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Book Reviews

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Abstract

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Heterogeneous Worlds Yoked Violently Together: the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, 1979.

Gabriel Okara, *The Fisherman's Invocation*. Heinemann, 1978. 63 pages. £0.95.

Brian Turner, *Ladders of Rain*. John McIndoe, Dunedin, 1978. 63 pages. NZ\$4.95.

The Commonwealth Poetry Prize would be the only thing these two poets could ever share. Of Nigerian and New Zealand origin, respectively, they have totally different social backgrounds and, following that, different concerns materializing into different themes, and last, but to these two poets not least, they have very different natural backgrounds (climate, vegetation etc.) through which they can express their experiences. As the Commonwealth countries develop each in their own direction, the Commonwealth umbrella has to stretch further to keep everybody under its shade, and one wonders if it is not perhaps overstretching itself at times.

Although the prize is specifically for a first book of poetry, Gabriel Okara is already well-known both as a poet and as a novelist. His novel *The Voice* (1964) is a much read and much discussed book, chiefly because of its unique experimentation with language. Gabriel Okara tries to transfer the syntax and vocabulary of his native Ijaw directly into English in order to try to preserve the specific African content of his thinking. This reflects his deep-seated concern with traditional African values.

The importance of retaining values in a world governed by Western technology forms the major theme in Gabriel Okara's already published poetry, like the well-known anthology pieces 'Piano and Drums' and 'The Snowflakes Sail Gently Down'. The title poem of the collection also belongs to this previously published section of the book. It debates the relationship between the past and the present in traditional African imagery, rooted in oral literature. The concreteness of the images is powerful:

Your back's stump is not dead.
Deep down in the desert
there's water bubbling up to your roots
So draw, draw the Back
caught in the net into the canoe
and stretch forth your hands
into the face of the sun
and pluck down the essence
of the stump of your Back

Through this use of imagery the poem moves effortlessly between private, public and cosmic levels, never losing sight of the central idea. It is surely one of the best expressions of the literature of its kind.

The collection also includes a section of previously unpublished poems dealing with the Biafran war. Although Gabriel Okara was committed to the Biafran cause, the poems are non-political dealing with the horror of war. Gabriel Okara's voice is always personal and quiet, even when he deals with public issues, and this, combined with honesty of feeling and excellence of expression, makes his poetry a pleasure to read. 'Cancerous Growth' sums up these qualities:

CANCEROUS GROWTH

The noon sun
shrivels tender buds
today's wanton massacre
burns up tender words
and from the ashes
hate is growing, forcing its way
like mushroom through yielding soil
But it's an alien growth
a cancer that destroys its host.

Umuahia, 13 December 1968

Brian Turner's world of rain, wind, rock and snow is superbly at peace with itself. Set in a far-away rural part of New Zealand, it celebrates provincial life at its best: the quiet content with the predictability and stability of life without any trace of smugness. In 'Careys Bay' the townlet is described as

A scatter of modest houses,
yachts and fishing boats
moored in the bay,
the water glinting
like a sheet of aluminium.

The poet's grandmother, born in the place, bridges the past and the present:

At eighty she comes around
to see my son, has tea
and goes. I watch and wave
as she closes the gate
and snicks her legs into noisy gear.

Times, however, do change:

... 'Your hair. Why don't you get it cut?
You were such a nice boy.'

The strength and beauty of this volume lie in the natural, direct, simple and always well chosen diction. In 'Four Seasons' Brian Turner conjures up an upside-down turn of my Nordic winters with chilling precision:

... The brutal disasters of winter
are almost past,
 raw days turning to crisp invigorations
and an absence of flensing winds.
 Scoured dawn skies
become blue-tempered by mid-winter morning;

The collection, however, aspires to more than nature poetry, and inevitably, I suppose, the surroundings, in particular the mountains, take on a deliberate and obvious symbolic value:

Rock and snow spells mountain for the eyes
yet the picture, unlike the tourist's instamatic view,
may differ in the mind,
spring dreams of a different, dangerous kind.

When dealing with human relationships the collection tends to take on a lighter tone, as in 'The Conversation', and the marriage of nature and

philosophy is not always a happy one. This, however, only mars slightly the success of this volume.

The contrast between the two poets is nowhere more striking than in their references to surroundings and their use of those references. Consider the contrast between the following two extracts:

I . . . go for walks
over lucent snow, the earth longing
to shed unwanted skin,
hunched forests raked by squalls of rain.

(*Ladders of Rain*, p. 23)

The mystic drum beat in my inside
and fishes danced in the rivers
and men and women danced on land
to the rhythm of my drum

(*The Fisherman's Invocation*, p. 26)

Heterogeneous worlds yoked violently together!

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger*. Heinemann, 1978. 154 pages. £1.25.

Dennis Brutus, *Stubborn Hope*. Heinemann, 1979. 97 pages. £0.95.

The House of Hunger is a somewhat lopsided collection of short stories, the title story taking up more than half of the collection. This 'awkward' length is not the only feature the main story shares with Alex La Guma's 'A Walk in the Night'. Set in the slums of the author's childhood it is a rambling description of incidents and places, only loosely connected by the first person narrator. Unlike 'A Walk in the Night' it does not even have a pretence of a plot, but like it it puts its main emphasis on vivid and detailed physical descriptions of slum conditions.

The slum world of Dambudzo Marechera contains all the clichés in the book. A drunken father who beats the author mercilessly, a tough mother who gives him sex-education

You were late in getting off my breast; you were late in getting out of bedwetting. Now you're late jerking off into some bitch. You make me sick up to here, do you understand?

and a gallery of whores, thugs and hard-hitting, knife-throwing, dagga-smoking youths. Some of these youths are also schoolboys or students, and in this capacity they discuss with amazing insight the differences between Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Turgenev, Pushkin, Gorky, and finally settle for Gogol. When they tire of this, they beat each other to a pulp, or a paste or a stain. The author receives so many beatings of the following nature that he would surely have died long before he wrote the book, had they been true:

The tall one spat:

'Fuck shit!'

and caught me solidly on the jaw. I heard my dentures crack beneath the impact. I turned to run but the shorter one stuck out his foot and I fell heavily onto the paved path. They were kicking at my head. I was trying to spit out the fragments of my dentures.

... he grabbed me and yanked me hard against the low brick garden wall and began to smash my head into it. ... I smashed a fist through the window, cutting my wrist badly ... and he dragged me ... into the paved pathway where he thrashed me so much I blacked out, speechless.

After such beatings the author has his wounds stitched up, and those stitches become the scars on his mind:

My head seemed encased in a fiendish ice-hold; but when I explored with my hand, ripping off the bandages and feeling around the wet stinging wound, it was only the cold cold stitches they had used on the gash. Stitches enough to weave webs from the one wall of my mind to the wall of the House of Hunger.

Amazingly, the clichés come to life and reveal a considerable talent of the Bukowsky shit-sperm-and-spew variety:

There's just dirt and shit and urine and blood and smashed brains. There's dust and fleas and bloody whites and roaches and dogs trained to bite black

people in the arse. There's venereal disease and beer and lunacy and just causes.

The violence of the language seems justified, and unlike La Guma Marechera does not stop at naturalistic descriptions of the surface of things, but he uses the physical degradation of slum conditions as direct comments on mental states, sometimes with great effect:

The underwear of our souls was full of holes and the crotch it hid was infested with lice. We were whores; eaten to the core by the syphilis of the white man's coming. Masturbating onto a *Playboy* centrefold.

The shorter pieces are written in a less violent style, showing the author's ability to master different varieties of expression, and there is no doubt that this is a first book showing considerable talent.

On the titlepage *Stubborn Hope* is described as 'new poems and selections from *China Poems* and *Strains*, but in the table of contents the largest section is called 'poems collected for this edition'. At least half of those were written in South Africa; in other words this is mainly a collection of old or previously published poems, not a new book of poetry. This is borne out very much by the poetry itself; it centres on the same themes, has the same muted tones of tenderness and despair, and exhibits the same strengths and weaknesses as *A Simple Lust*. The troubadour, the lover, the rebel and the seeker of peace in moments of beauty are all wellknown persona from *Sirens*, *Knuckles* and *Books*. Some poems seem very close in either theme or imagery or both, like

IT IS WITHOUT THE OVERTONES

It is without the overtones
of wry cynicism
– as I know you will understand –
that I say
I raise my eyes
to the Abergavenny hills
and find there some small casement

This poem echoes the feelings of 'This sun on this rubble after rain', but in a much slighter and inferior poetic expression, and a later poem, 'Again the rain-silvered asphalt', uses the imagery of 'This sun on this rubble after rain':

Again the rain-silvered asphalt
a brilliant mirroring sheen...

to arrive at a familiar conclusion in the familiar shape of the rhyming couplet
which ends a sonnet

...for these trophies these prices could be paid once again:
one buys, for one's land, small hopes for much pain.

The collection is uneven and suffers from the same convoluted, overwritten
style which occasionally mars *A Simple Lust*, like the following lines

Profligate seminal milliards
my ego's co-existences
yearn with theftuous motility
for acquisition of your other selves...

The collection also contains prison poems in the different, more prose-like
and less poetic style of *Letters to Martha*, and poems about exile, loneliness and
despair which fit into the 'In Exile' section of *A Simple Lust*.

Although the book is enjoyable, it would seem to me a better idea to take the
best poems from this collection and substitute them for the worst poems in *A
Simple Lust* and thus create a single volume of exquisite poetry rather than two
volumes of uneven quality. I realize that this would exclude the China poems
which are experiments in using the haiku form in the English language and
which belong in an entirely different context of experimental poetry.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN

Errol Trzebinski, *Silence Will Speak*. Heinemann, London, 1977.
348 pages. £7.50.

Denys Finch-Hatton: would the name or the person be remembered at all
today if Karen Blixen had not described her relationship with him so movingly
and so forgettably in *Out of Africa*, her account of the seventeen years, from
1914-31, that she spent on a large farm in Kenya? The answer must surely be
no. If ever a case existed where a person can be said to be indebted to an author
for renown, even for immortality, here undoubtedly is one.

Until now, then, there seemed no question about who was indebted to whom; here, however, in Errol Trzebinski's book, *Silence Will Speak*, we have an attempt to redress the balance by seeking to demonstrate the great extent and fundamental importance of Denys Finch-Hatton's influence upon Karen Blixen's whole work as a writer. The attempt has, it must be said, only very limited success.

Errol Trzebinski has had access to the private papers of the Finch-Hatton family; she has read, one judges, all the major works on Karen Blixen and most of the minor ones as well; she has either met or corresponded with those people still alive who knew either Finch-Hatton or Karen Blixen; her book is crammed with details that make it absorbing reading; moreover, she has herself lived in Kenya for many years, and thus writes with an intimate knowledge of the background to their lives and relationship that continually lights up the story she has to tell. Finally, the aims of her book are very clear:

There is a twofold attempt in this biography of Denys Finch-Hatton. Firstly the aim is to cast a little more light on this elusive man whom Karen Blixen so deeply loved but about whom she has remained singularly reticent. Secondly it aims to elucidate and complete the palimpsest of her life by showing that even through the circumstances of his tragic death he was to serve posthumously as one of the most forceful catalysts in her development as a writer.

Having said that Errol Trzebinski by and large fails in these aims, one has to add straightaway, in all fairness, that the failure is by no means entirely her fault; a large part is due to the recalcitrant nature of her material, and, in particular, to the character of Denys Finch-Hatton himself – 'this elusive man' as she aptly describes him. Again and again the word that recurs in the descriptions she quotes of Finch-Hatton by his contemporaries is that of 'charm'; few if any can define it. Nor, it must be admitted, does Errol Trzebinski herself come much closer to pinning this elusive quality down when writing of him in terms like these:

His prowess was essentially masculine but his Byronic lustre made him irresistible. His poetic quality contrasted intriguingly with a masculine aggression and typically English flair for sang-froid in a dangerous situation. Courageous actions for which he became renowned in Africa were shrugged off casually, he never needed to raise his voice in anger: a word or look was enough.

In fact, Finch-Hatton's English upper-class background, his education at Eton and Oxford which bred the cool, assured, lofty attitude to others, the

interest in games, sports, and hunting, even most of the cultural pursuits, all these attributes were, after all, not so radically different from many of the other young men who emigrated to Kenya in the years before the First World War.

It is perhaps, however, in quoting from an obituary notice that Errol Trzebinski comes closest to his true nature: 'Denys always seemed to do everything he wanted to do and never do anything he did not want to do. Anyone else leading such a life would have deteriorated'. Not only does this single out a central feature in his character, it seems likely that it also points to the major reason for the final breakdown of the relationship between him and Karen Blixen. For an important contribution that this book makes to Karen Blixen studies is that it does establish a central fact. In *Out of Africa* the reader is left with the idea that what terminated the relationship between them was Finch-Hatton's tragic death when the plane he was piloting crashed only a short time before Karen Blixen left Kenya; in reality, however, this relationship had already come to an end some months before then.

It is important to stress this, since it is additional confirmation of an aspect of *Out of Africa* which has become increasingly apparent over the last few years. Instead of simply regarding the book as a straightforward autobiographical record of the years Karen Blixen spent in Kenya, it is really most fruitfully seen as an imaginative work of fiction which far outshadows all her tales and stories which are, indeed, all of them, fictitious – and avowedly so.

Why, however, did the relationship between these two break up? The answer, as Errol Trzebinski points out, must surely be looked for in their characters. Much evidence has accumulated over recent years of the well-nigh incredible degree of jealous possessiveness that Karen Blixen could display on occasions. It was her tragedy that in Kenya this possessiveness should be centred upon a man least likely of all to acquiesce in this. In her own words from *Out of Africa* 'he never did but what he wanted to do ... he was happy on the farm; he came there only when he wanted to come'. Towards the end he no longer wanted to come – and therefore didn't. Thus he remained faithful to the central principle that seems to have guided his actions throughout his life. How one judges this, whether anyone even has the right to do so, remains a debatable point; some readers, however, may feel tempted to regard Denys Finch-Hatton a little more harshly than Errol Trzebinski does in her book.

The other major area that she is concerned with is that of the influence that Finch-Hatton exercised on Karen Blixen's work in general. She points out various characters in her tales who seem modelled upon him, and these all seem convincing enough examples. Where she is much less successful, however, is in claiming that Finch-Hatton's influence went far beyond these figures. For one of the surprising things about Karen Blixen's work is that, in reality, most of her ideas and beliefs were already firmly shaped and tenaciously held *before*

she left Denmark for Kenya and were expressed in various short stories that she wrote in Danish during her earlier years. Consequently, her years in Africa, and her friendship with Finch-Hatton, did not modify or alter these ideas to any essential degree, but really only served to ensconce her even more firmly in them.

It would, however, be ungrateful to end on this negative note. Errol Trzebinski has, in spite of this, succeeded in writing an absorbing and fascinating study of the man who probably meant more to Karen Blixen as a person than anyone else in her life. If only for that fact, one has every reason for strongly recommending this book to any reader who has experienced Karen Blixen's appeal as a writer.

DONALD W. HANNAH

Per Wästberg, *Afrika – en opgave. Refleksioner, beskrivelser, formodninger*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 1977. 254 pages. D.kr. 85.

In spite of his distinguished career as novelist, literary critic and newspaper editor in Stockholm, Per Wästberg's name for the Scandinavian public is probably most closely associated with Africa.

Wästberg's non-fiction works include *The Writer in Modern Africa* and two books about his impressions after a year's stay in Rhodesia, Nyasaland and South Africa in 1959. Since then, he says in the preface to his new book, he has almost every day been occupied with Africa in his thoughts and often in action. He has worked for foundations and on committees, been in contact with African friends, politicians and refugees, and travelled extensively in most of the new states south of the Sahara.

'When I first arrived in Africa in 1959', he writes, 'I knew much too little about Africa. Today it sometimes appears to me that I know too much to get a clear view'. Wästberg states that he loathes summaries, flexible conclusions, nicely wrapped truths. He prefers the fragments, the details, with no hope of being able to join them together into a whole. 'Travelling in Africa, I don't expect to find anything we call Africa, only separate parts streaming through it: People on the move, ideas circulating'.

Consequently *Afrika – en opgave (Africa – A Task)* is more a living impressionistic map of Africa, concentrated upon the eastern and southern parts of the continent, than anything like a textbook on African problems for the uninformed reader. The Swedish author is not easily surpassed in his ability to make 'people and milieus come alive in his descriptions of Africa: the drought-

stricken savanna, the sleepy town of Moshi in Tanzania, remnants of the colonial period at the Government Rest-House in the bush equipped with old copies of *Punch* or the Portuguese manager of a sugar factory in Mozambique, still a complete foreigner after a lifetime in Africa and while co-operating with the new FRELIMO government understanding not the first thing about the liberation movement or even about his black boy who has lived in his house for six years.

The descriptions are enough to make the book worthwhile reading for anyone, and it can only be deplored that Wästberg has not included his impressions of the more colourful West Africa.

But the book is much more. Luckily, despite his dislike of summaries and conclusions, Wästberg has not been able to avoid them. His views are, however, given in a cautious way: reflections, conjectures.

One chapter which comprises a campaign against colonial misconceptions recorded in older European literature seems to be among the more superfluous in the book, as the subject has been repeatedly written on since the early 1950s. In other chapters there are few short, but interesting observations about modern European writers. Wästberg the literary critic might well have elaborated a little more on what Graham Greene, Laurens van der Post, Nadine Gordimer and others have to say about Africa. Some of them seek the truth about ourselves in the 'mysterious' continent. Others, like Alberto Moravia, have some doubtful generalizations about Africans being born easy victims to capitalist manipulations.

Wästberg also dissociates himself from modern marxist or dogmatic marxist-inspired patent solutions or explanations of the situation in Africa today. He describes the rhetoric of the 'super' leftists among Tanzanian students as unable to distinguish between reality and wishful thinking. For them, Western capitalism is a gigantic conspiracy, directed from Wall Street and easily overthrown by suppressed masses under a small group of revolutionaries. They are unable to understand the adaptability of the Western system and the differences between the USA and for instance Sweden with its mixed economy.

Wästberg is clearly whole-heartedly for the gradual socialist revolution in Tanzania under the careful leadership of Nyerere with his realistic idealism. After the book was published it has, however, been generally acknowledged that Tanzania's policy of rural collectivisation has been abandoned as a failure. The peasantry proved unwilling to produce under socialist conditions and villagisation without socialism is the current policy. The revolutionary development in Mozambique occupies a large part of the book. Wästberg relates his discussions with Eduardo Mondlane, long since murdered but once the powerful leader of FRELIMO, which fought the long war of liberation against the Portuguese. Unlike Régis Debray and other revolutionaries of the Third World, Mondlane held the view that political instruction and education of the

peasants must precede the armed fight against the colonial oppressors. The new nationalism must grow out of close agreement and co-operation between the educated and the masses. The peasants must experience a material benefit from the liberation.

During visits to Mozambique in 1975 and 1976 Wästberg tried to assess the results of the liberation war fought along these lines. In 1975 he was filled with optimism. Most African countries are characterized by elitist governments, corruption and foreign economic dominance. 'In Mozambique I have no doubts about the will to justice and the removal of class distinction . . . But', as Wästberg remarks after a visit in 1976, 'FRELIMO carries out its radical program so fast that it shocks as well as impresses . . . Resistance is growing to a more and more centrally directed policy, formulated by a principally anonymous politburo'. Wästberg remembers that Mondlane warned against party-elitist dictatorship after independence. His pessimism dissolves more or less when he visits the villages, where a new and better Mozambique is thriving.

For poor agricultural states like Mozambique and Tanzania it is comparatively easy to experiment with new patterns of societies and – given the necessary aid – build new nations. President Kaunda in Zambia also has his vision of a future, but he is a prisoner of economic realities that he cannot control. The elite in Tanzania has not much to lose in trying a radical policy. The situation in Zambia, with its mineral riches, expatriates, greedy elite, class distinctions and failure of agricultural reforms to appear, is more typical of most African states.

Wästberg has not much to say about these 'typical' states which makes the book one-sided, taken as an evaluation of the African situation as a whole. Wästberg does emphasize that although the colonial period left the African states in a deplorable situation, the new elite has a growing responsibility for the fact that nothing or next to nothing happens in many countries. But he clearly prefers to deal with the states where something is happening.

With these limitations *Afrika – en opgave* is easily the best written, most versatile among newer Scandinavian books about Africa. That many of its clever observations are hidden unimpressively in the text only serves to emphasize that 'the truth' about Africa for Europeans is more elusive than ever before.

SVEN POULSEN

Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest*. Heinemann, 1977. 232 pages. Csd. £5.50, paper £2.70.

Since the publication in 1956 of *Trade and Politics in The Niger Delta* by the Nigerian historian K. O. Dike, Nigerians have increasingly taken over the research of the history of pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria. They have questioned old theories and views and provided new and more satisfactory analyses of, for instance, the events just before and during the British conquest of Nigeria 1885-1914. Many of these new works are highly specialized. The result is that undergraduates in Nigerian universities have had to read at least ten monographs and a sizable number of articles to get an overall Nigerian view of the British conquest. Consequently, in *The Fall of Nigeria* professor Obaro Ikime, University of Ibadan, has brought together much of the available material on this subject providing both the students and the interested general reader with an accessible synthesis of existing work. The book is divided into two parts of which the first (about 80 pages) presents the analysis and arguments while the second more popular part brings twelve episodes from the British conquest: The Fall of Lagos, Benin, the Tiv, Kano etc.

On the whole the British occupation of the various territories in West Africa caused fewer military clashes than the French. The Yoruba states in the 1880s were characterized by war weariness and diverging interests. Ibadan and Abeokuta strove to open up regular trade with Lagos while others, anxious to play the role of middlemen in the trade, would do anything to block Ibadan's route to Lagos. Here and elsewhere African politics played into the hands of the British by providing them with enemies which they could play against each other. Those who tried to support the British soon found that the Europeans gradually took power from them, while those who tried to be independent invariably were bombarded into submission.

Ikime raises the question why so many Nigerian rulers willingly signed protection treaties and points out among other things, that in many instances there were no interpreters able to translate the legal English jargon of the treaties into the Nigerian languages. Some of the interpreters simply were afraid to tell their rulers that they were yielding up their sovereignty.

Most readers will probably prefer the second part of the book which brings into focus some of the most dramatic events in Nigerian history such as The Benin Massacre in 1897, which was not, writes the author, the murder of a few Englishmen, but the subsequent British attack on Benin. The second part also brings a good deal of quite new material, especially on the resistance of the Tiv. The first part seems rather condensed and at least for students may require additional reading.

The book within its somewhat unusual framework is filling a wide gap. It tells a story worth telling in an engaged and scholarly manner. There are no footnotes but ample bibliographical notes.

SVEN POULSEN

Eckhard Breiting, ed., *Black Literature*. Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München, 1979. 372 pages. DM 36.00.

If you expect this to be a survey of black literature in English you are mistaken. It is in German, and it is just another mixed bag of essays that do not cover the whole spectrum of black writing: there are no essays on drama and poetry, on East and South African writing, on literatures in Portuguese or any African languages, on the French Caribbean, etc.

The book opens with a forty-page overview of African, West Indian and Afro-American literature by Eckhard Breiting. This is followed by a section on Africa. There is an essay by sociologist Gerhard Grohs on models of cultural decolonization. Jürgen Beneke contributes the almost obligatory essay on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Breiting writes on another member of the 'pioneer brigade', Tutuola. Jürgen Schäfer also covers a lot of familiar territory in his survey of Anglophone African writing. His theoretical considerations are pertinent, there are good analyses of specific authors and works, and above all Schäfer writes very well. But the latest book he discusses was published in 1968 and since then a lot of new material has come out of Africa. That he omits all this gives his essay a somewhat dated look. Two of the best pieces, in my opinion, come from Marlis Hellinger and Barbara Ischinger. Hellinger gives a concise and very readable account of the different forms of English used by black writers, from Standard English to Creole. Ischinger gives an interesting survey of trends in Francophone African writing, giving far more emphasis to modern developments than to *négritude* (but she omits drama). Ischinger pleads for more co-operation between students of Anglophone and Francophone African writing.

The Afro-American section consists of three essays, one on autobiographies from Douglass to Cleaver (Heiner Bus), one on Jean Toomer (Udo O. H. Jung) and one on Richard Wright (Kurt Otten). The only essay dealing with the West Indies comes from Gordon Collier. He gives what he calls an analytical metatext of Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and compares Brathwaite with Walcott.

It is a fine critical reading and the comparison of the two poets offers new insights. It is, therefore, a pity that this essay is marred by unidiomatic and ungrammatical German. Would it not have been the editor's duty to throw out the most egregious errors?

There are other instances of rather careless editing. Why are four different methods of citing references used in this volume (two of which are clearly inadequate)? And there is no uniformity in other matters: some contributors quote English originals, others German translations. Some words occur in two spellings (e.g. Suaheli/Swahili, Ibo/Igbo, James Ngugi/Ngugi wa Thiong'o). Why did nobody correct the irritating mistakes in syllabification (e.g. brot-her, wit-hin, so-mehow, bloods-hed, etc.)? Why are so many names misspelled (e.g. Harry Bloom, Mphahlele, Ernest Gaines, André Gide, Arthur Nortje, etc.)? The selective bibliography seems, like most bibliographies do, lopsided. There are no references to primary sources – apart from some thirty titles in the West Indian section. There are six pages devoted to both Africa and the West Indies, but only two to Afro-American Writing, two pages to Achebe and half a page to Wright. And there are some strange omissions (e.g. eds. King & Ogunbesam, *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*, New York 1975; Ramchand, *An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature*, Sunbury-on-Thames 1976; Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, New York 1973 – to name a few at random).

KLAUS STUCKERT

Dick Harrison, *Unnamed Country. The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction*. The University of Alberta Press, 1977. 250 pp. C\$12.50.

In his preface Dick Harrison points out that he wants to go beyond two well-known studies of Canadian prairie fiction, i.e. Edward McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction* (1970) and Lawrence Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal Man* (1973). Both discuss the problems that are connected with an imaginative transformation of prairie landscape and reality.

Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country* emphasises in particular how European and Eastern Canadian norms tended to prevent the settler from establishing a close relationship with his unique environment, the prairie; in the process he offers a wide-ranging survey of Canadian prairie literature and history. He shows by an abundance of references how explorers, travellers, and artists saw

the prairie and recorded their impressions. On the whole they offer a distorted picture of the prairie and its history for the artistic tools of Europe were inadequate when it came to recording the enormity of prairie landscape and climate. Up to around 1925-6 the prairie was first of all seen through romantic glasses both in fiction and in painting (the volume includes a number of well-chosen paintings to illustrate this point).

It is thought-provoking to know that the influx of immigrants was at its highest level ever during a period when the prairie was looked upon by outsiders as an innocent fertile Eden just waiting for cultivation. Harrison points out that settlers nursed on such romantic ideas and nurtured by the C. P. R. and the Union Trust Co. in their sales drive abroad were badly prepared for the tough realities of the prairie.

Canadian painters were the first to record a realistic view of the prairie, and by the mid-1920s novelists such as Martha Ostenso and Grove reflect a new attitude towards the prairie experience. These writers and others like Ross and McCourt reject the Edenic myth and show us man in all his inadequacy in an alien and hostile environment. Outside the universities and related circles these realists never reached an audience like the one addicted to a 'Kodachrome' version of pioneering and Mountie adventure. The latter elements are discussed in ch. VI, 'Adventure Romance and Sentimental Comedy'. Harrison's final chapter, 'Renaming the Past' is on contemporary prairie fiction. He traces a new tendency shared by writers like Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe and Robert Kroetsch to peel away artificial and false prairie lore and start a 'renaming process' true to the facts of prairie life and history. Such a process will certainly include a revaluation of the prairie indians and the Metis.

In my opinion Dick Harrison has written the best introduction to Canadian prairie literature so far. It combines survey and well-researched details in a masterly way. Such a work with its thorough and complete bibliography will no doubt become an indispensable manual for students and scholars in that field.

JØRN CARLSEN

Noel Hilliard, *Selected Stories*. McIndoe, Dunedin, 1977. 132 pp. NZ\$4.95.

O. E. Middleton, *'Confessions of an Ocelot' and 'Not for a Seagull'*. McIndoe, Dunedin, 1979. 116 pp. NZ\$5.95.

O. E. Middleton, *Selected Stories*. McIndoe, Dunedin, 1975. 194 pp. NZ\$4.95.

Roderick Finlayson, *Other Lovers*. McIndoe, Dunedin, 1976. 136 pp. NZ\$4.95.

It is no coincidence that the four volumes under review all come from the same publisher. Within a very few years John McIndoe has developed a formidable reputation and has made a permanent contribution to the task of bringing New Zealand's more serious fiction and poetry to their audience. Clearly and unpretentiously printed on off-white paper, which is easy to look at and pleasant to handle, these volumes do visual justice to the high standard of the books' contents.

All of the writers represented here are established literary figures, and the books offer an opportunity to reconsider their work rather than to make new discoveries. The stories in Noel Hilliard's book, for example, have all appeared in book form before, being selected from two previous volumes. They permit us, however, to appreciate more clearly than ever before the wide range of themes which Hilliard's talent embraces. His fame as an exponent of modern Maori life, based on his novels, has perhaps tended to obscure the fact that even in those a series of vignettes offers a broad picture of Pakeha life as well. That his portrait of New Zealand is double-sided is more obvious in the *Selected Stories*.

Technically, like most members of the New Zealand mainstream, Hilliard tends towards the conservative. His narrative is finely controlled, but it is often pre-Mansfield in its concentration on telling rather than revealing. Occasional experiments nonetheless occur, the most consistent being 'The Absconder', a monologue in 'illiterate' English punctuated only with paragraph markings.

Hilliard's greatest weakness is his tendency to explicit moralising, which interrupts the narrative flow and causes the reader's suspension of disbelief to crumble. Sometimes ('A Piece of Land', 'Looking the Part') the stories are virtually exemplary anecdotes, and this sits uncomfortably with the otherwise consistently naturalistic style. (This tendency even mars the last pages of *Maori Girl*.) 'Erua' is in this respect a flawed masterpiece. It is such an effective in-depth portrait of a Maori schoolchild that Hilliard outdoes himself on his own special ground, but the twist at the end rubs in the 'moral' at the expense of suddenly reducing the complexity of vision. Erua's social isolation has already become clear so that his explicit disillusionment with the teacher is really a kind of tautology.

In my view, Hilliard's most successful story is 'Friday Nights are Best', where the moral complexity is not reduced to a precept at the end. The story is almost a compendium of traditional New Zealand themes, which it synthesises very skilfully: isolation, both physical and mental; closeness to nature; manual labour as a virtue; mateship; the value of 'hard' individuals in contrast to 'soft'

civilization; the outbacks as a source of strength and virtue. These themes can, of course, add up to a set of values which are inhumane because they stifle spontaneity and aesthetic sensibility – this is the burden of Middleton's and Finlayson's books, not to mention those of Frank Sargeson. But Hilliard is able to combine them here with the outstanding virtue of the other writers: humane sympathy for the unfortunate and misunderstood. Curiously, one of the few traditional themes not touched in 'Friday Nights' is Hilliard's 'own' theme of Maori-Pakeha relationships. Otherwise, it is so inclusive that it would be an interesting point for a teacher to begin, when introducing New Zealand literature to his students for the first time.

In his two long stories 'Ocelot' and 'Seagull', O. E. Middleton applies a narrative point of view which is in danger of becoming a cliché in New Zealand: that of a narrator participating in the story's events and under necessity to pass on more information to the reader than he, with his limited powers of perception, is actually aware of. This is the method characteristic of Sargeson and employed with the skill of a virtuoso in Ian Cross's *The God Boy*. Middleton, for all his talent, is no virtuoso – one might even say that he is too warmly human to breathe the cold thin air of the virtuoso's heights. He awakens the reader's sympathy for his outsider non-heroes, but even in the midst of sympathy one must question the technique of some passages. In 'Ocelot' the narrator is witness of a theft in a bookshop without realising that this is so. If he were to fully understand what is happening this could breach his essential innocence in the reader's mind. Nonetheless all the details of the theft are reported, even laboriously reported, and the reader cannot help wondering why the narrator observes so closely and reports so faithfully what he apparently cannot interpret. To pick out this moment of weakness in a splendid story would be mere carping were it not that it illustrates a danger in a narrative mode which has become common in New Zealand. This is not to deny that there are excellent reasons for its commonness – the highly sophisticated author does not wish to seem patronising to his bewildered, intellectually groping protagonist and deliberately reduces the range of narrative vision – an act of almost heroic discipline on the writer's part.

A further danger is that the author's range of social awareness may seem to be reduced with the narrative perspective, but this can be compensated by setting one story against another. For this reason 'Seagull' is a necessary complement to 'Ocelot'. The Maori protagonist here offers a very different view of Auckland from that of the Pakeha, somewhat effeminate narrator of 'Ocelot'. Both, however, experience established society and its values as oppressive. The 'seagull' runs away from an isolated fisherman's hut to the city, hoping to increase the range of his experience. He does so, but not all his experiences are pleasant ones. He confronts racism and brutality, especially in the police, but

he also establishes a tender relationship to a white girl. The sense that this relationship is endangered by the emotional bluntness of 'society' is a point of connection between these stories and those of Finlayson reviewed below. Both of Middleton's stories are remarkable – and in the New Zealand context precious – for the author's powers of empathy. Both struggle, however, at the edge of technical downfall. The precarious nature of the narrative perspective is one aspect of this; another is the self-consciousness of the symbolism (e.g. the odorous plant which suddenly loses its odour in 'Seagull'), which is no less at odds with the naturalistic style than Hilliard's moralising is.

This also endangers some of Middleton's *Selected Stories*. Indeed the rats in 'The Greaser's Story' partake of Hilliard's weakness no less than of Middleton's own: they are at once moralising and self-consciously symbolic – 'I still think sometimes of Johnson from Liverpool who made us see the danger of rats until you get together and wipe them out, once and for all...' On the other hand the soaring model planes in 'The Man Who Flew Models' do seem appropriate. This is because they are integrated with other elements of the story. The character of the German schoolteacher is drawn in such a way that the planes seem to externalise an essential aspect of his inner nature which could not find expression in words or in any other action. Johnson in 'The Greaser's Story' is less evenly and consistently drawn. Perhaps what seems to be a weakness in the symbolism is really in the characterization. In any case, one story harmonises symbol and character, the other does not.

O. E. Middleton has long been recognised as a master of the short story, but it is perhaps only now, with his *Selected Stories* before us, that the full extent of his accomplishment can be realised. His sympathy for the underdog has always been apparent: sometimes all of the characters seem to be victims, none of them victimisers. But what astonishing variety there is within this basic theme! Middleton's oppressed come from many walks of life and from several countries: schoolboys, the unemployed, political exiles, wharfies, seamen, prisoners, a German woman struggling with her national heritage, an injured English miner – our sympathy is invited for all people who strive to maintain human dignity in adversity, but, unlike Hilliard, Middleton rarely turns this invitation into a command. The typical ending of a Middleton story is not a precept but an image of human aspiration.

Like Hilliard, however, Middleton provides an interplay of typically New Zealand themes. To those listed above might be added the theme of childhood and adolescence. H. M. Holcroft has discussed this topos in *Graceless Islanders* (1970). It could well be that the child's groping towards an understanding of the world he finds himself in is perceived by writers as a metaphor for the Pakeha's groping towards an understanding of the islands he lives in. The fact that these islands superficially resemble that West European island where his

cultural tradition originated makes his confusion over their fundamental difference all the greater. This seems to be confirmed by Middleton's story 'First Adventure', where the confused responses of the protagonist are as much due to his Europeaness as to his childhood, the two being inseparable. Billy is troubled that the old Maori skeleton recently found is not neatly stored, out of sight out of mind, in a cemetery as European skeletons are. Why, he wonders, is it so naturally a part of the land which the European is breaking into with his spade?

The notion that the Maori is more truly a New Zealander than the Pakeha because he is more closely bound to the land itself is central to Roderick Finlayson's perception of his country. In the blurb to *Other Lovers* the publisher points out that 'these three stories are linked by their views of love and/or marriage', but this is only the surface theme. Behind the love affairs, disturbing them, and in two of the cases destroying them, is a darker problem: the psychological injury perpetrated on sensitive but underprivileged individuals by the puritanical self-righteousness of New Zealand's established social values.

The love of a very old man and a very young girl is a difficult subject and a dangerous one in any society, but Finlayson masters it in 'Frankie and Lena' with tact, sympathy and literary finesse. Not the lovers, who are united by their surprising innocence despite the superficial disparity of their worldly experience, but the sturdy pillars of the farming community, where repressed passions are jolted into ugly openness by the clopement, prove to be unnatural and prurient. Yet even they earn some of the narrator's – and the reader's – sympathy, because their natures are not inherently evil but simply warped through their imperceptive acceptance of a set of dreary social conventions.

The combination of detestation for accepted values and limited sympathy for those whose blindness leads them to accept them is common to both Finlayson and Middleton. And just as Middleton relieves the darkness of this view with a story of deep parental affection and the understanding it receives ('A Married Man'), Finlayson allows a more positive note to enter in 'Tom and Sue', a story of adolescent love and marriage. Even here, however, it is implied that success in love is only possible after a conflict with the crudeness of one's neighbours and the crudeness within, which has been inculcated by one's New Zealand upbringing.

Finally, in his most complex treatment of the theme, 'Jim and Miri', Finlayson returns to the subject-matter which brought him some modest fame: the clash of cultural values between Maori and Pakeha. This is for Finlayson a cultural rather than a racial issue. It is, one might say, a question of the rhythm of living, the Maori adapting the rhythm of his daily life to that of the place he lives in, the Pakeha creating an environment to match his rhythm by building cities, in which he can live partly independent of the natural world. In 'Jim and Miri' this is the predominating theme; the love story merely illustrates it in one

of several ways. Ultimately it is the major theme of all three writers discussed here. To some extent it merely continues a contrast which is common to all literatures – the contrast of city and country. But here it is given a special flavour by the fact that country (Maori) implies a long tradition of adaptation to the land, while town (Pakeha) is a short sharp attack with the will to make the land do the adapting.

These three writers are only a part of that sound body of craftsmen who testify to the health of New Zealand literature. Whether they testify to the health of New Zealand society is another, more difficult question.

NELSON WATTIE

Margaret Orbell, ed., *Maori Poetry*. Heinemann Educational Books, Auckland, 1978. 104 pages. NZ\$3.85.

With this collection of Maori poetry, Margaret Orbell gives us a glimpse of a culture and a way of life very different from our own European one. Traditional Maori poetry – like music, dancing, and sculpture – was a part of the fabric of life, an essential means of expression and communication. In Maori society language was always experienced as a part of lived reality and words were considered to be a form of action. Thus poetry provided the people with an outlet and a means of asserting themselves. Poems were sung or recited during tribal meetings and celebrations, at religious ceremonies, in the daily routine of work as well as during the crises of life and death.

The imagery of the poems is subtle and rich, and many of the images indicate a union between two phenomena which are believed actually to exist; so that light, for example, is associated with life and success, and darkness with death and failure, as becomes obvious in the following poem where the triumph of light over darkness is metaphorical of success in battle:

SONG OF BATTLE

I am striking, you are striking
Whence comes my weapon
Strong in battle? From ancient times!
Poroku, my club, moves fast!
Its thong was tied in darkness

That my eyes might be like stars!
Auee! It is day, ee!

Many of the poems in this anthology are – in various ways – concerned with themes of separation and loss and more often than not with death – the final separation. Thus it may seem as if Maori poetry in general is inspired not by success and happiness but by sorrow and defeat. The love poetry usually laments the loss of the beloved, expressing the grief of the lover as in 'Oh I am torn with fear':

...
Clouds, farewell! Remain up there alone!
I am gone with the descending current,
The sun disappearing at the river mouths at Kapenga,
To my lover dead of disease, for whom my heart cries out!
Oh he is here! He grasps me, comes close!

After finishing the anthology the reader is left with a vivid sense of Maori thoughts and sentiments and a rich experience of a totally different way of life. Though – for obvious reasons – it is impossible for me to assess the quality of the translations, it seems to me that Margaret Orbell succeeds in conveying the pulse of Maori life and the richness of Maori experience. Moreover she succeeds in making the poems accessible and easily comprehensible to a non-Maori readership by her lucid introduction and the useful explanatory notes preceding each section of the anthology.

It is noteworthy that the Maori people, in spite of pressures from the Pakeha (white settlers), have kept their individuality and have been able to retain much of their own culture. Margaret Orbell's book is a valuable contribution to a deeper understanding of the Maori way of life and will no doubt arouse an increasing interest in Maori culture which one can only hope will continue to make its mark and come to have influence on New Zealand's way of life.

ANNEMARIE BACKMANN

Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott. Memory as Vision: Another Life*. Critical Studies of Caribbean Writers, gen. ed. Mervyn Morris. Longman, London, 1978. 85 pp. £4.95.

Henry James suggests that the good critic is 'a torchbearing outrider, the interpreter, the brother' of the artist, and Edward Baugh is most of these to Derek Walcott. And yet, there are some points of dissatisfaction with the book; most of them, I fancy, have to do with what I take to be Dr Baugh's brief. I will come to this; but let me suggest that this study will be the first to which we should turn when beginning to assess the scholarship building up around Walcott. Not only is it the first monograph study of the poet, it is also by a student of literature whose judgement we have grown to value.

But what is *Derek Walcott*? It is not a study of the Walcott canon as we have it at this point in time and yet it raises those large issues crucial to an understanding of the poet: myth/history, art/life, home, painting, the journey... It is, as we learn from the small print on the title-page, a study of *Another Life*, and it is a fine introductory essay to that notable poem.

Dr Baugh's approach is to let his subject dictate the form of the essay, so that, after an introductory chapter covering essential biographical background (Baugh is no voyeur) and detailing influences, the remaining four chapters correspond to the four books of *Another Life*. But the method emulates Walcott's poem more finely and subtly than this, for, just as we sense the presence of so much that Walcott has written behind *Another Life*, so Baugh echoes, anticipates, or alludes to other poems by Walcott or sets in motion central thematic concerns of the study. Once he has launched these themes we find him, in subsequent chapters, deftly adding to or filling them out. In the ambience of the first chapter, then, we sense poems like 'Royal Palms', 'Ruins of a Great House', 'Roots', 'Sea Chantey', and 'A Far Cry from Africa', in addition to Walcott's biographical essays 'Meanings' and 'Leaving School' which are referred to in the chapter. At times, however, the approach becomes almost too epigrammatic (e.g. the discussion of silence launched on p. 27 and linking 'Choc Bay' to *Another Life*, pp. 13 and 148, could have been extended usefully by reference to Walcott's deepened pre-occupation with silence in *Sea Grapes*). But the only really awkward moment in the approach is the fracture in the absorbing discussion of history. Baugh commences this discussion on p. 42 but on p. 48 it is suspended until he treats Chapter 22 some twenty-five pages later.

Derek Walcott is a short study (c. 22,000 words) but occasionally Baugh offers us glimpses of his eloquent and sensitive reading. Among others, I have in mind his treatment of the crab metaphor, his elaboration on 'the moment of Sauteurs', or the 'idealising of Anna' where, while the discussion remains compressed, it has a rich metaphoric quality to it, at once, picking up resonances and setting others in motion. This is not always the case, and the discussion of influences in Chapter 1 is severely truncated. There is perhaps, a place in the chapter for a consideration of literary influences (clearing some of the critical detritus on the way). What of Walcott's feeling for Hemingway's prose? Does not this shed some light on his ideas about the relationship bet-

ween poetry and prose? What is Walcott's interest in Neruda, in O'Hara? But it is a short study and we feel often that Baugh is on short rein.

In spite of this, Dr Baugh catches well the energy of Walcott's poetry, its richness and fine tensions, the paradox and ambiguity that underwrites it but which is always subordinate to the naming and praising of his place and fundamental folk.

The book does not have an index, nor does it need one, but it does include a useful select bibliography of primary and secondary sources, one of which I look forward to reading: Craven's *Treasury*.

JAMES WIELAND

Stephen Alter, *Neglected Lives*. Andre Deutsch, 1978. 179 pages. £4.95.

"Why should we let our grandfathers interrupt us with their history?" Lionel's Indian girlfriend asks. But for Lionel the position is not so simple; whether he likes it or not he cannot escape his grandfathers for Lionel is an Eurasian. At the age of ten he asks his mother the barbed question, "Mother, what am I, Indian or English?". The book explores Lionel's attempt to answer this question and to come to terms with his mixed heritage.

After his Indian girl friend becomes pregnant and her brothers attempt to murder him, Lionel is forced to seek refuge with an old friend of his parents, Brigadier Augden, who lives in Debrakot, which was once a flourishing hill station but is now almost completely deserted except for a few elderly Anglo-Indians. The decaying, disintegrating hill station is a painful reminder to the community of their own situation.

Neglected Lives is not just Lionel's story; woven into the fabric of the story and his life are the stories and lives of the Anglo-Indian community of Debrakot. Each one of them tells of his or her own life, the desperate attempts to pass as English, the failure and despair of someone in no-man's land, a despair and bitterness summed up in the words of Mrs Augden, "I'm like a mule. Cross bred and sterile".

Stephen Alter is an American citizen but he was born and has spent almost all his life in India where he is still living. This is his first novel and it is at times obviously a young man's book. There is a tendency towards the melodramatic, the characterization and relationships between the young people are not particularly well handled, and the symbolism of Lionel's and Sylvia's marriage

and the new road is perhaps a little obvious and possibly a facile solution to the problem.

But these are small points when one considers his strengths; his ability to tell a story, his insight into the characters of the elderly Anglo-Indians, his sympathetic portrayal of these 'neglected lives' without any touch of sentimentality. There is humour, but it is a humour of understanding and love, not condescension.

The plight of the Eurasian in India has not attracted the attention of many writers – we find them in John Masters' *Bhowani Junction* – but this novel of Stephen Alter's is the first serious attempt to deal with the dilemma of these people.

Neglected Lives is not just a good first novel, it is a good novel and I look forward to his next.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

Michael Wilding, *The Phallic Forest*. Wild & Woolley, 1978. 139 pages. A\$3.95.

Michael Wilding, ed., *The Tabloid Story Reader*. Wild & Woolley, 1978. 320 pages. A\$3.95.

Brian Kiernan, ed., *The Most Beautiful Lies*. Angus & Robertson, 1977. 247 pages. £4.95.

In 1968 I read a typescript of Michael Wilding's story 'The Phallic Forest' and enjoyed it for the way in which it accepted the human proclivity to fantasize, and entered into it with wit and understanding. At the time, the conflation of the fantastic and the mimetic seemed very experimental, but the story came off because of the author's control of tone, his lightness of touch and precision of language. There is a natural, seamless bond between its theme and its innovative narrative method which should have been enough to assure its publication. But in fact, it was censored from the author's first collection.

Its publication now by Wild and Woolley indicates how the situation has changed in Australian writing in the decade or more since the story was written, not just in a greater readiness to accept its subject – for 'The Phallic Forest' could never have been fairly considered obscene or pornographic; it is a sexual

comedy, and it is impossible to deprave and corrupt comically – but in the evolution of short fiction and the related developments in publishing which have accompanied it. As writer, editor and publisher, Michael Wilding has played a central role in this process.

His latest collection, *The Phallic Forest*, includes pieces from most of his career, and illustrates both his own evolution and, synecdochally, that of short fiction in the current decade. The title story (not the earliest collected here) marks a stage in the author's process of liberating himself from the conventions of formal realism, (for too long imposed upon short fiction by the dominance of the novel) to allow a distinctive voice and narrative stance to come through more clearly. This opens rich possibilities for exploring the themes and preoccupations which sustain his recent fiction. One is the characteristic brand of sexual comedy, which takes its origin, perhaps, in the anxieties charted in an early story like 'Don't Go Having Kittens', but which in later work acquires a kind of aesthetic independence. These stories of sex and sexual fantasy do not operate primarily in the interest of psychological realism, but grow out of the exploration and ordering of the artistic potential in fantasy itself. Cognate with this is a recognition of the power of fiction, to which all of us have recourse in our attempts to establish dominance over others and control parts of our 'reality'. Both the sexual and the political dimensions of his work are wittily and compassionately exemplified in 'The Nembutal Story', collected here and also in the anthology of pieces from *Tabloid Story*, where it first appeared.

In *The Tabloid Story Pocket Book* Michael Wilding has collected most of the stories which appeared in the periodical under his editorship with Frank Moorhouse, Carmel Kelly and Brian Kiernan. This history of this venture is recalled in the tailpiece to this collection. All that need be said here is that it succeeded entirely in its aim of revitalizing short fiction in Australia. Far outweighing the occasional tedious or pretentious effusion, inevitable in such an assemblage, is the mass of original, exciting and varied writing. Some of these new voices have an authentic strangeness which almost certainly would never have been heard, had it not been for the encouraging policies of the *Tabloid Story* editors.

Tabloid Story and the two or three small presses which came into operation at about the same time have been largely responsible for enriching and strengthening the tradition of short fiction in Australia. Paradoxically, the editors began the project as a response to what they felt was a narrow and stifling conception of the 'Australian story' dominant in the traditional magazines and anthologies and called for a more 'international' outlook on the part of writers, editors and readers, yet what they revealed, and to a large extent stimulated, was the vitality and diversity of the short story in Australia.

The writing in *The Tabloid Story Pocket Book* and in Brian Kiernan's collection *The Most Beautiful Lies* is certainly very eclectic, often conceived without respect for The Australian Legend, yet for all that, distinctly Australian in fresh and varied ways. Neither in Britain nor the United States has there been a comparable resurgence of short fiction. Some of Australia's most important and promising writers are now short story writers. *Tabloid Story* played a central role in fostering this development.

All this happened during the period of crisis documented in James Sutherland's *Fiction and the Fiction Industry* (London, 1978) when traditional outlets for new fiction in Britain, and consequently in Australia, which remains a colonial market for British publishing, began to dry up. *Tabloid Story* and the small presses Wild and Woolley and Outback Press represent the efforts of writers doing the whole job themselves, by creating an alternative to the fiction industry on a small, sometimes collective scale, in touch with the actual craft of writing.

This has determined some of the changes observable in recent Australian fiction: the short, highly finished story; the collection of clustered pieces; the extended work structured according to the principles Frank Moorhouse calls 'discontinuous narrative'. These are positive developments full of great potential, for short fiction, freed of the dominance of the novel and the narrow tradition of the 'Australian story' is capable of great variety and refinement, and story clusters or discontinuous narratives have all the potential of the novel without its inherent tolerance for boredom. As the fiction industry, dominated by international publishers who treat Australia as a cultural colony, becomes closed to writers starting out on their careers, it is increasingly likely that new and innovative fiction – the work, in fact, upon which the strength and survival of literary culture depends – will come through the alternative avenues of publication, and take the forms which they encourage.

In Australia, this process is well begun. The five writers selected by Brian Kiernan – Michael Wilding, Frank Moorhouse, Peter Carey, Murray Bail and Morris Lurie – have all been connected with *Tabloid Story* or the small presses (including the University of Queensland paperback prose series) and they must be considered among the most important writers of their generation. Their experiments and innovations in form and mode promise to nourish Australian fiction for some time to come. They are not alone, of course. There are good young novelists, and other short story writers of great originality, like Vicki Viidikas, Laurie Clancy, Angea Korvisianos, Brian Cole and Christine Townsend, among others who found an audience through *Tabloid Story*. It is to publications like this to which the reader must turn to discover the resurgent vitality of Australian fiction.

BRUCE CLUNIES ROSS