



# Issue The First, July 1998. ed.1.

## CONTENTS:

### [Editorial](#)

#### [Poetry - Poems About Poetry and Poets.](#)

Works about poets and poetry are pretty hard to place. Please let's have them for an airing.

#### [Poetry - Virgin Verse and Verse From the Pros](#)

Tracy Ryan, Fran Sbrocchi, John Kinsella, Glen Phillips, Shane McCauley, Sherry-Anne Jacobs, Jim Cornish, Dianne Beckingham, Walter Vivian, Ethel Webb Bundell, Helen Hagemann, Andrew Burke.

#### [Shorts - Old and new](#)

Sherry-Anne Jacobs, Delphine Montigny-Vivian

#### [Page Three Writer/Reader Revealed](#)

The Bronte Sisters

#### [Reviews](#)

Janet Woods on "Jessie" by Anna Jacobs

#### [Articles old and new](#)

[Nuts and Bolts: Writing With A Computer by Walter Vivian](#)

[Blimps and Blips - Government for and Against the Arts](#)

[Goliardys - Saucy little stories or verse](#)

#### [Joker](#)

[Publishing News - the rise, fall, amalgamation and gossip about hard copy & electronic presses](#)

[Opinion - readers views and feedback, especially with a literary flavour](#)

[Contacts - URL's to visit on the net, etc.](#)

## Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of PixelPapers, the small "l" literary e-zine or longsheet on the internet, linking a select group of discerning readers, hopefully scattered across the globe, or in the worst case scenario, seated at a mere handful of computers in suburban Australia. We hope to be liberal and lively without being lightweight.

Our thanks to the fine writers who have contributed.

In seeking brand new work from new scribblers and second or third publication stuff from more established writers, we hope to fill a sort of niche, a void in the literary net. Instead of work lying idle at the bottom of the proverbial drawer in the limbo between first publication and the ultimate anthology, we offer another chance for it to be showcased and kept in the public eye. Who knows, a web-surfing magnate may recognize in it the seeds of a mega-movie or a significant advertising campaign, and abundant filthy lucre will be offered. Even published work contained in collections and anthologies can benefit from such notice, to help lift it out of the competing ruck on booksellers' shelves. Likewise, beginning writers are encouraged to send in their work to give it an airing, before trying for hard copy publication.

Apologies are offered if there seems to be an excess of our own work. It is included not only out of unwonted vanity, but also merely to fill voids, and we promise to yield place to contributors.

PixelPapers has a deliberate emphasis on the word, for despite our delight in finding intermingling illustrations in publications, like fruity bits in a pudding, they are a turnoff if we have to await their slow manifestation on our screens, materialising out of the ether like Alice's Cheshire cat, with only the mere grin for much of the time. So-called surfing the net becomes very much like dog-paddling, if there are constant pauses to import graphics. We suspect that the slowness of modems and net technology is one reason why newspapers are not brought to us via the screen, despite the fact that this was heralded more than a decade ago. Therefore, the only pause and impediment in your reading should be as the glory of page three is revealed.

Whatever the mode of news delivery, we fear that hard copy literary magazines are likely to diminish in the future. In Australia, aside from their perceived shortcomings, most depend on support from increasingly and deliberately scarce government funding, directed through the Literature Fund. In addition, their hosts are usually cash-strapped as well. It is a pity because outlets for publication are diminishing. The literary magazines are victims of that marvellous political concept taken from agriculture, the notion of "seeding money". It begs the question about the existence of possible nourishing resources and whether there would be need for support in the first place, if there were any such thing.

We need our literary magazines.

Publishing on the net has many virtues. There is no cost for glossy paper and binding, and the potential readership is immense. It should be possible for rapid assessment of work rather than the dreaming semester or two passed with conventional literary magazines, between submission and editorial judgement. Thanks to the magic of HTML, readers may peck spicy little bits, at will, out of a scroll of biblical proportions, without having to scan through the lot. If boredom sets in, a mere click on one of the listed URL's sends you soaring away to a completely different screen, originating from another state or another

country.

We propose to have a new issue every two months. There will be limited uploads of revised editions during each two-month period, so that submissions are always welcome. Look upon this issue as a fine amphora, part filled with the wine of literature and awaiting further samples of the vintage. The stopper will be corked, waxed and sealed on the thirty first day of August.

This editorial chair is politically central, with an occasional bias towards leftish issues, but this may not always seem to be the case. Given that there is one quarter Irish blood pulsing through the editorial veins, being agin the government of the day, whatever its coloration, is the natural, default stance.

We toyed with the idea of having an office boy's column, as was popular in comics long ago, featuring schoolboy grammar and orthography. However since the charming e.e.cummings has spawned many less skilled emulators, we feel that it would be passe.

Please send in your work. We promise that it will be treated with due respect.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

## Poetry - Poems About Poetry And Poets

### Brave Sonnet

Walter Vivian

The poet, in a frenzy of poesy,  
whelmed by a surge of creativity  
ripped off seven good poems at once!  
I think this should be commemorated  
with a snowwhite sash or cummerbund,  
embroidered, 7 AT ONE BLOW, for,  
to flash such a brave sign, would,  
as with faery story's brave little tailor,  
quell opposition, easing poetic odyssey  
through the mythic literary morass,  
where critical ogres abound,  
eunuch horns are everywhere,  
but winnable fair princesses,  
and half kingdoms, are rare.

# A Clever Poet

Walter Vivian

How I admired

your sprung verse

your words bouncing from all directions

riccochetting in fascinating flight

like a ball in a squash court

dazzling with energy and curving trajectories

deft placement

vollies of ideas

rattling rhythms

dainty lobs;

but

you are so clever, that,

I cannot get a handle to your thought,

so

much of the time,

are you in a court of an orthodox sort,

or merely playing,

with yourself?

# Versomania

Walter Vivian

My friend, the poet, must write  
at the instant the muse strikes him;  
like the Ancient Mariner he has a curse,  
compelling him to scribble verse;  
in the car  
at his desk  
walking  
running  
standing  
sitting  
lying  
kneeling  
squatting  
eating  
drinking  
washing  
shaving  
in the shops - a small sonnet on a docket  
in the bank - pay pretty teller the sum of one new poem  
in church - sermons are fallow for the poetic mind  
in the en suite - for scrolls of homeric length  
in the restaurant - he'll buy the cloth if they turn nasty  
in the train - for haikus and ticket-sized poems  
but dare he, stricken with the muse  
when in flagrant delight  
to say, *Hold a minute dear -*  
*I really must write?#*

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

## Poetry - Virgin Verse and Verse From the Pros

### Morningswood

Tracy Ryan c/-[jvk20@hermes.cam.ac.uk](mailto:jvk20@hermes.cam.ac.uk)

Playing with fire.  
Dad lets me carry in  
sticks and twigs for the kitchen  
stove. *Morningswood*, he says.  
Mum corrects him: *Kindling*.  
*Well, where I come from*, Dad begins,  
and it begins again.  
I say nothing  
never name  
this stuff that sets it all alight.  
That narrow mouth with its sliding grate  
consumes all that's useless, does away  
with cover-ups, old news, stale arguments  
and in exchange  
feeds and warms us. We take it for granted.  
Buttering up the jaws  
of the old jaffle-iron  
we metamorphose  
all last night's leftovers  
smashed peas that slid round the plate  
stiff remnants of potato mash  
and hated carrots -  
into a crisp toast-pocket that'd  
sizzle the roof of your mouth off.  
*One way to make her eat veges at least -*  
says Mum - *but it's dangerous*.  
Sitting this close to the source my face is burning.  
Later, bringing sticks in again  
to fire up my own hearth  
I dare the word

*Morningswood.*

My husband looks up  
sees the hard logs give way  
flames taking all the unsaid  
we make bonfires of.

(FROM TRACY'S DELIGHTFUL AND POWERFUL BOOK, *KILLING DELILAH*, FREMANTLE ARTS CENTRE PRESS. IT REMINDS US OF HER CULINARY COMPETENCE IN PRODUCING SCONES FROM THE STOVE AT THE KSP WRITERS CENTRE WHEN SHE WAS WRITER IN RESIDENCE.)

## In The First Place

Tracy Ryan c/-[jvk20@hermes.cam.ac.uk](mailto:jvk20@hermes.cam.ac.uk)

In the first place was something other than this.  
I know that, though I couldn't tell you  
where the first place was.

It was somewhere between the fur and  
looking slightly ridiculous  
with our sleek skin on

or perhaps even earlier.  
I wish, I wish I could remember  
the way back there.

The trees, the earth, look familiar.  
They call me back to before  
we got separated.

I want to lie down beneath them  
become what I was in the first place  
in the first place where we knew how to

mate and die without talking  
of love because  
love was obvious

love the first time and the first place.

(FROM *KILLING DELILAH*, FREMANTLE ARTS CENTRE PRESS.)

## Willow Song

Frances Sbrocchi [naisburi@mail.iinet.net.au](mailto:naisburi@mail.iinet.net.au)

We stood by the well where the summer sun  
shone late and the willow shadowed the gate  
You were strong and tall and I wanted it all  
and I knew you  
and learned your loving

The marsh mallow, yellow, cradled us then  
and I knew you, knew you as never again  
for the willow's shadow hung low  
where we lay  
and marked the space of our loving

The days have been long  
since we left the well,  
leaves from the willow cover the place  
where we loved and the branches fall  
where I knew you, and knew your loving

The marsh mallow's faded  
the well's grown black, willow leaves bitter  
and the shadows track, dark in the space  
where we lay and loved  
where I knew you and knew your loving

You left in the morning, your call had come  
and I heard the beat of the ancient drum  
that takes the best and the best of the young  
from the places they know, and the women weep  
for the men who go from their loving

## Touch me once more

Frances Sbrocchi [naisburi@mail.iinet.net.au](mailto:naisburi@mail.iinet.net.au)

Stay with me  
summer sun grows dim  
long black shadows coil  
their fingers from the corners  
and as days grow shorter

memory fades

I have forgotten summer  
and by this cold sea  
a season's silence  
crawls inward

I can no longer feel your touch  
or quite recall that morning  
when we lay  
hibiscus blossoms  
dropping by the path

The shadows coil  
black in the corners  
stay with me, for yesterday  
has hidden herself  
and the last rays  
drop from the skylight

(FRAN IS WELL PUBLISHED. WHEN SHE IS IN REMINISCENT MODE ABOUT HER CANADIAN CHILDHOOD, SHE CAN CHILL TO THE MARROW WITH POEMS IN WHICH ICE AND SNOWDRIFTS ARE PROMINENT!)

## Pig Melons

John Kinsella [jvk20@hermes.cam.ac.uk](mailto:jvk20@hermes.cam.ac.uk)

As children we dashed  
their brains out,  
the insipid flesh  
drying like chunks of pork  
over the yellowing paddocks;  
this murder bringing  
further ruin to arable lands,  
choking the native flora  
with spilt thoughts  
encoded as seeds  
that bided their time  
spitefully  
until the rains  
washed away the tracks  
of our games, our conflicts,

percolating beneath the surface,  
throwing ropes  
that crept out,  
securing the meagre  
fertility of the place  
with their rituals  
of bondage.

from *The Hunt* (Bloodaxe, 1998)

## Windows

John Kinsella [jvk20@hermes.cam.ac.uk](mailto:jvk20@hermes.cam.ac.uk)

I

You follow the smoke-column  
from a garden fire to a point  
near the top of the window  
where it liaises with the dark  
waste of clouds. From the ash,  
still warm, the bulbs - electric -  
throw off their shucks.

II

The wind stirs a vague notion  
from its frame - the sweep  
of the Sleepy Mallow of Peru,  
the shimmering Arizona Cypress,  
the hillocked paddocks,  
the cankered orchard,  
the errant hawk riding the boundaries,  
and a fell moon straining to claw  
the inhabitants of a dark room  
out into the finest of days.

from *Poems 1980-1994* (Bloodaxe, 1998)

(JOHN HAS PUBLISHED MANY BOOKS OF POETRY, AS A VISIT TO HIS WEB PAGE OR THE FREMANTLE ARTS CENTRE PRESS PAGE WILL SHOW. HE IS A FELLOW AT CHURCHILL COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE, U.K.)

## Old Ladies

Sherry-Anne Jacobs

I love lumpy old ladies  
Whose figures have gone to seed.  
They don't give a hoot  
If they're sexy or cute,  
From tyrannous fashion they're freed.

I love gaudy old ladies  
Whose wrinkles are smothered in paint.  
They've hennaed their hair  
And they still bloody care,  
So they're striving to be what they ain't.

I love scrawny old ladies  
With hardship writ deep in their eyes.  
It's been a hard row  
But they've wielded the hoe,  
Though they know they have not won a prize.

I love careful old ladies  
With each little cup in its place.  
They've tamed their old man  
And the rest of their clan;  
Yes, they've conquered their own little space.

I love stylish old ladies  
Who've maintained their standards in dress.  
They've matched every thread  
And they're not short of bread;  
Yes, they've lived their whole lives with finesse.

I love all those old ladies  
Whose lives are engraved on their face.  
Their bodies are worn  
And their dreams are all torn,  
But they've nurtured the seeds of our race.

# Terracotta Army

Glen Phillips [g.phillips@cowan.edu.au](mailto:g.phillips@cowan.edu.au)

1

On thousand upon thousand visages  
I stared and stared; phalanx and file  
too perfect in their ponderous array:  
here were warriors with encircling  
forefinger and thumb empty  
as if they held a conjuror's coin to spin  
instead of haft of spear, shaft of bow,  
since rotted in the tomb's quiet aeons.

Each of their faces was a dun-grey mask,  
yet something else disturbed: no two  
stern soldier faces were the same.  
And in the lidded eyes, curvaceous lips  
I read a message I had missed:  
this tomb, precisely grained, presented  
an all-dimensioned photographic print!  
Long ago, the emperor  
(himself separated from death by a slender hair)  
decreed that this massed moment  
should be stopped,  
this freeze-frame record  
be the closure to his reign.

2

Strange it had taken me so long  
to break the code's ten thousand stares,  
assemble, reassemble that moment's text  
written in such painful lettered lines.

So what was cypher to this serried  
statement in the hardened clay?  
Another  
simpler photograph had unriddled  
ranks of patient faces, calm, serene.  
A picture such as holidaying couples take;  
and scrawled with scratching fountain pen  
overleaf that simple appellation: *ëJ.* and her brother.

The young couple posed in front  
of some printed woodland backdrop,

planted grove of ancient trees  
on unfolded cloth; the squared  
creases with precise lines  
still showed the tree-lined avenues.  
This one of thousand upon thousand  
photographs of a much photographed scene.

3

Lady, in your face I saw no joy, sorrow,  
hate or hope, no sense of fear  
at gathering doom, no anguish;  
only, perhaps, perpetual questioning.

In your face I saw you shared  
Xian, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Beijing;  
and more still of yellow earth's generic lands  
inherent in your Han curve of brow,  
lidded eyes, the curve of lips.

Your patient  
waiting face looked out as if from  
caverns of some enormous dust-hung tomb:  
I saw affinity with ten thousand warriors  
on bruised terraces of hewn earth.

Like all unburied ones, they too wait  
in prisons of expectation:  
facing the ogling of tourists' eyes,  
from Tokyo, New York, Berlin,  
eyes that reflect these multitudes of stone sockets.

But still,  
as my eyes face yours, in your photograph,  
your delicate carved beauty, your calm gaze,  
I look into these two darkneses.

Might such curve of harmony  
unite somehow our east and west?

4

Shadows of those terracotta lineaments  
combined in majesty of intent,  
could find strength to challenge  
destiny's dread imminence.  
As when roaring Celt or Saxon warriors  
searched out the southlands  
either to prosper or to serve  
blood summons of their warlord chiefs.

Silently could my own blood brothers  
assemble to confront your brethren  
in these terracotta ranks?  
Genetic cyphers pre-destining  
the first advance?

Fragile gestures, perhaps,  
like the one, who, facing rows  
and rows of tanks in Tiananmen  
on a burning day in June,  
shopping bags in hand,  
challenged a corrupt nation's course,  
turned again and again before  
the hesitant machines.

To share now such agony?  
To sway two shadow armies  
in headlong course, march at them blindly  
with force of blunt, affrighted flesh?

5

Yes, after green fields of Xian  
where I found suspended  
in the silvered photograph,  
multi-dimensioned time-lapse of another time,  
the largest search, the longest march of all.

6

Today I walk barefoot on old bricks,  
on the burning garden pathway of my homeland,  
under a summer's sun.

Again I try to build or re-build  
images of a long, shaded road,  
a road that could have led  
the travelled way of human progress  
through the chromosomes.

This blue-green world still spins,  
encircling time's soft decay  
of human handiwork,  
defies the endless warring paths,  
the bloodied march of enmity.

September 1991

Sassi Chiantigiani

## Tuscan Landscapes II

Glen Phillips

Squared stone, rough Chianti stone,  
stone set square to take  
the steep wall's corner weight:  
bone-white, gray as old straw  
or brown as bare arms when  
the gathering, la vendemmia,  
brings the burdened baskets  
from the still-warm vineyard slopes.  
Here le rondini, the swallows,  
wheel and wheel in final frenzy  
in shrivelling autumn skies.  
Rough-laid stone of terraces,  
prim walls of farmyard prisons,  
the tiled towers of filial hearth;  
Chianti stone of every fortified town -  
even Etruscan arch and tomb  
brambled by insolent berry barbs.  
Scarred stone turned by the plough;  
stone to be torn down; to be hurled;  
then set square again, stone on stone.

August 1991

(THESE POEMS, THE FRUIT OF FELLOWSHIPS IN ITALY AND CHINA, WILL APPEAR IN *SPRING BURNING*, FREMANTLE ARTS CENTRE PRESS, LATER THIS YEAR)

## Marsyas The Phrygian

Shane McCauley

When the god is ungracious -  
And he nearly always is -  
It is better to let him win

Taking his pitiless content  
With his own cunning  
The needless Stratagems  
To perplex and torture mortals. . .

That my flute song was quite  
As good as deity's strumming  
Goes without saying

But what is the use  
If your skin is nailed to a pine  
And flaps in the high wind

And the worms make flutes  
Of your Bones?

## Archeological Museum, Orvieto

Shane McCauley

Where is the kitchen clatter, clutter,  
In these glass cabinets housing  
Pots, cups, plates, utilitarian  
Artefacts made then, made now,  
Into art?

Achilles rides off to war on the side  
Of a wine jug. Dionysos is groomed

By priapic helpers. Artemis offers  
Counsel on a storage jar for oil.

Two thousand years later my face  
Is superimposed on such scenes,  
My footsteps reverential in this  
Resurrected pantry.

What admiring gaze, a further span on,  
Will sift my plain kitchenware,.  
Mass-produced mug, graceless spoon,  
Dogged instruments of brief wear and tear?

## Medieval Wall

Shane McCauley

You touch the pachydermatous wall  
Of the old town, feeling  
What it must be to be protective  
Stone, chipped but unwearied  
By five centuries, hardened in  
Certain sun, less certain rain.

The only graffiti here the creeping  
Images of shadow, twisted fluid  
Shape of passerby, resting dot

Of a fly. A cat sleeps where  
Archers once stood, eyes searching  
Out the valley's rival banners.

Behind the wall, dust and silence,  
All that was so carefully guarded  
Now outlasted by its shield.

(SHANE HAS RECENTLY RETURNED FROM A FELLOWSHIP IN ROME.)

## Improbable Odds I See

Walter Vivian [pixpress@mail.iinet.net.au](mailto:pixpress@mail.iinet.net.au)

The suitors all slain  
with the bow that only the king could string,  
he and Telemachus swabbed the palace out  
and buried the numerous deserving dead;  
Odysseus had some explaining to do,  
lying with Queen Penelope in their marriage bed,  
which if you recall, was  
the stump of a mighty tree he'd caused  
to be adzed and crafted to make a woody couch,  
unyielding to the hottest pressings  
and incapable of being moved  
to rearrange the bedchamber;

Under her doubting gaze,  
he told about nine years of the Trojan wars  
and the sack of mighty Ilium.  
*That's well known, but the next nine years, says she,  
When I was tight kneed under a tapestry  
but longing for the royal orb and sceptre,  
what took you so long?  
Why, it could only have been three or four days sail  
on a good easterly with a snip of north in it  
and no more than a week or ten days rowing.  
Agamemnon and the rest came back promptly.  
Why not you? Nine years!*

Blushing manfully, he told the tale  
of heroic deeds and mighty vicissitudes,  
silver-tongued as ever,  
but without any god daring  
to work lustrous magic on his behalf  
- nine years of lavish libations  
had pickled the lily too much to gild -  
to help him explain, how he'd humped, not his swag,  
but sundry sylphs around the Aegean's margin,  
of how his men were turned to pigs  
and he had to serve Circe lest they flew away,  
of choosing between the original rock and a hard place,  
Scylla and Charybdis,  
outwitting the demi-god of team supporters, the Cyclops,  
and resisting the sirens' invitation to their fleshy pleasures,  
riding a riven keel shattered by Poseidon's spite  
and teaching dear little Nausica how to play ball.

Penelope, poor thing, greying after all those years  
and with a wife's longing for marital order and bliss,  
forgave and submitted to unaccustomed penetration  
-or so she said, all who could gainsay, gibbering in Hades-  
like a young virgin bedding her first lover,  
and afterwards, when her lying old man was snoring,  
she listened to the susurrations of wood beetles  
and wondered if Telemachus would give them grandchildren  
and what the neighbours would think  
and whether the bedchamber could be moved about the bed.

(FIRST PUBLISHED IN *QUADRANT* AND TO BE FEATURED IN *SAPPHO'S DELIGHT*, PIXELPRESS,  
1998)

## Not a Proper Shop

Walter Vivian [pixpress@mail.iinet.net.au](mailto:pixpress@mail.iinet.net.au)

Mrs Chappell had a shop,  
drapery, mercery & haberdashery,  
at the top end of town near the bridge and the trains,  
and my Gran would take me in for yarns, heh, heh,  
yarns being long, long threads and long, long conversations;

It was a shop piled high with colour,  
frilly frocks that were dresses, not dressers,  
bright cloths, skeins of wool and reels of cotton  
smelling of mothballs, and nothing to eat,  
a smooth counter with a brass ruler edge

where you were sat when legs grew tired,  
and big black shears which scringed through cloth,  
and could easily cut off your troubles,  
bright buttons that you mustn't touch ,  
some like barley sugar, if you could only suck them;

I would be greeted and noted for growing,  
Gran would buy her cotton and  
I faded from notice as the yarn began,  
two dear grey heads a-bobbing,  
kind, spectacled eyes locked in conversation,  
with much,tut tut tut , and then she said,  
and sometimes whispers about what he did,  
and, did he really ,tut tut tut , and, the poor soul tut tut tut,  
and whispers you couldn't really hear, tut tut tut ---  
on and on and on and on;

The train for the city chuffed by and the train for the port  
and another and another,  
a week's iniquities unravelled until the yarn was over,  
I was noticed again, goodbyes exchanged,  
and off we went to a proper shop that sold things to eat, and no yarns.#

(FIRST PUBLISHED IN *FREMANTLE ARTS REVIEW* AND FEATURED IN *NOT A PROPER SHOP*,  
PIXELPRESS 1997.)

## Caution: Ghosts Crossing

Dianne Beckingham

Beneath shimmering ghost gums  
on a red earth ledge  
I stoop to re-fill water-cans  
from a cool, clear creek.  
I feel at one with this land  
and become a dark nomad  
naked and nubile  
of times before.

Suddenly I glimpse  
a smooth-limbed stranger  
on the other bank. He is not my tribe  
he lures me to danger, defiance of law  
even unto death.  
Shall I go with him, follow

the sideways hint of black eyes  
swim beneath his brews  
slave to his spear?  
Or shall I scabble up and back  
over quartz and flint  
to tend a safe campfire  
heart fluttering like a startled bird?

A man's call to woman is heard  
the shout of "Billy's boiling!"  
breaks the spell.  
Thousands of years pass.  
White gums, tranquil stream  
come into focus again.

## Sturt Peas

Dianne Beckingham

On Pilbara ridge and range  
among spiky green spinifex:  
blazing red petals, eyes of the desert.

Light reflects from dark centres  
as if all the fire of summer  
were stored for mid-year blooms;

Your wild beauty mesmerizes  
like campfire embers  
holding the traveller's gaze.

The mystery, the witchery is  
such burning visions call me back  
from cold cities to this land.

## To a Dung Beetle

Jim Cornish [naisburi@mail.iinet.net.au](mailto:naisburi@mail.iinet.net.au)

Oh scarabeus, welcome in this place,  
Oh worthy migrant, paragon of renewal;  
your strange digestive talent earns you grace,  
Oh venerable Kheper, royal Egypt's jewel.  
A trencherman of pattie cakes bucolic,  
gourmand, agrarian aerobe without peer,  
best in your class for services metabolic,  
commutation we most gratefully revere.

You of the hornèd snout, the emerald charm,  
esteemed sun god, gem of a Pharoah's crown  
shall banish musca campus from the farm,  
shall foil the flies and keep their numbers down.  
No longer gardens, fields will be defiled  
and dung, defiled, no longer be reviled.

## Virgin Page

Jim Cornish [naisburi@mail.iinet.net.au](mailto:naisburi@mail.iinet.net.au)

Contemplating a virgin page  
unsullied yet by platitudes of our age  
or profundities that might the mind engage

Or fancy perambulations of the pen?  
Imagining's the game my friends, well then  
assemble some words, line them up and when

You've whipped them into orderly decorum  
(some nouns with adjectives after and before 'em)  
we can examine 'em, admire 'em or deplore 'em.

Chuck in some verbs to show there's something brewing  
with adverbs to describe the kind of doing  
and lots of pronouns to define your point of viewing.

Construct a trunk, then limbs and add the foliage,  
some fruit you've garnered from the tree of knowledge,  
some ten dollar words to show you've been to college.

All arranged in columns and ranks and dressed  
by the left they'll march past eight abreast  
in step and hope the reviewers are impressed.

Editors, judges, critics who line the route

clap and cheer and wave or boo and hoot,  
awarding a metric foot or order of the boot.

(JIM IS CO-AUTHOR OF A CHAP BOOK.)

## Kimberley Safari

Ethel Webb Bundell

I come to your country as a tourist, dark man, watching from the ridge.  
Wait. Don't fade away into the pindan like smoke from the morning campfire.  
We were brothers once.

I cannot follow the genetic path back to where we went our separate ways  
before either of our dreamtimes, but surely we can bridge the distance  
with the handclasp of cousins.

I need the trappings of the tourist, the air-conditioned four-wheel-drive,  
because your country would kill me, not through hostility, but  
the grandeur of indifference.

The green places of the earth nurtured my stock, and there I can survive.  
Here, red is the colour of the country; red rocks, red earth, the vast  
red scream of death.

I would walk with you quietly, awed by the immensity  
of this country's space and time, and the synthesis, which is you,  
my cousin, cousin of the shadows.

Cities diminish you. Here I see you on the ridges, on the cliff-tops  
relaxed, alert, watching the centuries go by. The land is you; you the land.  
You can afford to be patient.

I've put away my wrist-watch. It seems irrelevant.  
We move according to the light, the shadows, or our hungers.

Other members of the party are more precise  
We wait for them; and they for us,  
and you, my cousin, wait.

Here the grass is taller than I; I cannot see the rocks.  
I stumble, stumble endlessly. There is a dead taipan. Another.  
The live ones have slithered away.

Airless heat engulfs me. I gasp dust and spinifex resin.  
You used the resin to bind the sharpened rock

to haft of axe or spear, to catch the evening meal.

Yet your dark sister, the cook, serves steak and sausages, curry, stew with dumplings, fresh caught barramundi cooked in foil, and there's porridge ever day at breakfast.

But sometimes we stop to sample bush fruits from tree and vine; enough perhaps for tourists. I would move slowly from our diet, to yours...I hear that crocodile tastes gluey.

Heavy and uncertain, balanced by my back-pack and makeshift walking stick fashioned by your brother, our guide and mentor on this journey, I step and slither, slip and fall, into gully, gorge, ravine.

I see the crevice where hides rock wallaby, above the waterfall, river, creek, where all of us come thirstily to drink. Here the water's pure, I roll it on my tongue, savouring the absence... can one savour an absence?...the absence of chlorine.

I remember stories of poisoned waterholes, dead, dark children, and my stomach cramps in shame that I am white. Yet I, too, could perish in the plains between the creeks, between sweet abundance and indifferent absence.

I clutch at rocks, scramble up and over boulders reach out for helping hands, climbing over tumbled stones of river bed or sharp devonian reef.

I hear the story of Pigeon, murderer, or freedom fighter, according to the teller, white or black.

I see your paintings on the rocks, and ponder, dreaming, forgetful of the camera in my lap. I think some tourists are more concerned with camera settings than in what they see.

The pictures in my heart are sharper than the inept photos captured by my fumbling hand and eye. I try to feel your dreaming, sense your loss your pain, join your laughter and delight.

The batteries are flat, the ignition inert on the "Motica" On the trailer, an U-bolt has snapped.

We drink billy tea while your brother, our guide, calls for "big mob a tools in tin box be'ind the driver's seat." We line up behind the "Motica" push, to push, to push again.

Do I hear you laughing, cousin of the shadows?

I doze, awaken, somewhere between comfort and discomfort, lying on creek bed, camping ground, or even gravel pit, and try to trace the Cross as it wheels across the sky.

I'm restless, and the sleeping bag restricts me, but unzipped

mosquitoes suck my blood, and I think about encephalitis.

I hear the sounds of resting cattle and wonder,  
since there are no fences could they tread on me as I sleep?  
How many aeons, cousin, will it take before I sleep as peacefully as you?

Grass-seeds interweave my clothes, resin-stained, stinking, and  
I throw them away.. My hat I give to some passing tourist.  
Shall I end up as naked as you, my cousin of the shadows?

I'm too noisy for rock wallabies, crocodiles. Bower birds flee  
as I approach their nests. The only snakes I see are dead.  
Yet I sense you watching from the ridges.

Native grass has overcome the pasture, disease has claimed the herds.  
The cattle kings are gone. The land is coming back to you.

I've walked with you through your land not close, yet not too far away.  
As I leave your country, I take something of you in my heart. When I return, as return I  
shall, perhaps you will walk a little closer, my cousin,  
cousin of the shadows.

(ETHEL IS A WELL-PUBLISHED WRITER AND A TEACHER OF CREATIVE WRITING, WHO LIVES AT DUNSBOROUGH. SHE HAS WON THE PRESTIGIOUS NORTHERN TERRITORY RED EARTH PRIZE FOR POETRY AND HAS A HUGE SILVER MEDAL TO PROVE IT. HER NOVEL, *DANCING ON THE FREEWAY*, WAS PUBLISHED THIS YEAR BY LITERARY MOUSE PRESS.).

Dugite Mother

*Pseudonaja affinis*

Helen Hagemann <[hhageman@echidna.stu.cowan.edu.au](mailto:hhageman@echidna.stu.cowan.edu.au)>

I must hurry  
not just hasten  
rocks move  
I make a wide berth  
she smells me

defenseless  
you can't force bravery  
in bush gardens  
of molested mice  
snake holes are venomous reasons  
to hasten  
my own season  
ends  
and begins  
when she defends  
20 eggs  
a haystack of dugites  
eat through spring  
she may attack  
poison muscle  
but I wait for her speed  
when it comes  
brown in travel  
mother's practice  
leaves -  
defenseless  
I hasten.

## Well It's Hard Not to Dream

Helen Hagemann <[hhageman@echidna.stu.cowan.edu.au](mailto:hhageman@echidna.stu.cowan.edu.au)>

In the park  
I could watch your face  
naked in my lap  
undo my picnic jars  
the straps of my dress  
bite into aroma  
of succulent pleasures  
  
near a lake  
I could lead you to the edge  
skip through the tangled ruins  
of my opened dress  
pour wine to a rhythm  
of our passion  
bounce the berries

near our navels

if we came to a bridge  
we could swallow the river  
if the rope ladder broke  
we could follow each other

the rope to this dream  
is breaking slowly  
I'm in a house  
and a tempest is calling  
I'm in a storm  
and the whole world is sinking  
I'm in a room full of weather  
and you're disappearing  
I'm hurting  
and inside I'm leaking  
in this bedroom  
the walls are still raining

I have a certain thickness when it comes to  
inclement weather  
I get hungry.

Well it's hard not to dream.

## Starry, Starry Night

[Andrew Burke](#)

In Australia's outback, curtains drawn,  
Japanese tourists sleep all day while  
everlastings and wild orchids sway,  
oblivious, and native tomatoes redden.  
Tourist operators scratch their melons,  
balding, with 'roos-on-wheels logos  
carefully researched to attract  
the cream of the Asian market. They shrug  
it off, and fill out reports with full tallies,  
then crack tinnies and jokes in motel rooms.

Evening, Japanese couples file out from,  
darkened cells to gaze enrapt and nudge  
each other: Ah, the Milky Way! The  
Saucepan! Orion's Belt! *(They look so real!)*  
The Southern Cross is an everlasting post-  
card of the Great Southern Sky, where  
the best blooms are above their heads.  
Such a sight locals can't see, as wreath  
flowers fade in sundrenched windows  
among gumnut people and pet rocks.

Dave stood after Saigon and Beirut, Arafat, Sadat, Kissinger  
and Co.; he stood atop his rented orchard, snowdrops running  
up his bush drive; he stood in front of his Blue Heeler asleep  
on the Dingo Flour Mills bag on the verandah; he stood beside  
his cottage, jarrah weatherboards peeling Mission Brown; he  
stood beside his Holden Station Wagon, FJ, crusted with rust;  
he stood and raised his arms to hug the fairytale sky for  
every New Yorker, and rolled in his best Voice of America  
tones, no ID, no dog tags: *Oh, the Almighty Creator has left  
his porch lights on again, and all's right, with the world!*

*1st June, 1998, Varuna*

## My Last Poem

[Andrew Burke](#)

My last poem shall speak clearly as a waterfall, pooling sweetly;  
shall dance entranced and ecstatic at the tip of a cliff in a full moon;  
shall sing without influence as simple a song as birds sing at dawn;  
shall have an erection and a gentle heartbeat, graceful as sunshine;  
shall bring together words like neighbours, over a splinterless fence;  
shall glide across the face of public clocks, like a seagull's shadow;  
shall dress in robes of mountain mist, tall tanned form firm beneath;  
shall be taut yet bountiful, fecund images rippling with thought;  
shall come no later than my last day, no sooner than my last dream;  
my last poem shall be the unchallengable translation of my first cry.

But today's poem knocks on your door again,  
looking for attention, wearing jeans and a floppy  
checked shirt, middleaged, dispossessed,  
whistling a tune if you should send him away,  
smiling like a goon if you let him stay. Okay,  
it's me hiding here, covering my papier mache  
mask with another coat of words, sticking  
it together with the spittle of life, tenuous as  
dew. These poems are like spider webs all over

my house, and when you read this, I web  
your house too. The threads are as fine as I can  
draw, the tension true: a cross wind blows me off  
course but the next wind brings me back Should I  
worry too much about how it's all hanging, it  
goes crazy like that mythical spider on acid  
who spun a freaked-out web, where Ashbury and  
Haight never met, and Jerry Garcia was  
the mayor's messenger boy. Katoomba Falls are  
nearby, I hear birdsong. I sport an erection, but  
this is still my first cry, take one million and two.

10/6/98 Varuna

(ANDREW IS A WIDELY PUBLISHED WRITER, POET, CRITIC AND TEACHER OF  
CREATIVE WRITING. HIS LATEST BOOK OF POEMS, *Pushing at Silence*, Folio/SALT 1998, IS  
NEARLY SOLD OUT.)

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

## Shorts - old and new

### Dress

by Sherry-Anne Jacobs

When a draught of cold air crept around her neck, she twitched in shock and a shiver of fear rippled down her spine. There should have been no draughts, for she had learned to lock up the house very carefully indeed.

Even as she looked up, two men took her by the arms and hauled her out of her seat, kicking the chair aside as they did so.

A hand covered her mouth. "If you scream, we'll shoot you."

She froze.

"Good girl," said a soft voice. "You don't want to cause us any trouble, now do you?"

"Answer him, girlie!" It was the hoarse voice that had haunted her nightmares for the past three months, ever since someone had tried to grab her in a dark street.

"No, I don't want to - to cause any trouble."

"Good. Where did your father keep his notes?"

"The police took all his papers away."

"We know he kept papers at home. It wasn't allowed, so he must have had a hiding place somewhere."

"I don't know anything about that." One man shook her hard. "I don't know!" she cried desperately. "He never told me anything. He said it was boring mathematical stuff."

The eyes of the man opposite narrowed and his lips thinned with anger. "Well, boys, I think we'll have to look for some clue in her memories. God knows, it's a long shot, but she may just have seen something. Give her an injection."

A needle jabbed into her arm and the scene around her faded into a blur. Voices shouted at her. Question followed question. She answered as best she could, but it didn't seem to be what they wanted.

Someone kept sobbing. Some poor woman. Muffled, agonised sobbing and moans. She felt so sorry for that poor woman.

After a black eternity, she could feel the drug starting to wear off. She was surprised at how hoarse her voice was, and when she moved, pain stabbed down one arm.

A voice cut through the confusion in her mind. "She obviously knows nothing. Shoot her and let's go."

"Is that really necessary?"

"Yes. She's seen our faces."

With a surge of terror she managed to get to her feet and start running across the room, away from them. The bullet slammed into her back with a force that tore one scream of anguish from her before the floor came up to hit her in the face and the lights started to fade around her.

\* \* \*

A shadow crossed her face and she half opened her eyes. A voice echoed in her ears from a long way away. "Helen, wake up! We haven't long. Dammit, girl, wake up!"

It was a colleague of her father, one she had never liked. "Mr Jones! Are you dead, too?"

"No one's dead."

She took a deep breath and managed to focus on the room. Two men by the door, handguns at the ready, another standing beside her.

Mr Jones shook her hard, making her yelp with pain and focus on him. "What happened here, girl?"

"Some men. They wanted father's papers." She forced more words up the sandpaper tunnel of her throat.

"Tell me exactly what happened!" He was as urgent in his questioning as the others had been, and only marginally more gentle.

Her thoughts kept wandering off. Mr Jones had advised her to move out of the house and she had refused. Her father had always said she was pig-stubborn, just like her mother. But why should she have to leave? Well, she knew why, now. What had her father been working on, for heaven's sake? "Some men - I don't know how they got in. They were just - there. How should I know who they were? They gave me an injection. Then they questioned me."

"What did they ask you?"

"About father's papers. I can't remember. And then they shot me. They killed me."

"Stupid bitch!"

The man beside her spoke. "It'll have been one of the new relaxant drugs, sir. She really won't remember."

She looked down at herself. She could see no blood, but her back was a mass of agony and it hurt her to draw breath. "They did shoot me," she insisted. "In the back. Why am I not dead? Am I dying?"

Mr Jones stepped back. "Find out why she isn't dead, for Christ's sake, then maybe she'll talk sense!"

The man with the kind voice tried to move her carefully. But it hurt, heavens how it hurt!

"She has a bullet-proof vest on, sir. Her back's badly bruised and I'd guess she's got several cracked ribs, but the bullet didn't penetrate. It must be a damned good vest."

"Bullet proof?" Helen grabbed his arm. "What do you mean - bullet proof?"

"You're wearing a bullet-proof vest. Surely you knew that, love?"

She started to laugh, but the pain was too sharp and the laugh turned into another moan. "No! I didn't know. I was just cold. I saw Dad's quilted jerkin and put it on."

Mr Jones leaned over her again. "Well, you've just saved your own life by wearing it, girl."

"Why should my father need a bullet-proof vest? What was he doing?"

"You really don't need to know."

Tears were trickling down her cheeks. "No. I don't need to understand any of this, do I? I just have to act as a living target. After my father's accident - "

"Murder," he corrected.

She always had trouble with the word 'murder'. The father she knew was a gentle loving man. Why should anyone want to murder a mathematician? Whatever Mr Jones said, she had been sure that it was all a mistake, a horrible mistake, an accident.

"What am I going to do now?" she whispered. "I can't stay here any more." Tears made chill tracks down her cheeks.

"No, you can't. They don't usually leave living witnesses. You did see them, didn't you? You will be able to help us make up identikit pictures?"

"Yes. I saw them quite well, actually." Nausea roiled round her stomach as she realised that the intruders had made no attempt to hide their faces. They must have intended to kill her all along. "What can I do now?" she whispered. "They'll come back for me."

"You'll have to vanish."

"What?"

He spoke slowly, as if to an idiot. "You're going to have to vanish, Helen. Permanently."

"You mean - like in the spy movies?" These things didn't happen to ordinary people like her.

"Exactly like that. We'll give you a new identity, find you a home and a job in another country - Australia is the usual choice - and then you can carry on with your life."

"And plastic surgery, too?" she joked. She would not, could not believe this was real.

"Yes, of course." His voice was impatient. "You don't want anyone to recognise you, do you?"

The dark man cleared his throat. "We can't delay much longer, sir."

"You're right. Call the ambulance."

One of the men watching the door slipped outside.

Helen stared up at Mr Jones's cold face. "What was my father doing? I demand to know."

"You're in no position to demand anything. Besides, a dedicated greenie like you wouldn't like it if we told you."

"But - "

"Let well alone, you silly bitch! Just accept our offer gratefully if you want to continue living."

"My father wouldn't work on anything that would damage our planet," she said stubbornly.

"Your father was a patriot. Let's leave it at that, hmm?"

"Then who were those men?"

"Terrorists."

She lay back, too tired to argue. Her fingers rubbed against her father's vest. She looked

down at it and started laughing, in painful jerky gasps.

"What the hell's got into her now?" Mr Jones snapped.

"The bullet-proof vest."

"What about the vest?"

"I only chose this one - because I liked the colour. It matched my new jeans, you see. I always did have good dress sense."

The two of them just stood staring down at her.

"Don't you think - you must see - how funny that is?" she begged. But they didn't laugh.

She was still laughing when they gave her an injection. The last thing she heard was Mr Jones's voice.

"Cover up her face! We want her to look nice and dead."

After that, it was a very long time before she laughed again. #

(FIRST BROADCAST ON RADIO. SHERRY-ANNE'S EXTENSIVE RECORD OF PUBLICATION MAY BE SEEN ON HER WEB SITE .)

## Hamish, Hair, and the Graduation Dinner

by Delphine Montigny-Vivian

Ever since I could walk, my father had taken me to his barber shop to get my hair cut just like his. The man who did it was one of Dad's friends and after the cut, the two of them would go out for a beer at the pub, and I'd walk home (we only lived down the road).

The barber's name was Hamish Macgregor, a Scottish bloke who'd migrated about fifty years back He'd hung onto the accent though. By the time I was ten, Hamish was about seventy. Since my grandparents had died or lived elsewhere he was the oldest person I'd ever met.

Hamish was bad at cutting hair, as blind as a bat, but it was a men's tradition in our family. My grandfather had gone there, and so did my dad, and I was expected to as well, with no questions.

Of course my mother complained at the terrible haircuts I got and suggested that she take me with her to her unisex salon. But no, My father put his foot down.

"What's the problem?" he said. "It's cheap, close to home and Hamish is an old family friend" (It was all right for him he was nearly bald). So I continued, to my mother's

dismay, and mine, to walk around with the daggiest hair ever. The kids at school teased me. I tried to cut it myself a couple of times but Hamish still did better.

I put up with it for fifteen years. After that I gave up and let it grow to shoulder length, but on the night of my year 12 graduation I was going to have good hair. I went to an out of town, out of the way unisex salon. There the blonde reshaped my lifeless hair into something good until halfway through...

"Oh my god!" she yelled, well, croaked. She'd lost her voice from talking too much.

"What, What is it?" I demanded, more urgently each time. The back of my neck began to burn as she combed through my hair with a look of utter disgust on her face.

"It's absolutely rampant", she marvelled quietly to herself, "I've never seen anything like it!"

Now I knew what was going on. I'd heard of people who'd had nits when they went to the hairdresser. They got thrown out straight away, in case they infected any of the combs or something. I struggled to get my voice back, terrified of the consequences of this accusation.

"Have, um, I got nits?" I stammered, displaying total innocence in case she thought I had come with nits just to corrupt their salon. "I don't think I do". I subtly pleaded for mercy.

"Yes, you've got nits," she didn't take the sympathetic path I made for her. "A couple of weeks and your head'll be crawling with lice!" she exclaimed almost triumphantly.

Suddenly my face felt like an atomic explosion. All the blood and heat in my body rushed to my face and I began to sweat profusely. Everyone in the salon twisted to stare at me. Each eyeball bored into mine and then they all pulled away. I could feel the pressure in the air as they all leaned in the other direction like the same ends of a magnet repelling. It was the most stressful and embarrassing moment in my whole life. I felt as though I did not have a right to be there.

Then the expected came. The manager strode up. A peroxide blonde with pink nails that looked fit to kill. Her foundation-covered face almost cracked as she smiled to display flashy white teeth, and her scarlet lips moved as she spoke cheerily.

"I'm terrible sorry sir, but you must now depart Elvira's Unisex Salon on the condition that you never return, nits or no nits." The contradiction of that smile and the cheerily trained voice to the meaning of those ferocious words left me slightly confused for a moment.

"Yes of course," I smiled back.

"Right now please sir," she fluttered her eyelids expectantly.

"Yes of course." I came back to reality, "Oh I see."

"Ten dollars please".

I gave it to her. I shouldn't have, I should've stood up for my rights. My hair was only half

cut but I didn't have the energy. My brain was splattered over the room and my emotions and pride were being swept up with the rest of my hair, probably to be sent to quarantine.

I strode up the street, the right side of my hair blew in the wind and the left side of my head shivered, unfamiliar with the cold.

I sat down on the bus stop when I realised what had happened. My hair looked terrible. One side had a fashionable style that I had picked out of a magazine while I waited in the waiting room, perched on a peach coloured vinyl sofa. The other side of my hair was long, and although long had never bothered me, my girlfriend had begged me to get it cut for so long I'd decided to make a surprise for her for the graduation dinner. I wondered what she would think of it now.

I contemplated the possibilities:

1. Cut It myself.
2. Go to another hairdresser and try to convince them that I had cut my own hair, but couldn't do the other side.

Surely I didn't have nits, probably just dandruff. Up the street was another hairdresser. As I went in a man with black slicked-back hair with a curl at the front came to the counter.

"Can I help you sir", he inquired in a high pitched voice with a lisp as he looked at me strangely.

"Yes, I'd like to have my hair cut" I said.

"Well that is what we do here" said the man. "What exactly happened to your hair to get it in that state?"

"I did it myself," I replied, trying to sound convincing.

"Yeah right" he said, "give me a look" I was filled with dread as he started to search my head.

"Nits" he said. "Get out!" He pushed me out and slammed the door.

I tried four more hairdressers. Each one was worse than the other. I said it was dandruff, sand, sugar. I said they were dead nits and I even raced to Coles and bought a comb and scissors for them to cut it with, but they all refused. After those four I couldn't handle it any longer. I caught the bus home and dinged the bell one stop early. I got off outside of Hamish's barber shop and stepped inside. It was like being in a trance. I knew there was nothing else I could do.

Hamish came in. "G'day John" he said, "Finally decided to come back! Well, I ain't gonna cut your hair."

I broke down. Hot tears poked through my eyes and I crumbled to the ground. Tired and worn out.

"Please" I begged on my hands and knees, "I know I never appreciated you before but you have to cut it." I stood up, and as my swollen, red eyes looked into his I said. "Family tradition"

Hamish cut my hair that day, don't know why. He must have felt sorry for me or needed the money. He did an OK job though. Both sides nearly matched up. He didn't ask why my hair was half cut and he didn't mention the nits. He probably couldn't see them anyway.

I managed to go to the graduation dinner but my girlfriend never turned up. I heard from her friends that she'd had nits and went to the hairdresser and they threw her out. No one would cut her hair and she had to stay home until she got rid of them. She was so embarrassed she hadn't told me.

I walked past her house, glad I had someone like Hamish to fall back on.

I've been going there ever since, nits or no nits. It's a family tradition.#

THIS VERY YOUNG WRITER'S STORY WAS FIRST BROADCAST ON NATIONAL ABC RADIO.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

## Page Three Writer/Reader Revealed



## Currer Bell, Ellis Bell or Acton Bell?

Said to be a likeness of one of the Bell brothers bathing, a sketch exchanged with the landlord of a Yorkshire inn for a firkin of brown ale and flask of gin. It can now be revealed, in a scoop for this magazine, that the Bronte sisters hid their identities as the Bell brothers, a name not unknown to Western Australians, to escape male prejudice in the publishing world.

Currer Bell was the pen name of Charlotte Bronte, who wrote *Jane Eyre*.

Emily Bronte wrote *Wuthering Heights* and Anne Bronte wrote *Agnes Gray*.

These highly acclaimed novels were published in 1847 and have continued to perplex the literary world with their mastery, originality and passion.

It is interesting that *Wuthering Heights* persists in the popular culture, with songs by Kate Bush and now Sir Cliff Richards' musical.

Charlotte also wrote three other novels, *The Professor*, *Shirley* and *Villette*.

WRITERS OR READERS ARE INVITED OR CHALLENGED TO CONTRIBUTE WITH A PHOTO AND SPIEL ON WORKS PUBLISHED OR IN PROGRESS OR COMMENTS ON FAVOURITE READS. WE ARE DEFINITELY INTO THE COPOREAL ASPECT OF *LITTERATEURS* HERE, SO THAT A BIKINI IS THE MOST ADORNMENT ALLOWED!  
NEXT ISSUE WILL REVEAL A READER.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

## Reviews

### "Jessie" by Anna Jacobs.

Hodder and Stoughton \$14.95

Reviewed by Janet Woods c/- [swwwa@mail.iinet.net.au](mailto:swwwa@mail.iinet.net.au)

With her usual inimitable style, Anna Jacobs has woven a rich tapestry of colourful characters, and written an engrossing story set in the 1830's during the early days of the railway boom in England.

At a young age, the rebellious Jessie Burton's life is mapped out by her mother. Her lot in life - employment as a maidservant at the local Manor House. Her life is ordered, her future is more of the same - her morals are dictated by others.

Then the despised railways gangers move into the district, bringing with them their shanty towns, their camp followers and their own set of values. With them comes Jared Wilde, a young, hard working and hard living railway navigator, who has ambitions to rise in the world.

The two meet, fall in love, and despite the obstacles placed in their paths - marry. Thus starts Jessie's life on the railway diggings, where the

living conditions are appalling, the men tough, and the woman little more than chattels.

But Jessie is an intelligent and determined woman who seizes every opportunity to better her life and that of her female companions. Along the way she makes enemies, and she makes good friends.

There is rape, prostitution, death and violence in this book, subjects which in less skilful hands could be depressing. The railways diggings are not a pretty place. The reader will smell the smells, taste the dirt and suffer the indignities of humanity struggling to survive for the next drink, the next meal, the next woman to bed.

The reader is not left to wallow in unrelieved mire though. There is wonderful contrast in the verdant green countryside of Hertfordshire and Yorkshire - which serve to highlight the differences between the parallel lives of the characters in the various sub-plots. The sub-plots are skillfully handled, making a social comment as they showcase the differences in class structure, at the time where even the farm labourers considered themselves a cut above the railway navvies.

Through it all is woven a story of hardship, courage and love. It tells a tale of one woman's ability to rise above the degradation of her surroundings and turn her marriage from near disaster into a triumph. A single title of about 160,000 words, this novel is thoroughly researched and beautifully written. Not one word is wasted. "Jessie" is packed with enough excitement, tension and emotional punch to keep the pages turning non-stop.#

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

## Articles old and new

### Literature and Learning

From a paper presented at the Journalists Club in Sydney on 5th March, 1993, to an invited audience, and published in *The West Australian*.

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My brief is to talk about the role of literature in the early years, especially in formal education, based on my many years as teacher and principal in schools catering for

children between the ages of five years up to fifteen years, and with occasional contributions as panellist and committee sitter at tertiary level. I was a fellow, state chair and national councillor of the Australian College of Education.

Literature shapes our dreams, gives form to our emotions and stimulates our thinking. It influences our modes of expression and action, our means of communicating with each other and is an important ingredient in the cement that holds society together.

Having nailed my theses to the door, I defer to a well-known literary model provided by Socrates through the writings of Plato, and get down to definition of terms, so that what I am talking about and what you are thinking about are much the same thing. Literature, according to my faithful, "The Concise Oxford Dictionary", is the, "realm of letters, writings of a country or period", and its derivation is from the Greek lithos, a stone. My massively misnamed, "The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary", latches onto a later root from the Latin, lit(t)era, a letter, and proceeds to offer definitions ranging from limp wristed belle lettres of the literati to the vulgar scribblings of common journalists. Plainly, literature is that which is written, telling some sort of story, whatever the medium, whether it is on a slab of stone, a smelly sheepskin, the grey matter of people's minds, fine white paper, or, if we are realistic, the magnetic tape, film and silicon of the modern era. I suppose that we must qualify it for our purposes as writings of significance or we'll be trapped into considering masses of material more appropriate for historians - the bus tickets, dockets, laundry tags and other minutiae of everyday living. Purists must also accept that if Homer's Iliad is literature now, it must also have been literature in the centuries that it existed purely as a vast oral work, otherwise we'll be confined to considering the ten commandments, hieroglyphics and funerary writings on stone!

Learning, according to COD, is to, "Get knowledge of (subject) or skill in (art &c.) by study, experience, or being taught", a definition with which its big brother concurs. I have carefully and mindfully avoided using the word, education, for despite Wittgenstein's dictum that everything that exists can be described, educators are contrary people, seemingly incapable of arriving at a satisfactory definition of what their profession is all about and disputing endlessly about definitions. It has been said that we are learning from the cradle to the grave and possibly beyond. I would therefore look upon learning more broadly and define it as, the process by which we strive to adapt to our environment and culture to become fully functioning individuals having the capacity to contribute to, maintain and transmit that culture.

Doubtless, if we could bring to life one of the ancients, he or she would be surprised that anyone could even speculate about the place of literature in learning or that anyone would even bother to attempt to prise them apart, as is often proposed by our writers of syllabuses. In the pristine cultures, the great literary works - the Iliad, the Old Testament, the Mahabahrata, the Norse Sagas - encapsulated the history, values, beliefs and myths of the respective cultures. I think that the great minds of our time see art, science and literature as permeating all things, perhaps no better exemplified than in the master works of Kenneth Clarke and Jacob Bronowski. (Again, I must point out to purists that their magnificent television presentations were based on the legitimacy of copious writings.)

There is evidence that learning depends on a process of building up a personal array of metaphors. In our cradles we kick and gurgle, exploring our bodies and immediate environs through our senses. Gradually, we learn to make generalisations about what is

happening to us. A toddler soon learns that someone is like or unlike its mother and its needs will be pleased accordingly. It builds a network of associations about what is happening near it. Later it learns that something hot hurts and does not really need to be told that a hand in the fire is going to hurt a hell of a lot more than a finger in a candle flame or that falling from a height is going to hurt more than merely tumbling over.

As we grow older our metaphors are acquired in a more sophisticated and vicarious way as we learn to pile like upon like. We extend from our experience. For instance, I think that most of us would have a pretty good idea of what it would be like to be faced with imminent extinction: we extend or extrapolate from the experience of a guilty awaiting of father's imminent homecoming with possible punishment for some childhood misdemeanour to an unfortunate few minutes outside the deputy principal's office to a gripping poem like, *He Fell Upon Thieves*, to an array of prose narratives we've read, to graphic portrayals on film and screen, to some compelling vignettes from news items.

We've lived very full vicarious lives through identification with the heroes and heroines of literature. I, for instance, in my placid existence on this planet have kissed sweet little Lorna Doone, swung through the jungle tree tops with Tarzan, blasted meteorites in outer space with Buck, Wilma and Dr Huer, slain the giants threatening Asgard with my mighty hammer, and outdrawn and outshot the meanest outlaw in the wild west. I've also lived through the bloody retreat from Moscow with the gormless Pierre, thrilled at the unlikely counter-revolutionary adventures of Lord Percy, lived leaden-footed terror with Kafka, endured incredible hardships on epic journeys with Burton and Speke and contemplated the chill of space with Clarke and Asimov.

Such vicarious experience helps us to grow beyond our own immediate experience. We not only explore the roles of heroes but also of villains. More importantly, we can look inside the minds of victims, whether people or animals, and develop some capacity for sympathy. Most of us learnt a lot from "*Les Miserables*": not the inspired stomping on the stage but the anguish of Jean Valjean and poor little Cosette crying on the page. The story of little Peter Rabbit in Farmer MacGregor's garden and the brave creatures in *Watership Down* probably saved many a real rodent from wanton cruelty at human hands. Reading the "*Diary of Anne Frank*" could not fail to quell the spite of a potential persecutor.

I sometimes wonder, when there is a senseless and cruel murder, whether society has somehow missed the opportunity to develop the faculty of pity and empathy in the killers and whether such moral deficit is a consequence of a literary lack. To paraphrase Henry James, literature offers many windows on life.

Literature may help us to shape our dreams through providing role models. This has been attempted clumsily and consciously with the *Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories* series, where a MORAL was erected in stodgy prose for infant contemplation. It has been echoed also in atheistic regimes, for instance, where the virtuous Wang gained merit, Mao's citation and a flat head by saving the village truck from rolling back down the mountain road to certain destruction, by chocking it with the only chunky object available. More realistically, our literature should stimulate us with some subtlety. I suppose that there is a downside in that literature may also shape our nightmares.

The power of literature should not be underestimated. There is evidence that the television portrayal across all India of the old "*Ramayama*", as a 64 episode television

extravaganza, has led to a massive revival of Hindu fundamentalism, with devastating political and social consequences.

It can also be conjectured that literature gives form to the expression of our emotions. The brave salute and devotion to selfless duty, as, "smiling the boy fell dead", inspired the children of the Raj. The anti-hero plays of the fifties, sixties and seventies, with emphasis on personal indulgence, may have helped to breed a despairing generation of slobs. Does life imitate art or vice versa? I noted a comment recently by a senior personnel manager, to the effect that young men in his office tend now to express their emotions in the theatrically extravagant mode of the television serials, whereas formerly they may have sulked or stormed out, in conformation with the macho male values of the time.

Literature helps us to form paradigms in two ways, by providing metaphors that encapsulate our thinking. I use paradigm in the same sense as Thomas Kuhn in his admirable work on *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. He shows that a unifying idea or theory is a necessary prerequisite to understanding masses of data, citing the example of the phenomenon of electricity, with scientists attempting to weigh and bottle it, until Columb postulated his wave or current theory so that all fell into place! Similarly, I believe that our life experience needs to find unifying ideas before we can make sense of the mass of data impinging upon us. For some, it may be a religious parable, for others a significant biography or great work of fiction.

Some of our best writers have foreshadowed change and stimulated thinking with seminal works that established new paradigms. The great cultural revolutions were influenced by such people as Diderot, Rousseau, Locke, Marx and Engels. In recent times, science fiction writers such as H.G.Wells, Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov have shown remarkable vision. Interestingly, the emergent sub-discipline of future studies depends very heavily on bibliographies of science fiction.

The notion of paradigms also works on another level, in which we encapsulate an enormous amount of meaning in a single word or phrase, drawn from literature, which has the impact of many. This not only enriches our language but also promotes economy, for if a hundred words can be made to do the work of a thousand, meaning must be so much clearer and accessible. On reflection, it is the stuff of poetry. (My colleague, poet Andrew Burke, reports being stricken at a recent seminar in Singapore by the disparity between his array of metaphors as an Australian with Irish Catholic upbringing, contrasted with Asian poets whose English was coloured by their eastern backgrounds.)

Literature influences our modes of expression, our means of communicating with each other in mechanical terms. We learn patterns of sentences, the effective use of language, the sparkle of variety, the power of rhythm, the impact of repetition and the tricks of rhetoric. Without it, we are doomed to mundane and arid modes.

I suppose that it is a truism that literature is an important ingredient in the cement, the glue which holds society together. If nations are to survive, there must be some commonality of values, beliefs and even shared myth. Each nation must tell its own stories and follow its traditions. It is worth noting that totalitarian regimes immediately resort to tampering with literature when they strive to retain power, by revising the stories of the past and reducing the new to closely edited slogans and propaganda. It is food for thought that they also work on writers by herding them within the discipline of academies

and writers centres.

It is interesting to examine the underlying assumptions about the teaching of literature in schools.

There is a widespread belief, unsupported by compelling evidence, that it is necessary for teachers to specialise in order that they may be more expert in a narrow subject area. Literature may then become the province of a learned zealot who will present LITERATURE, usually bracketed with reading, to each group, three or four times a week. Such specialisation has spread down to junior secondary levels and into the older years of primary education. My experience suggests a contrary reorganisation. Literature, with language, must pervade the curriculum and there is no subject area on which it does not impinge. Even mathematics, or especially mathematics, has a rich literary component, as a little reflection will show.

The artificial dichotomy of arts versus science is reduced to absurdity at the level of the primary school. All teachers should teach literature. All teachers should be truly literate.

The notion that teachers cannot handle all general subjects up to Year 10 level is distressing. It is strange that despite increased time devoted to teacher education, our beginning teachers, who are admirably dedicated young people, are mainly semi-literate. I suggest that eighty per cent of them not only have deficits in simple, mechanical literacy, but also lack a reasonable background in literature. They are victims of a system grown about a neo-Dadaist philosophy that seems to have held sway for more than a generation. It is interesting that leading American universities now subject candidates for admission to higher degrees to batteries of tests of vocabulary and literary allusion and the standard of the tests is not high!

It is possible for our prospective primary teachers to gain university entrance with no literary qualifications and to choose elective courses so that few have any contact with literature other than brief encounters in method areas. Secondary teachers are similarly prepared. As Chaucer states, in his thumbnail sketch of the Poor Parson, "That if gold ruste, what shal iren do?"

Literature in schools is too often reduced to reading from the page. The assumption is that once a child attains reasonable competence in reading skills, he or she is capable of finding his or her own literature. This is largely true, but it defines literature too narrowly, not only ignoring the vast oral and non-book sources, but also the mediation of the mature mind of the teacher. It makes the assumption that all children decode writing to the same degree and derive the same pictures, sounds and meaning from the printed page. I suggest that many children do not. There is a good case for teachers telling stories and reading along even into the teen years. There is a very strong case for group recitation to enjoy the sound and texture of language, despite arguments to the contrary.

It is important that children be involved in their own writings as personal literature, learning to relate it to the great literature about them and learning to extend their horizons and appreciation, otherwise we may condemn them to a lifelong diet of literary fairy bread, chips and cola.

The notion that functional grammar should replace literature is canvassed frequently, working on the assumption that if many school leavers spell poorly, are ignorant of

grammar and are incapable of expressing themselves in writing, then they need to devote much more of their time to the basics, thereby removing colour and stimulation. This idea commonly not only arrives from unreflecting members of chambers of commerce and industry, but occasionally from people who should know better, including a colleague otherwise bright enough to have held university chairs in three different disciplines!

For most, the problem seems to be developmental and psychological, for taking up their first job is really the only time that they are really tested on these undervalued mechanical skills. I believe that a simple certificate in functional literacy and numeracy to be acquired by public examination from, say, age fifteen years and onwards, would constrain and motivate without any necessity to tinker with the curriculum. It is not time on task so much as motivated time that is important. Probably, more relevant literature rather than less would be useful in promoting literacy.

Perhaps industry and commerce really have a legitimate gripe about the way they are portrayed in literature, which is still imbued with aristocratic values where "trade" is looked upon as something inferior. Business could do worse than develop a literary culture about its activities, which were a feature of past truly entrepreneurial empires. It would be a good thing if the renaissance notion of the cultured merchant prince could be revived, for with a few notable exceptions, our magnates are hooked on conspicuous consumption and gluttony as a means of expressing their worth. They are gourmands rather than gourmets. Where are the Fricks, the Carnegies and Courtaulds in Australia? Business magazines are sterile, arid and seemingly devoid of cultural values. But there is hope: have you ever caught Robert Gottlieb on television, when he lowers his voice dramatically in telling about the current machinations of the fiscal pixies, in classic story telling style?

A very real problem in establishing methods of education is inherent in the flaws of adult recollection. Adults commonly forget the complexity of early learning tasks, whereas the reality is that they are amazingly difficult.

Children should enjoy a wide selection of literary material, both old and contemporary. Perhaps one of the previous failings was that literature was seen to be old, rooted in the past. School reading texts were also literary samplers, mostly fiendishly difficult to read but very rewarding and stimulating. Subsequently, I used the comprehension tests from my own school reader, which I had at age twelve years, to stimulate my classes of fifteen year olds. They loved the rich diet from Hugo, Dumas, Dickens, Thackeray, Melville, Macauley, Wordsworth, etc, but found it very difficult and needed my mediation.

In the junior primary years we had the old Beacon readers with a marvellous array of folk tales drawn from around the world, illustrated with beautiful wood cuts, little valued at the time. These were classics that had stood the test of time like old songs and old wine. The stories were not well constructed from a theoretical point of view but their literary structure was superb, using repetition and imagery refined in years of telling. They did not conform with fashionable learning theory and gave way to the carefully controlled but inevitably boring vicissitudes of Janet and John, Dick and Dora. There is a case for structured reading material but there is still a place for literary samplers that delight and extend.

To summarise:

1. Our teachers must be cultured and their training courses should contain sufficient emphasis on literature.
2. Literacy may be constrained by significant testing.
3. Literature is important across the curriculum in all subjects and it should be expected that all teachers should teach it.
4. Literature is more than reading and requires the mediation of the mature mind of the teacher.
5. Literary samplers are important.

I think that we must beware of educational fundamentalists and false dichotomies in our new age of rapid communication, new technologies and glorious wealth of information. Art is not distinct from science, the small picture is part of the big picture, the new is related inextricably to the old, and literature and learning are not so much interdependent as inseparable.# (3187 wds)

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## Nuts and Bolts: Writing With A Computer

Walter Vivian

Conversations at writers' gatherings suggests that it is likely that few creative writers are comfortable about writing with computers. In fact, many seem to regard the computer in the same category as venomous brown snakes! A surprising proportion still battle away with clunking old typewriters.

One renowned writer owns to taking to the fountain pen when writing poetry, as if the muse is offended by anything remotely mechanical. Another, of enviable reputation, writes longhand at an ordinary table and has a typist type up drafts that are worked on until the final piece is ready for display typing.

I've been through, it all from dip pen to power personal computer. Can you remember the delight of a good fountain pen and how much easier it was to let your thoughts flow along with the ink that reached the page somewhat faster, without need to dip, wipe and avoid blots and spatter?

My first typewriter was an Olivetti Lettera 22 portable. How proud I was at the quality of the type! Despite trying to do the right thing by using the correct fingers, it was fiendishly difficult. I found that too much mental energy was expended in the process and I could not compose on the keyboard for many years. Worse, the kinaesthetic element of spelling was removed and I found myself making simple and quite maddening errors. I would handwrite my drafts and then type them up in a separate process. Type seemed to validate the scribbled word.

Errors and amendments were a trial which brought to the fore skills in juggling the carriage to squeeze in extra letters, and marvellous circumlocutions to try to fit something

credible into the space available.

Later, I bought an electronic machine, which produced a beautifully even type and had a built-in corrector. About a year later, I bought my first computer and hardly used the typewriter again.

What are the advantages in writing with a computer?

If you have chosen wisely and have a good computer which is user friendly, all you have to do is type. (I think that most computers now have this quality, but for years, Macintosh was the best by far, even though this was not reflected in popularity.)

A computer allows you to write almost as fast as you think. Errors do not matter, because you can go over your work in an editing process, zapping out your errors and correcting misspelling. No more do you have to re-type pages 3,4,5,6 & 7 because you made substantial changes on page 2. The text is moved along, appropriately to fit, before you print.

Cutting and pasting is easily effected with a click and drag of the mouse, the rolling switching device attached to the keyboard. You can try your sentences or paragraphs in different sequence, combine them, separate them, highlight them or bracket them.

I well remember the difficulty that I had with the beginnings of my first thesis, all nine of them. It took me a morning of physical cutting and pasting on the floor, before I had reduced them to one satisfactory, coherent, unified beginning. All this can be done almost effortlessly on screen, using the mouse.

Writing poetry is a dream. Get your thoughts on the screen as quickly as possible, either directly or from scribbled notes. Before you go to work, instantly copy another version above your first effort and work on this. When you return for a fresh look, copy your last effort, so that you have a stack of drafts, with the latest first. If you feel that you have painted yourself into an artistic corner, as poets and oil painters are prone to do, then you have the luxury of being able to look back to see where you went wrong and to mine out any vital turns of phrase that were lost along the way.

I know that Kerouac and others have been known to say something like, "first thoughts are best thoughts", but I am sceptical. Most writers need to revise their work.

Before you print, you have the luxury of setting out for display in different size, fonts, spacing and positioning. You have the capacity to show your work in the best possible way. (Overdoing it is the mark of the beginner - beware!)

There are other advantages such as the spelling and grammar checking facilities, which nevertheless can be quite maddening because of their mechanical obtuseness. Temporary editing marks help you to correct. You have the facility to compose in large type such as 14 point for comfortable viewing and to finish in 10 or 12 point, ready for printing.

Articles and stories can be easily tested for that all-important opening, either by reordering paragraphs or injecting new ones, not forgetting to first copy your original.

Lately, I have taken to having my computer read my work back to me in one of a score of voices. It is also maddening, but the computer reads exactly what I have actually put on

the page, in its mechanical, metronomic way, rather than what I think I have put on the page.

Work from a good printer has a slight edge when it comes to acceptance for publication, but this will soon change.

I suspect that electronic submission will soon be favoured, because it goes directly to an editor's screen without messing about with typing or scanning.

Adequate secondhand computer and printer combinations may be bought for about five hundred dollars. A more sophisticated ensemble, including a modem for connection to the internet and e-mail, would cost two to three thousand dollars, but if you have good advice, a mix of old and new equipment would cost less.

Computers rarely wear out, but become obsolete with amazingly rapid advances. My fourth computer has 256 times more memory and 7500 times more storage capacity than the first!

But don't forget that there is a marvellous old-fashioned device that is a good and cheap adjunct to the computer. It is portable, doesn't leak, is erasable and writes with variable thickness and density on a variety of surfaces. Pencils, too, are very useful writing devices!#

NEXT ISSUE. A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO BUYING A COMPUTER FOR WRITING.

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

## BLIMPS AND BLIPS - GOVERNMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE ARTS by Woz

(Imagine if you will, a timeless, panelled interior, real offices with grimy glass panels and clerks scratching away with dip pens at high wooden desks. The boardroom is sumptuously decorated with pictures of past war heroes and notable battles, dominated by the portrait of queen Victoria in her mature years. The chairs have cracked leather upholstery and there is a water jug and glasses on the polished wooden table. An ornate sideboard bears the silver and the port.

### Artists and Other Lawful Animals.

The Ministry of Culture, which oversees the arts in the state of Western Australia, is to have as its director, Ms Ricky Burgess. According to Ron Banks, arts editor of *The West Australian*, Ms Burgess has spent the past three years restructuring the Perth Zoo as its chief executive.

The newly constituted ministry takes over from the old Department for the Arts, moving away from the Perth Cultural Precinct to offices in the old Law Chambers Building, doubtless reflecting something significant.

Remarkably, both items have passed without comment, although we expect that now that Ms Burgess has artists in her keeping, 1st April in 1999, should spur some interesting notice.

We are glad that there have been no cheap shots about renaming heads of departments as keepers or designating offices and work spaces as cages, and will leave cracks about ground feeders, tree dwellers and nocturnal animals to others. (We bet the broilgas and warblers still get more than their fair share of the pet food, though.)

## Australian Writers' Honey-pot

The Literature Fund Panel of the Australia Council distributes funds allocated by the Australian Government .

It is chaired by Father Edmund Campion, NSW, and has a panel of writers as members:

Mr Frank Devine, NSW  
Ms Sue Gough, Qld  
Mr Patrick Morgan, Vic  
Mr Louis Nowra, NSW  
Ms Gillian Rubinstein, SA

There is probably a rationale for the Panel's composition. In Dickens' time and since, printing houses had a functionary called the father of the chapel, who represented the journeymen. Indeed, your editor is the son of a former father of the chapel of the now defunct Government Printing Office in Perth.

The New South Wales representation of half the places is obviously because of the Lygon Street push and the impending Olympic Games, which I am reliably informed by pamphlets and posters bearing the title sydney zooo, is in the year 2000, nothing to do with Taronga Park, and to be held in Sydney.

As ever, we at Pixel Papers are beforehand and have laid down a literary blueprint for the poetry events in awesome, awful couplets.

## Olympic Poesy

WALTER VIVIAN

The torch is lit, massed bands play,  
myriad balloons and pigeons fly away,  
calls to victory enthrall everywhere,  
conquering poets bound and punch air,  
on the track athletic poets compete,  
displaying fast-moving iambic feet,  
hurdlers intersperse with broken gait  
iambus and anaapest at prodigious rate,  
clearing the bar with glorious conceit

leaping poets bring the crowd to its feet,  
in the pool high conceptual dives, then,  
after a wet flop or two, a perfect ten,  
gymnastic poets on pommel and rings  
show what rigour in poetry brings,  
whilst on the floor in writhing freeform,  
the skilfully inventive pertly perform,  
shouting poets, poets who mumble,  
press on regardless as records tumble,  
no worry of steroids and drugs disavowed,  
and following wind is always allowed,  
but most prized in the literary pantheon  
is the up-hill-down-dale poesy marathon,  
endless submissions without publication,  
vie with hopeless unheard versification,  
sweating epics and sagas, book length verse,  
plodding ballads and a great deal worse;  
apprehension, tension, rise on the ground,  
until the wobble-kneed victor is crowned,  
proud poets mingle as the great games fold,  
displaying medals, bronze, silver and gold,  
anticipating home's motorcade celebration  
when joyful bards drink-in rapt adulation,  
anticipating the sadly appropriate caper,  
showers of torn bits of very used paper,  
for nothing's more prized, people know it,  
than the talents of a well-performed poet!#

## GST and the Arts

Performing arts managers are concerned that the proposed goods and services tax will inflate ticket prices so that fewer people will be able to afford to attend performances, compounding their bums on seats problem.

Their call for increased government subsidy, by way of compensation, has been countered by arts minister, Senator Alston, on the grounds that, according to the GST mythmakers, theatregoers will be paying less personal tax and will be able to afford more!

Perhaps the same argument could be applied to book sales. Remainders will be complicated.

## Wordsmithing at the Top

Prime Minister, John Howard, seems determined to outstrip his predecessor's use of colourful language and it is to his credit that he has set his goals higher than Paul Keating's fairly basic invective. *Incentivation* was an early Howard coinage that rang and fell as flat as a lead penny, failing to grip the imagination. *Fulsome* was used when he meant to say full or wholehearted, perhaps being closer to the truth than was intended, for it connotes falsity and flattery. The recent venture in sibilant alliteration presents danger, for it invites distortion and plagiarism: cynicism and stupidity fit equally well, especially in relation to the arts.

## Long Serving

Congratulations to Senator Richard Alston who has achieved a minor record for being Australian Minister for (against?) the arts for nearly three years. His predecessors since Wendy Fatin, have managed to warm the chair for about a year at a time. There are ominous portents with the invisible Bob McMullan as opposition spokesman for the arts and the possibility that he may perhaps have the opportunity of another year with his hand again so very lightly on the arts tiller.

Senator Alston must be having difficulty finding items to put on his arts report card, leading up to the next election, and doubtless he would be grateful for notification of anything positive that he may have done during his tenure.

## Censoring the Spice

Western Australian censors have refused to ban a magazine featuring a nude photograph of Spice Girl, Geri Halliwell, known as Hot Spice, despite urging from a local politician, who feared that it could be purchased by children. Apparently the nude Ms Halliwell displays black hair, in contrast to her gingerish stage persona. We have not had the pleasure of hearing the Spice, but judging by the occasional press photograph featuring dolly makeup and tarty costumes, the offending photograph could possibly inform youngsters that they are real people.

The responsible minister, Cheryl Edwardes, has supported her censors and advised parents and newsagents to take a responsible attitude.

The programme Sex/Life has been withdrawn from screening on television, purportedly due to the urging of Senator Brian Harradine. We should resist censorship, but in this case, a few minutes viewing established that there was so little of sex or life in the programme that we suggest that its demise came as a relief.

(CONSIDERTED CRITIQUES OF POLICIES ARE WELCOME HERE. ANON WHISTLEBLOWERS ARE ESPECIALLY WELCOME.)

[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)

## Goliardys - Saucy little stories or verse.

(WE HAD CONSIDERED PUBLISHING EXCERPTS FROM THE CLASSIC PORN OF OUR YOUTH, PENGUIN'S *THE GOLDEN ASS* BY APULIUS, TRANSLATED BY ROBERT GRAVES. HOWEVER, WE BAULKED AT TRACKING DOWN THE COPYRIGHT AND HAVE TAKEN AN EDITORIAL DECISION TO AWAIT WRITERS' INITIATIVES.)

## Joker

SBIG

## HOW TO BE FAMOUS WITHOUT TRYING

WALTER VIVIAN

Eddie the Eagle was the worst ski jumper at the winter Olympics. When he galumphed down the ski jump, far short of everyone else, it pointed up a puzzling facet of human life. He is remembered because of his stunningly poor performance. Who remembers the winner or the triers?

Eddie was so bad he was good.

When you think of about it, this SO BAD IT'S GOOD syndrome (SBIG) has spread into many fields. There is hope for all of us to be famous.

At the local golf club, the clown who is capable of hooking/slicing mightily across two or three fairways is much better known (and feared) than the club champion and certainly watched more closely and carefully.

In music we have those amazingly boring sitar pieces with hundreds of identical bars, played over and over, something like Ravel's Bolero. Then there is Louis Armstrong's rough, homely voice, a relief against sugar sweet crooners. Rock singers like Rod Stewart

and Bonnie Tyler, charm us with their distinctive croaking. When Lee Marvin growled his way through, "I was bor-orn under a wandering star", he inspired bathroom baritones. Youngsters who have never heard of Lee Marvin still croak that song. He was a very SBIG singing star.

In art, it's plainly useless trying to paint something that can easily be shot with a camera. You have to paint as if you've never had a lesson in your life, are off your trolley, or didn't graduate out of Grade 2. One of our most famous artists, managed to paint everything in a landscape to look like lollipops. He was once humiliated in the field, when a lady, who knew a little about art but wasn't very good herself, suggested how he could avoid painting lollipops!

Years ago, I read a poem by an avant garde Dutch poet, which presented no great difficulty in translation as it consisted of one word, "oot", and the first line read, "Oot oot oot oot". The next line read with equal panache as "Oot oot oot", and so on. A second gem was based on "Toot"! It was a hoot and quintessentially SBIG.

Back in the mists of time, SBIG was responsible for dry wines. Probably a whole vintage fermented too quickly and instead of having a sweet drink to stone them out of their tiny minds, the old folks were left with something dry and seemingly fit only to water the pigs. But, as we Irish say, there's no such thing as really bad grog if that is all you have, so they drank it and learnt to like the taste. Some genius probably shouted, "Eureka. It's SBIG. It doesn't leave you with a sticky mouth. If you work at it, you can still drink yourself witless. If you think as you drink, you can tell which slope it came from, what grape juice was fermented to make it, and who had a hand or a foot in making it. It's wine with a message. It's definitely SBIG." It could be said that a whole industry was founded on SBIGness, but it only survived, of course, because it was not taxed.

SBIG is the foundation of so-called method acting. When Marlon Mumble mouths his lines so that you can't understand a word and looks as if he is slightly in pain, we are inclined to think, "My goodness. He sounds exactly like cousin Bert, the one with the haemorrhoids. He's so natural." Gary MacDonald took his Norman Gunston character to the height of SBIGness.

SBIG is in politics. When Mr Bush looked for all the world as if he should be sitting on someone's knee with a hand up his back and said, "Watch my lips," he was very SBIG. In Australia, I feel that there are many politicians to watch.

A lot of the programming that we see on television, is very definitely SBIG. Your average soapie grips your interest simply because it is so bad and unbelievable that you can't wait to see what happens next. Some late night films on SBS, especially those about goings-on in Greece or Egypt, often have a memorable SBIGness.

Spaghetti westerns are really SBIGetti westerns.

It's good to strive and aim high in life to become famous, but sometimes it might be better, metaphorically speaking, to shoot yourself in the foot.

And in future, if faced with a sticky artistic situation where you are expected to offer a sensible comment, merely mumble, "It's certainly SBIG", and pass on to the next painting/reel/act/poem/speech.#

Walter Vivian's writing on education and other humorous matters is well known to be SBIG  
(First published in *Western Review*.)

## Life Cycle of the Comma

by a Gentleman

Have you ever thought about how much we owe to the tadpole of literature? The tiny creatures swim through masses of verbiage, breaking it up into readable chunks.

Some writers salt and pepper them thickly, scattering them like the sower of seeds in Bible, but possibly in the hope that they are not falling on barren ground. Others allocate them in miserly fashion, especially lawyers.

Little is known about the private lives of commas. Mortality is high as editors peck them up and snuff them out: Small wonder that they escape to the heights and hide as apostrophes. At such vantage points they have even greater potential to annoy and confuse but are the joy and delight of sign and ticket writers.

Commas seem to mate by rising in pairs as the "eyebrows of speech", and in quotations. Signwriters find such mated commas even more loveable and irresistible.

It has been hypothesised that the semi-colon is a stage of metamorphosis. Whether the next stage is the full round maturity of the period is not known. The relationship of the full colon is unknown. Perhaps some elongate into the dash. This view is strengthened when it is noted that modern literature tends to be dash-y rather than colon-y.

A charming thought is that talented commas migrate into music manuscripts to begin new lives as hemi-demi-semi-quavers, maturing or transmigrating through stages to the round fullness of minims.

Commaphiles have long been disappointed to find that the comma has no special sound in the spoken language, though this is remedied to some extent by the pianist and humorist Victor Borge. It is unfortunate that the sound he chose in his masterwork is somewhat plosive and horsey.

I am not inordinately fond of commas but I beg you to be kind. Next time you see one resting before your eyes, do not prod it or obliterate it with a careless stroke of your pen or playful click of your mouse - pause respectfully, giving it mature judgment before you move on - otherwise you may find something that you have written, commandeered and altered completely in meaning.

(ADAPTED FROM A PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED PIECE.)

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

# Publishing News - the rise, fall, amalgamation and gossip about hard copy & electronic presses

## Opinion - readers views and feedback, especially with a literary flavour.

What about some flaming arrows for editors or arts policy?

What's wrong with rhyming verse?

Are verbs as good as they used to be?

We'd love to have some views on the Writers Centre/Literature Officer Program of the Australia Council. Is it a boon to writers? Should it be extended? Is it right that funds should gradually be withdrawn? Or should it be scrapped in favour of other initiatives?

[Back to CONTENTS](#)

## [Contacts - URL's to visit on the net](#)

Andrew and Miles Burke have a site which is a gateway to other useful links and contains a great deal of useful information at [lit.bam](#)

[Australian links](#) is a homely site with a lot of useful information.

[The Ozlit site](#) is massively comprehensive, with a huge database of Australian writers, but it is very, very slow.

[Fremantle Arts Centre Press](#) has a clear and simple site which tells all you need to know without distracting bells and whistles.

Prolific and successful writer, [Sherry-Anne Jacobs](#), has a prize winning web site which is well worth a look. It is a model of clarity with speedy graphics.

I dutifully record [Web Wombat](#)'s piece below, although I think that their code was meant for other screens. It is a recommended search engine for Australia.

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<A HREF="http://www.webwombat.com.au/">Web Wombat Search Engine</A>

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Inklings: newsletter for writers. This excellent Canadian site emphasises technical aspects of writing, especially targeting and marketing. It's worth a look at [inkspot.com/inklings/](http://inkspot.com/inklings/)

## Advertisements.

Does anyone have access to old copies of *The Australian Home Journal*, circa 1940? We thought that it would be fun to run some of the *Mainly For Contributors* columns which were so acid and biting destructive, merely to show that a kinder editorial mood is now fashionable, doubtless due to the growing penchant in our society to rush to litigation. Anyway, if your happen to have some old copies in Granny's storeroom, what about mailing in a sample or calling us?

### STOP PRESS FROM MILES BURKE

I am just letting you know of a new electronic magazine I have started called 'litdotbam'. The purpose of 'litdotbam' is to encourage members of the WA Writers Forum and other organisations to send me material regarding their events to be distributed not only to their own members via the mailing list, but to other interested people.

The main address for information, as well as details on how to subscribe / unsubscribe is available at: <http://www.lit.bam.com.au> There are submission guidelines available at <http://www.lit.bam.com.au/submitting.html> and an example of what it'll looklike at <http://www.bam.com.au/example.html>

Endeavour:

A Photographic Journey

Richard Polden

In October 1996, photographer Richard Polden set off on

an extraordinary adventure. Together with an international crew of men and women, he sailed from Fremantle, Western Australia, bound for London aboard the magnificent Endeavour replica. Two hundred and twenty-six years before, Cook sailed a similar route, limping home with a sick crew and a battered ship. By contrast the Endeavour replica's voyage was the start of her planned four year journey around the world.

In dramatic detail, these photographs from the voyage capture the very essence of sailing on Endeavour.

Published in association with Sunday Times, Perth, on 18 March 1998

ISBN 1 86368 227 9 \$24.95

(WE MET RICHARD ON ASSIGNMENT AND HAD A LOOK AT HIS DELIGHTFUL BOOK. FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE SEA AND SHIPS, IT IS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.)

E&OE. IN THIS CASE, ERRORS AND OMISSIONS EXPECTED. IF WRITERS DETECT THAT WE HAVE SINNED IN DISPLAYING THEIR WORK, THEY ARE INVITED TO E-MAIL CORRECTIONS, IN THE KINDEST POSSIBLE TERMS, AND CORRECTIONS WILL BE MADE FORTHWITH.

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