



Issue The Sixth, July, 1999.

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As PixelPapers is totally unfunded by the Australia Council or any funding agency, we don't pay. Your only reward is the showcasing of your work to a growing, potentially worldwide audience. Work previously published in hard copy is welcome.

Poet Laureate \$100.00 Competition

Pretend that you are the newly appointed Australian Poet

Laureate. Choose a recent significant event in Australia, or since it is a royal sort of office, that foreign country that many old Australian's used to call home, and write a poem extolling or defending it in any style you like, with whatever spin seems appropriate, ranging from the deadly serious to extravagant poetic whimsy. Monarchists and republicans are equally welcome to write.

The GST, Tim Fischer's retirement, John Howard and the lamb, and the Collins Class Submarine, are topics which beg some sound verse. The recent royal nuptials, or the preceding exposure, (in part) of Sophie Rhys-Jones in The Sun Newspaper, could also be tempting topics.

Send it to PixelPapers for publication for next issue, so that readers may vote on it. Votes from readers, via e-mail, will be accepted for the favoured entry, and the \$100.00 will be awarded, at the discretion of the management, to the most pleasing entry.

Editorial

This issue is being raised early to allow investigation of circulation problems, and as the week before publication is usually the busiest, I will accept further contributions up until the middle of July. Please have another look then, for further goodies including a possible competition. You will note that type size has been increased by one notch above standard, for easier reading. If this comes across as overly large on your browser, please let me know and I will reconsider.

PS. The management has now solved its circulation problems and cleared theatrical commitments of the surgical kind and will accept items for publication until 16th July.

PPS. The management is now feeling buoyantly optimistic after its brief trip to the underworld, which it rates as being more memorable than a trip around the globe, and is looking forward to a bumper PixelPapers 7, brimming with fine examples of your work.

Thanks to your support, PixelPapers continues to grow and has about as many readers as the average hard copy literary magazine, which is not a bad achievement for the first year of publication.

In one of my short articles, I likened a computer to something alive and kicking rather than a machine. Present day computers, with all their wizardry, still handle something like

a wilful riding hack. A user can cover prodigious literary and mathematical distances, but every once in a while the alleged trusty mount slips to its knees or shies and balks at something as trivial as a computer mouse.

Are vital pieces of medical machinery and aeroplane guidance systems that protect us, of the same equine quality, or are they engineered as something solid and reliable, so that software and hardware never fail? Perhaps computer manufacturers and software developers are moving too far and too fast in attempting to gain a competitive edge.

Perhaps there is cynical use of the computer-buying public as guinea pigs and we are foolish enough to go for the glitz of power and speed rather than old-fashioned reliability.

My original Mac 128, with MacWrite and MacPaint, functioned for nearly two years, with the only failure being in a floppy disk that corrupted. Three or four computer generations on, my immensely more powerful and faster Power Mac freezes occasionally, despite my best efforts. It can read to me and presents a screenful of ravishing colours, but if I attempt to use my web authoring software when the internet browser is loaded, or vice versa, I'm looking for trouble.

Perhaps a good selling point for computer makers would not be speed, so much as cast iron reliability when using designated software. We poor punters should examine our priorities: who would buy a car that crashed occasionally, no matter how fast!

The book trade is reeling at the implications of an impending goods and services tax that will put further pressure on publishers, who are already trading precariously. No doubt there will be some trade-offs, but that will hardly soften the blow.

There is a case for tax reform to broaden the tax base, but there is no case for the mindlessness of applying a flat rate, so beloved of conservative governments. In its first term, the present Australian government, in cutting outlays, hacked into the customs service and other law enforcement agencies, with unfortunate results. Its flat rate approach to taxing in its second term is likely to decimate the Australian book trade and there is no recognition or talk of compensatory measures.

Are our politicians too lazy to craft a flexible taxation policy to produce desirable outcomes? Are they afraid of their intellectual capacity to defend variability, case by case, and instead hide behind a flat rate policy motivated by administrative ease rather than intelligent planning?

Writers may, of course, be expected to take comfort in the fact that perhaps some items of expenditure such as luxury cars will be considerably cheaper, but if there are fewer local publishers, the probability of publication and consequent remuneration is less likely. In any case, writers and luxury cars are rarely seen together.

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Poetry - Poems About Poetry And Poets

Anthological Tonguetwister

Peter Porter picked a pack of pretty poets
A pick of pristine poets Peter Porter packed.
If Peter Porter penned a pile of prickly poets,
Who're the prissy poets Peter Porter picked?

Walter Vivian

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Poetry - Virgin Verse and Verse From the Pros

Lover and Wife

Vellum bound, tooled and latched,
Gothic text hand-lettered,
Garlands, illuminations in gold;
Verses in allegorical mode,
Symbols and personification;
A treasury returned to the shelf,
Mystery eternal -
A clasped book, beloved forever.

Hard bound with tatty boards,
An everyday book, commonplace,
Thumbed and dog-eared, scuffed;
Lists, descriptions, statements,
Facts and summaries, gleanings
And ephemera; a daily guide,
Wisdom distilled -
A dictionary, needed always.

Edel Wignell

Blind Piano Tuner

Though the mid morning's spring light
and the garden's groomed colour
were outside his world's darkness,

he was alive to their warmth
and scent, and his hand in mine
when we met at my front door.

Born blind, blind through his teenage
and into manhood, without
a definition of light,

could his ears and hands alone
revive my piano's heart,
black to him like all its keys?

His hands roved with ease, with love,
keyboard and upright body
yielded to their dark wisdom.

I watched his lean face, its frown,
its set lips. At last I smiled
to see it relax and smile.

Not seeing, could he picture
a smile, ever? I nodded,
watching faith ripple his care.

His dark morning's work over,
he packed his gear, but I said
I must play, and he listen.

As I played, his warm breathing
saluted his art's finish.
For myself, my piano

had new heart and, yes, new light.
It was light we shared and light
was dancing in his blank eyes.

Alec Choate

Beduin Girl

Where have you danced from in that gust
of wind that shawls your shawl with dust?
Do you know why, or know how far
you've come from home, and where you are,
or that those dark shapes where you stand
are our guns' shadows on the sand?
Why are you laughing? I can tell
you we don't often laugh in hell,
and hell, it happens to be here.

This is a battlefield, my dear.

We've seen your menfolk, seen perhaps
your brothers, risking life for scraps
of junk our fighting leaves around
on any desert battleground.
Is this the rubbish that you're after?
But why alone, and why the laughter?
Would you pick through, with those small hands,
our spent shells' driving bands,
the Panzer or Crusader steel
ripped off and thrown around like peel?
And there are guns, crumpled like tins
and only fit for rubbish bins,
there's leather, canvas, rubber tyres,
wrecked aircraft, Messerschmidts, Spitfires,
tins hats, dropped rifles, boots, the lot
mile after mile left here to rot.
Yes, pretty scrounger, there's a stack
of stuff to choose from, but send back
your menfold, let them take the chance.
You are too young, life loves you!

Dance
home now while war is drawing breath
for even war can tire of death,
though, at a wink, its mood can change.
Dance quickly, we are well in range
of scores of restless 88s
that know our guns' co-ordinates.
The Stukas, too, each afternoon,
pay us a visit, which is soon.
Dance back the way you came, my dear,
but that soft laughter, leave it here.

Alec Choate

FROM ALEC'S FINE COLLECTION OF WAR POEMS, "THE WHEELS OF HAMA", WINNER OF THE
1997 WA PREMIER'S POETRY PRIZE

wounded ground

my wounded ground my
cat licked
corner my foetal
curl
my need

Kevin Gillam

like instinct

I must've had a previous
life here - I know it -
streets smooth as palms,
the old school - went there -
felt the swish of a cane
once or twice
but it's the park I really know
Norfolk Pines, Moreton Bays,
roots gripping the earth
like instinct
swing settling to stillness
as a child scampers away

Kevin Gillam

health farm

sat
all of us
big thin fat bored sad
ate
plates of raw veg
so much noise
talked
dreamt up meals
steak cheese cake beer wine
'and how long have you got to go?'

Kevin Gillam

typewriter

clatters.
piano without
pitch

battered.
holds mystery of

tabs

mother. bitter.
amongst kitchen
clutter

fingers fling
misspellings. matters
little

old ribbon.
client without
cash

Kevin Gillam

Bush Tail

Brush-tailed Possum
Trichosurus vulpecula

See that thing
hanging by its tail
fingers eating Marri leaves
brush-tailed against the clouds
fur in premature grey.

I'm really mad at him
woke me from a laboured sleep
he's pruned our tree
decorated the walk
scattered roses on the ground.

It's not the rattle
or his busy feet
but the insomnia
he brings me.

I know he's running
with a nervous heart
but the littering has to stop
in my roof-top home.

What will he do next?
crop the eucalypts-

scatter Marri nuts
sleep in hollows all day?

Wait!
before we call the pest control
he's a she!
carrying a baby in its pouch
now out with a runny nose
clinging to her back.
So cute!

I sweep the path
sleep all day.

Helen Hagemann

Let's Belly Roll

Echidna - Tachyglossus Aculeatus

Prickly to begin with
and when approached
you belly roll-
shoulder in a ball of silence.
It's the same for me
except I rocked years
under the doona.
Perhaps that's our safety leaf
when we're close to despots.

You hatch a single egg
a tongue licks your breast.
In childbirth I curled screaming
with eyelids closed.
Even worse
breast feeding was messy
painful, brief.

Here we differ greatly
only in looks
my body hair is minimal
you have too much belly fur.
I'm buried in paper leaves
your snout probes soil
my enemies live in tunnels
you eat them for lunch.

Could we swap?

Human forms have ways
of tearing forests to shreds.
It's like paring flesh
from ants nests
and insect wings.
Do you still live in a rock retreat?

If I look hard I might find you
buried in soft sand
somewhere, afraid of me.

Helen Hagemann

boab

the
boab
tree is
burdened
with promise
a bronze cask
a silvered flask
a pewter tankard
offering cool draught
a solitary sentinel
a slender spindle
a wrinkled gnome
here, statuesque
celebrating
variety

Dianne Beckingham

APOLOGIES TO DIANNE FOR THE SHAPE OF HER POEM, WHICH TRY AS I MIGHT TO SPACE IT INTO THE ORIGINAL BOAB FORM, RESOLUTELY SLIDES BACK TO THE LEFT MARGIN AS SOON AS I AVERT MY GLANCE. PLEASE ACCEPT THIS AS A BOAB SHAPE! I SUPPOSE HALF A BOAB IS BETTER THAN NONE.

IN A RECENT OFFERING, SHANE MCCAULEY POINTED OUT THAT SHAPE POEMS WERE NOT UNKNOWN TO THE ANCIENT GREEKS, WHICH MAKES ME FEEL BETTER ABOUT THE TWO OR THREE IN MY RECENT BOOK!

Sturt Peas

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 books;

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.

Dianne Beckingham

A house should sit

A house should sit against the hillside
sheltered
but high enough
I want a window
to know who walks my fencelines
and who turns into my lane

I will watch for you

When you come
my house will smell of coffee
and fresh-made
bread

Frances Arnett Sbrocchi

"Get in quietly"

Tall sails by day
orange and red wings
weave on the wind
A training class of tiny boats circle
dolphins play by the jetty

Midnight
pandanus fronds wave
as ghosts
launch canoes into moonlight

Ancestral tribes
slip quietly onto the water
this river welcomes shadows

Hidden voices
but the watcher
listening
knows the rhythm

Dolphins play by the jetty
old man hunches in a dinghy
his line trolling behind
He and the watcher
alone in the dawn

Frances Arnett Sbrocchi

The Homestead

This road is flat
and wide where the fences
hang

on crooked posts
these dust-blown fields
harvest nothing
no trees in a land of rocks
the sage has not bloomed thistles
tear from shallow roots
roll over stubble
pile against the granary
I move to the house
with a cast-iron stove
but first
I must split wood
hunt matches

There are no new stories
only new ways
to rearrange
these patches

Frances Arnett Sbrocchi

IT'S HAPPENED AGAIN! I BLINKED AND THE FORMATTING OF FRAN'S POEMS ALTERED TO HARD AGAINST THE LEFT MARGIN. MY APOLOGIES.

At Lights

At lights waiting car
Booms rythms
The driver

metronomes her head
palm pats wheel
lips words
Lights change they go

Jim Cornish

The Demon Drink

With booze, the demon drink, slops, suds, plonk, red ned, metho,
liquor, poison, tippie, nelson's blood, mother's ruin, firewater or
the devil's brew you can get stoused, slushed, smashed, pissed,
three sheets in the wind, liquored, paralytic, blind, stinko,
drunk as a skunk, pissed as a fart, blotto, sozzled, rotten,
pickled, intoxicated, inebriated, full as a goog, full as a boot
or drunk as a lord.

Or you can be sober as a judge.

Jim Cornish

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Shorts - old and new

The Swimmer

Rosanne Dingli

My father worked in a room exactly like this one. With a large window open to the skies.
With the sun sloping in from the bay in the afternoon. He would leave his work, standing
abruptly away from the untidy desk, and look out of the window at the surface of
thewater.

Sometimes grey and opaque, sometimes choppy and translucent, the water was almost part of the room. There were no curtains at that window, something my mother would have remedied very quickly, if she were there. But they had separated just before the house on the bay was taken, just before my father and I settled into life in the small community on the water's edge.

He was stern, you know: stern and silent. But for me he had special moments of communication which were more a concoction of movements and smiles than conversation, although he did have a reputation of talking incessantly over a good bottle of wine when he was happy. Happy? They were other times - times when we still lived near the port, when my mother would potter around and create wonderful cooking smells to lure us into the kitchen and into her circle of sustenance and warmth.

We used to live near the port. As I think of it, my father and I were never far from water. We loved it. My mother hated the ships, not because she did not like the sea, but because they were a constant beckoning to her, a call she could not obey without pain.

When she went, it was more a shock that she had carried out her threat than a surprise. In spite of her cooking, her handiwork around the house and her desire for our company, she yearned for her old country, and I remember watching her get into a taxi with four or five suitcases on a very rainy day, my father waving solidly and smiling widely and bravely as she departed. His hand was on my shoulder, and I was wondering - I remember well - whether I would remember how to adapt recipes in the big stained book, as she had, to make meals we could afford.

Of course I could not. I was only fourteen: 'all skirts and a pair of eyes', as one of my father's relatives had described me, and more given to writing and reading than messing around in the kitchen, which had become cold and uncomfortable since she went away. I was very much like my father, as all who knew us would attest, and as my mother had said often enough when she was there.

'Your daughter,' she said, as if I belonged only to him, 'holds a pen better than a spoon or a needle. She understands Milton and Boccaccio better than recipes.'

Yes, my father and I would spend inordinate amounts of time locked away, leafing through books or scribbling and scrawling on paper we bought by the box. Emerging after dark, myopic and cold, we would rummage together at the fridge and pantry, like thieves, and eat standing up by windows before one of us thought to turn on a light.

Perhaps like me, my father often thought of threats my mother had made throughout my childhood.

'I am going back one day,' she would say. 'I will go back to the yellow sun and the flat rooftops. Whether or not you will come - I will get away.' She was not demonstrably unhappy. I heard her humming strange songs in the kitchen as a child, but she never sang to me. She would point at the large white sun and say, 'I am going to where the sun is small and hot and golden-red.'

I never understood why she spoke like that, or why she disliked the port whose bustle and life my father and I seemed to thrive on. She was given to pickling and baking, and buying large pieces of mahogany furniture we would cram into the small house whose

windows were full of ships leaving.

It was when we moved further south to the house on the bay - or rather, the top floor of the large brown building which had been divided into units sometime in the forties - that we dispensed with superfluous furniture and trimmings and had one room each in which to write and sleep, and another to eat and entertain visitors in. We dispensed with curtains. We also had a leaky bathroom and an inefficient kitchen we were always struggling to liberate from vermin. We had no acquaintances in the community at first, because my father had turned dark and sullen within a fortnight of moving and we scarcely made an appearance. I remember being overwhelmed by the change in him, bewildered by the departure of my mother, and confounded by the differences I found in the new lodgings, which were nothing as desirable as the house we had at the port.

I too would stand for what seemed like hours at the windows, looking out upon the changing surface of the sea. I looked at boats and swimmers, the occasional tanker or container ship on the horizon, that made me think of our old home, where we would regularly watch merchant ships approaching and departing.

One of our regular visitors after about a year, when we had thawed somewhat and received and entertained friendly overtures from families in the area, was Theodore Crommelin, the poet. Father brought him home one afternoon and dissolved unexpectedly into an old kind of hilarity, which I had not seen for months. He even took the old man into his private room to show him some of his recent writings, and I was left - quite happily, I admit - to rustle up something to have with the wine they brought.

Theodore was a strange man, with an unusually shy manner when arriving or leaving, but oddly loud and noisy in between. His loud voice could be heard from our windows, I was sure, when he recited his works or those of others, shaking glasses when he banged his fist on the table to signal the end of a particularly moving poem.

My father would very quickly resume his silence when Theodore left, and I too would hurry to my writing table, imitating his need to be alone from a sense of duty rather than desire. I knew he thought about my mother and wondered whether she would ever return from the country where her eyes were full of white-painted houses, her ears with strange guttural songs and her hands with pickled cheeses.

One afternoon, after the old poet had regaled us with many recitals of his older works, and had departed with the remnants of a bottle of red wine into whose neck my father quickly thumped a cork, the rooms fell silent. But my father did not retreat into his room and pull the door to, as he was wont to do. Instead, he stood at the large open window and looked out at green waves on whose restless tops the pink reflection of the setting sun was making a warm pattern.

For some reason, I expected a revelation of some sort - it was that kind of afternoon, that kind of light. Instead, there was an exclamation.

'My god! That's Margherita out there!' His voice was choked, and he did not specifically address me. I rushed to the window and looked at the shape his eyes were glued to. It was a swimmer, far out beyond the shallows, striking strongly in a confident crawl across to the mole on the northern side.

The swimmer's arms were tanned and muscular, more like a man's than what I remembered my mother's to be. Still, I wondered whether, when the head would rise, she would look our way, tread water and wave at our window. I waited for her to look and wave.

It was a mad moment, in which we both watched an anonymous swimmer in the shimmering distance, realising at once we were creating a fantasy - a wishful fabrication started by a very lonely man.

His room was exactly like this one, curtainless and Spartan, but full of a kind of heaviness that came from the bound volumes in his bookcases and the brown carpet. His table was a bit like this one, with turned legs and a drawer that never fitted correctly enough to be locked. He would keep his boxes of paper on a shelf very much like that, only his was placed further from the table, so he had to rise for fresh sheets when he had covered the dozen or so on his desk with close writing.

He wrote with a blue fountain pen he often had re-nibbed in town: a costly affair, which was for him a necessity rather than an indulgence or a vanity. He often said he could not think without that pen in his hand. He used it for writing, and for calculating our expenses. And of course, for the daily crossword puzzle in the paper, which he never liked thrown away. One corner of the room - similar to that one - was always full of old newspapers folded in four to the crossword.

She never came back, you know, and her letters tailed off after about six years. I remember bringing a friend to meet my father and finding him rummaging through a box of old letters. His embarrassment, since he thought I would be returning much later, was forgotten slowly. He sat with us and was quite nice, but his silence was there, always an indication that he was thinking of her and the place to which she had to return.

He never spoke about her to strangers, but to me, he would sometimes make an effort to explain why we could not all go together to the small hot country she had never managed to dismiss from her mind and life. It took me a long time to understand fully, and I do not suppose I have ever accepted the different reasons he presented to me.

Now, I stand in these rooms, that remind me so much of the time we lived on the bay. I look through this window, and see again a stretch of green waves dappled with white and pink. There is a small yacht with blue sails on the horizon. Clouds form a layer between the sea and the sun. Lawn stretches and peters out into loose sand at the water's edge. And in the middle of the bay, there is a strong swimmer, tanned and muscular, who finally reaches the boulders of the mole and rises out of the water. Wet and sleek, even from this distance, it is neither male nor female, and its walk is clumsy compared to the slick movements of before. It is a being that belongs in the water, striking out strongly across a shimmering stretch of green water.

My father used to work in a room exactly like this one. When he died, I had to move from the tall brown building on the bay, but stayed near the water, in the immediate vicinity, and I often go and stand outside the house and gaze out to the spot in the waves where he once thought he saw my mother swim. #

THE STORIES BELOW ARE SCIENCE FICTION, OR WHAT VAN IKIN CALLS SPECULATIVE FICTION. IN EACH CASE, AN IDEA IS APPLIED AND WORKED OUT, SOMEWHAT WITH TONGUE IN CHEEK, AS IT IMPACTS ON ORDINARY PEOPLE.

GREENHOUSE DRYHOUSE LOOKS AT INUNDATION. IT WAS WELL RECEIVED.

Greenhouse Dryhouse

Walter Vivian

"I hate floodtides," he said, as they waded through the house to the front door.

They kissed.

"Check the traps at lunch time. There'll be crabs in them today. It's just right. Where are those kids?" he grumbled.

"If there's catfish I'm not touching them," she said, as she'd done many times before. "They're such ugly things and I can't bear those spines."

"Leave them to me."

The children splashed out the front door, lifting their faces to be kissed.

"Goodbye Mummy," Janet called.

"Bye Mum," said John.

"Keep your hair dry. You'll catch cold." The children always had wet hair.

James Everage stepped down into the waist deep water, thankful that it was not too deep for his waders and carried the children across to the family VW sedan moored on its pontoon by the gate. The children slithered in through the driver's window with practised ease. James pulled himself up, placed his brief case inside, waited a moment for the water to drain from his lower body, and shucked off the waders. He, too, slithered in through the window and turned to sit in the drivers seat.

James started the motor, untied the mooring rope from the steering wheel and pulled it gently askew to line up the car in the drive, before casting off and gliding gently out into the street, where there was a current running. He gunned the motor and the pontoon gathered way. They waved to her.

Deborah watched her little family surge away into the mainstream and disappear. The gentle wash lapped against her knees.

She paddled to the edge of the porch and pulled up the wiremesh trap from the garden. A medium sized catfish rolled and threshed, showing its ugly yellowish underside and its horrible whiskers and filmy eyes and threatening spines. She pulled a face and dropped the trap back into the water where the pink hydrangeas used to grow.

After she had cleaned up the kitchen, she splashed through to the bedroom and climbed up onto the bed for a delicious dry, with a big soft towel that she fluffed between her toes. She dusted them with dry talcum powder and wriggled in ecstasy, thinking of a dryhouse. James would really have to do something about raising the floor. It was not good enough to be flooded every time the tide was very high or to have the wash from the craft of thoughtless people pour in under the doors. The only way was to lay down a damp course and have thirty centimetres of concrete poured. That would make it a dryhouse for a year or two, anyway. The ceilings were high enough and dryhouses were saleable.

Baby Bree cried in the bedroom, demanding attention. Deborah fed and changed her baby, dressing her for an outing. The baby gurgled in delight as the slight wash from Deborah's movements swayed the body of the pram, which was barely afloat. Deborah changed into her yellow bikini and put on a short plastic coat, just in case there was rain. She would have liked to have walked barefoot but thought about the crabs and the catfish and put on her yellow plastic boots.

Deborah met her friend Marion at the gate and they pushed their prams against a slight current.

"The tide is still flowing," said Marion. "We had seals in the back garden last night. They woke us. I think they chased a school of mullet into a corner against the fence."

Marion had a wooden framed house and a bigger problem than Deborah's, because it was lower lying and they had already jacked up the house on its stumps and were worried about it being carried away like an ark, like the Smith house, which had floated off its stumps and the Smiths had escaped only with their lives and their video.

"Did you see the piece on killer whales, crocodiles and white sharks on the Channel 2 news last night?" Marion spoke with an edge of anxiety.

"That was just scaremongering," Deborah replied. The water was deeper and reached the crotch of her bikini pants. Although it was not really cold, it was just a little uncomfortable.

Mrs Nobble from the big dryhouse on the hill, motored past in her jet runabout and waved in friendly condescension. The two women waved back but quickly gripped their prams as the wash caught them.

"She's such a snob."

"Talks all the time about dryhouses and her highlander connections," agreed Deborah.

Mr Reilly waved to them as they waded past what had once been the park.

He was perched atop a picnic bench to keep his tackle dry and was fishing with a long beach rod.

"I was catching herring until they came along," he muttered, pointing to the dolphins that were surging and rolling in the clear expanse of water over the park.

"Anyway," he dropped his voice to a gossipy level. "Have you seen Garcia's way of getting a dryhouse?"

He pointed down the road to the lowlying Garcia house, an object of pity, for it was a wethouse even at low tide. There were workmen swarming over the roof, which they had opened up and were erecting a frame to build another storey.

Mr Reilly chuckled. "That's the way to make sure of a dryhouse even if the sea rises another metre!"

"Well I never!"

"Well!" said Marion.

It set them thinking.

There was a cormorant perched on the post box, attempting to swallow a flounder that was much too big for its beak.

"It would be better off posting it," quipped Deborah, and they giggled. The bird flew a short distance to avoid them, dropped into the water and continued to gulp and thrash at the flat fish.

A delivery barge was tied up outside the market, swinging dangerously on its moorings. They skirted past it singly, mindful of the weight that could pin them. A dodger for one of the glossies on the newsstand proclaimed '100 ways to make your house a dryhouse'.

The water in the super market was thigh deep but the staff did not seem to mind. They were mostly young and their wet hair showed that they swam a lot. The two women waded down the aisles.

Shirley from the checkout swam past, using a long gliding breaststroke so that the shelves would not be splashed.

"I can't see any chickens, Shirley."

Shirley changed politely to a sidestroke so that she faced them. "I don't think that there are any, Mrs Everage. Paul said that chickens are scarce and dear and we'd probably only have duck instead. It's the greenhouse you see. Ducks can swim." She turned on her belly and glided away.

"It must be getting harder for short people to shop as they raise the shelves," said Marion.

Paul, the manager, was fussing at the end of the frozen meat display. He was an earnest young man with a bushy moustache. He wore a short dust coat, wet at the hem, over a pair of red swim trunks and a white business shirt with a club tie.

"It's too bad about the chicken, Paul," Deborah complained mildly.

"I'm sorry about that, ladies." Paul brushed back his dry hair with his hand. "I'm finding it hard to get any red meat, too, only fish. It seems that there's a meat shortage in the highlands and they're keeping it all for themselves. It's getting to be bad with fruit and vegies. We can get all the water cress and sea cabbage we want, but the price for highland lines is going up and up."

"If the water rises any higher you'll have to float the freezer cabinets to keep them dry," Marion said.

"Or better still, float the supermarket."

"The owners are talking about floating a public company," said Paul, earnestly.

The women saw that he was quite serious, and burst into laughter. Paul blushed, swept back his shock of dry hair, and retreated down an aisle.

At the checkout, the talk was all about dryhouses and selling up and moving to the highlands and the poor people in Bangladesh and Sauselito and how it would be worse to live in St Kilda or Manly or Mandurah.

"I don't mind, really," said Samantha as she checked out Deborah's shopping. "I'd miss the water." Her hair too, was wet and she was wearing a sleek, black, one-piece costume. It was wet but she did not seem to mind. "Aren't these on special, Mrs Everage? The price seems wrong. How much are the whiting fillets?"

"I'll check," said Shirley. She entered the water with hardly a ripple and reappeared seconds later at the end of the aisle. She checked the price and called something that sounded like a bark or a cough.

"Thanks, Shirl," Samantha acknowledged. "It was a dollar thirty nine, Mrs Everage."

On the way to the coffee shop they saw a big blue crab feeding on the seaweed growing from a street litter bin.

"Let's catch it," giggled Marion. "Hold the pram." Marion made halfhearted attempts to grab the crab from behind, but it raised its claws in threat and she was afraid. It attacked her in a flurry of movement, slipped into escape mode and swam rapidly across the street, the ripple lights playing over its bright blue body. It disappeared in the sandy shallows of the old roadbed.

"Are you okay? You've wet your hair and your front," Deborah brushed water from her friend.

"I'm a coward when it comes to crabs," said Marion. "Alan picks them up with no trouble at all and never looks like being bitten. That was a big crab."

"Never mind."

They pushed their prams up the ramp to the coffee shop which was on a dry upper storey and was very popular so that they had to wait a minute for a table. It was called The Dry

Coffee Shoppe. They removed their wet boots and wiggled their toes in the luxury of dryness, hot coffee and sugar doughnuts.

The police siren blasted through the conversation about dryhouses, Dutch engineers and moving to the highlands, and they saw a police launch sweep around the post office on the corner, its blue light flashing and a young policeman with a shotgun, braced against the bow rails and another roaring, "Get out of the water! Get off the street!" through a hailer.

They saw the long grey shape before they saw the fin cutting through the water. It was a shark. It cruised effortlessly down the main street towards them. The policeman blasted both barrels at it and shot zinged and ricocheted everywhere. Flurries of whitebait surged and shimmered in panic and raucous gulls hovered overhead.

The shark doubled back but the helmsman was good and the launch spun around in the narrow street space and overtook it. The policeman fired again and the shark cut across the street and threshed into the doorway of a boutique. There were screams of alarm .

It was over in a moment. The shotgun was placed against the shark's body and there were two muted explosions. The policemen dragged the long quivering body through the bloodied water and tied it by the tail to a cleat, waved and moved the launch slowly down the street. The shark's white underside turned up and a great, cruel mouth leered for all to see.

"I feel weak all over." Marion clutched her friend's arm.

Deborah nodded. Her knees were shaking and she had a desperate need to go to the toilet. "It's getting so that the streets are not safe to swim in. We'll have to get a flatboat or a dinghy."

"It's the seals that bring them. The sharks feed on the seals," said a woman at a nearby table.

They had to wait for nearly two hours to get a ride home in a gondola, for all the water taxis were busy.

There were three seals, a small boy and a labrador on the picnic tables in the park. The dog barked at them and the boy and the seals joined in. The boy was grinning.

"They're just like dogs," said their muscular young gondolier. He puffed as he poled them along. Occasionally, little stingrays exploded from the sandy shallows of the roadbed and skittered off in panic.

James was in a happy mood at dinner. The trap in the deep water at the bottom of the garden yielded three meaty crabs. The boss's Mercedes had sunk at its moorings and turned over. He agreed that some of the holiday money to take them to the highlands for three weeks would have to go on a cheap dinghy to do the shopping. The children talked about swimming and diving at school.

John claimed that he could hold his breath for two minutes. Janet said that she could hold hers longer and they tested each other at the table, watching the kitchen clock with cheeks bulging and lips compressed. Deborah felt tired and stressed.

They watched the television, but apart from a piece about the great Bangladesh polder project and the breaching of the seawall and undermining of a beachfront hotel in Glenelg, there was little about the wetlands.

"They don't want to acknowledge that we exist," grumbled Deborah.

James escaped up into the dry roof space where he was growing mushrooms, using seaweed for compost.

When Deborah put the children to bed, Janet asked her to look at her tickly fingers.

Deborah parted the little fingers and saw the fine web of skin growing between. It seemed to be half way to the knuckles.

"Daddy, Mummy's crying," called John.

Mummy's crying," said Janet.#

THIS STORY HAD LIMITED PUBLICATION. IT TWISTS AN IDEA FROM CONTEMPORARY CONCERN AT THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPACT ON EARTH OF A HEAVENLY BODY.

Comet Meths

For my five hundredth birthday party my family hired the megastadium at Old Tuggeranong in Canberra. I would have liked to have had it under the quaint copper dome of the Academy of Science building, but it is far too small and there is some doubt about its condition. I have about nine hundred descendants. Together with my sister's line and my brother's line, and my friends, we number nearly two thousand.

"Happy birthday, grandfather!" A smiling young woman with a toddler in her arms kissed me. She was wearing a 14 badge which showed that she was of the fourteenth generation of one line of my grandchildren. "Meet Colin of your fifteenth generation," she said, lifting the little boy to be kissed.

The child whimpered at my whiskers as I kissed his cheek and struggled back into his mother's arms.

"You look very much like my first wife, Clare, the American. You're obviously of her line," I said. "She died young in her one hundred and thirty second year. It was an accident really. We were with a group protesting about the solar energy power farm. We wanted a compact atomic reactor power station instead."

"I know, grandfather. My name is Clare 14."

I realised that I was being boring, for my history is well known to the family. I suppose that I'm really getting into my dotage. Still, it's not bad to reach five hundred when most people die before they reach a mere three hundred years. I'm pretty healthy and have all my faculties, although I gave up work nearly eighty years ago. Everybody calls me

grandfather.

Clare 14 smiled and moved into the crowd. My fourth wife, Renata, was somewhere in there dancing to the yammer of some appalling modern music. It was colourful. Some of the youngsters would leap above the crowd with a frantic, shimmying, crawl stroke, falling back as their energy gave out and gravity claimed them. It was something that adults could no longer do, due to changes in the lower atmosphere that was regressing back towards the old-time standards.

I was alone on the dais. I took a pull at a squeeze bottle of hapjuice and began to think of Clare and the first time I met her, four hundred and seventy six years ago. It was in a staff house on the fringe of the campus of the old Australian National University in Canberra, although it wasn't old then.

I was lounging on the uncomfortable couch we had in the front room, checking through the car ads in "The Canberra Times". My old Toyota had seized and I desperately needed a cheap car to take me on my daily haul up to the Mount Stromlo Observatory. I looked up, and she was standing in front of me, a slender, fair woman, with hand extended.

"Hello. I'm Clare Ewing. You must be Doctor Le Olfent."

I jumped to my feet and shook her hand, pleased that she had called me doctor, because my doctorate was very new, and overwhelmed by her beauty. I think I fell in love with her instantly.

"Pleased to meet you. I'm Colin," I stammered. "You're American" .

"From Stamford."

It suddenly dawned on me. "You must be the Dr C.V.Ewing, I'm expecting," I said, blushing furiously. "I'm sorry but I thought he - you - was a guy with a bow tie and a college hair cut. I had that mental image."

She laughed in her joyous way and I laughed with her. I hardly left her side for the next century.

We worked together at the observatory and lived in the staff house with two other men and two other women. I don't think we were very good company for them and I can't really remember them. They were just like extras in our life story. Our project was the comet, Meths, a pale bluish light in the western sky, discovered by a young Professor Peake of the Hubble Institute. It was poetic that he was using the Hubble telescope that began to orbit the earth in 1990. Our doctorates were written on our studies of this approaching phenomenon and it soon became clear that Meths was to be our life's work. We measured it, photographed it, analysed it, charted it and wrote and talked about it incessantly.

Concern had been growing in the scientific community when it was realised that Meths was going to pass comparatively close to earth. First calculations suggested, quite wrongly as it turned out, that it had probably passed nearby on a previous encounter over three or four thousand years ago, hence the name Meths, short for Methuselah, the ancient of the Old Testament.

"It's a bloody big chunk of material," said Oscar Paech. "And it could have a bad affect on us. It's the closest contact in human history. It could take some of our atmosphere or cause a crustal slip."

"Nonsense," I said. "You've been reading too much Velikovsky."

Many shared at least some of Oscar's concern and near panic set in as the biggest comet in living memory neared the earth. There is plenty of evidence that huge, heavenly bodies have hit the earth in the past and a good case that devastation resulting from a massive collision, sixty five million years ago, brought the age of the dinosaurs to a close. The powerful impact on Jupiter of the Shoemaker-Levy Comet fragments in 1994 had impressed us. People feared a killer comet.

Meths lit up the night sky so that we had constant twilight. It was foolishly suggested that the military forces of the world should combine to destroy it with missiles, but nobody took this seriously. But there was worry in official quarters and we were forbidden to make statements to the media in case they sparked community hysteria.

People turned to religion and big groups assembled on hilltops for prayer and ritual in the bright twilight. Some strange sects surfaced and there were reports of animal sacrifice. Black Mountain became very popular for the establishment churches whilst Mount Ainslie attracted fundamentalist groups. It was reported that several covens and an African group from the embassies met on Red Hill.

A company in Fyshwick made a fortune by contracting to turn family swimming pools into survival shelters. People can be so naive.

We calculated that Meths would pass by on the night of 7th August. As it drew closer the light increased in intensity but the colour paled more and more. On the 9th of August, Clare was sure that there was the faintest tint of red. In any case, there were no abnormal earthquakes, volcanoes, tides, winds or storms and no changes to the atmosphere, excepting that the night sky was brilliantly beautiful with the pale shimmer of the aurora in gorgeous hues and many so-called shooting stars.

It was a magical night when we sat outside, drinking good Australian champagne and some smooth old brandy, also Australian. I asked Clare to marry me and we were intoxicated with love. We stumbled up the stairs to bed, well after midnight and were soon fast asleep.

I remember half waking during the night, thinking to myself that I was going to suffer for my sins in the morning, for the evening had been so sweet that I had drunk a lot and I could feel the beginning of a headache.

I awoke late. It was after nine o'clock. I felt fine and elated although my breathing was heavy as if I had hay fever. Clare was still sleeping peacefully. I pulled on my track suit, moving very sluggishly, even though I felt good, and padded slowly to the window. There was a fine mist filling the hollows and masking the lake. It was quiet, apart from some slow, unfamiliar bird calls, like the muffled belling of currawongs from the high trees. Some small grey birds were on the lawn and our neighbour's cat was stalking them. I hate cats being allowed to prey on our native fauna. If I had my way, cats and dogs would be tethered or caged at all times.

I strode angrily towards the stairs and tried to skip down them as I usually do, but I felt as if I had to thrust my way and moved lethargically. The door was heavy to push open. For a moment I had panicky thoughts about suffering a stroke, but I felt so good. I saw the cat and tried to shout at it but my voice was heavy as if I had a bad cold.

The grey bird skittered easily out of the cat's way, for it moved sluggishly. The cat turned and tried for others, which flew up with a peculiar motion into the lower branches of a red bottlebrush shrub. Christ, it suddenly hit me! What I'd thought were birds were carp from the lake and the cat was swimming! I swooned to the grass and lay there for a moment.

"Go - lenn," a heavy sound like the track of an old movie that had stretched or was being played too slow, caught my attention. I saw that there were fish flying about the lawn and the shrubbery, and a kingfisher flew slowly down, caught one of them, and flapped laboriously to a low branch.

"Go - lenn," the heavy sound rumbled again and only then did I recognise that it could be my name. Clare was running towards me in her nightdress, her eyes big with fear. It was like a nightmare. She was moving in slow motion. We clung to each other. I expected to wake all over again and find that I'd had a very realistic dream, but Clare was very real and warm. Close together, our voices sounded almost normal.

"Colin. Colin. What's happening?" She was very near to hysteria and so was I.

"I don't know, love. It'll be all right," I said. It did not help to see the cat flying slowly overhead with a rapid swimming motion. It was like the cow jumping over the moon in a child's picture book.

There was a chorus of rumbling sounds. Our housemates were spilling out the door. One of them, the slight girl who liked to dance, seemed to swim up into the air and slowly fall back.

"Christ, Clare. It's Meths. It didn't take anything from us! We've taken something from it!"

"You mean atmospheric gases?" Clare rumbled as I helped her slowly to her feet. "It's not possible."

But it was. The world had to adjust to having a new element in its atmosphere, an element that had some very peculiar properties in relation to oxygen and blurred the boundaries between air and water. It hung like a super fluid blanket to a depth of four or five metres over land and sea, streaming up the sides of hills and tall buildings so that it was present even in an aircraft in flight.

Once we'd become used to the change in sound and adjusted to movement, it wasn't so bad. They called the element, clinton, to honour an American statesman who was very big at the time. We've never been able to fully understand it or to work out why its existence was never suspected before. As my friend Oscar says, very loosely paraphrasing Kuhn, "If you don't have the paradigm then you can't really perceive a phenomenon."

Clinton has been very kind to the biosphere. We live longer and are healthier. There's been a marvellous interchange of flora and fauna between land, sea and air, which has

heavily qualified our thinking on evolution. Early on, dolphins cruised inland and learnt to prey on the rabbit population and airports had to be careful of the danger posed by dense schools of fish drifting across runways, although takeoff and landing could be effected more easily at much lower speeds. Coastal farms found a new hazard in predators from the deep sea attacking sheep and cattle. I was put in mind of the Galapagos Islands where iguanas range freely on land and sea.

The question was often raised, "Has Meths visited us before to stir our lazy little world into change?"

There's no doubt that clinton is now breaking down in the lower atmosphere. The layer is getting thinner but there is strong evidence that the ozone layer is increasing in thickness and clinton is responsible. When I was young, the average fit man could pull himself up three or four metres and swim above the ground, but no more. That's only for kids and real lightweights now.

Anyway, I owe my long life to clinton. I suppose that there is no way that our world could have supported forty billion people without. But I must confess that I long for the old days, especially the sound. It was so clear. Not the yammering and rumbling that you have all about you now with that so-called modern music. There's not a bright note in it. Come to think of it, that's one of the really big drawbacks of being five hundred years old. I'm really the only one old enough to remember it like it was and there's no way that I can make them understand.

"Congratulations, Grandfather." A pretty, dark little woman kissed me. She wore a 9 badge.

"You must be a Yoko. You remind me of my third wife, Yoko. She met her death accidentally when she was only a hundred and seventy nine, protesting against the dolphins. She had too much to drink and fell asleep at sea and actually drowned. The dolphins once threatened to overrun the land and humankind, you know."

"I know, Grandfather," she said. She kissed me again and danced off into the crowd, blowing me a third kiss.

My eyes felt heavy and I slept, dreaming of the bright sound of brassy trumpets, tinkling pianos, rilling water and sweet, soprano voices and sounds that had delighted me so long ago.#

THIS STORY WAS A SEMI-FINALIST IN THE "WRITERS OF THE FUTURE CONTEST" AND ALGIS BUDRYS, THE CHIEF JUDGE, TOOK THE TROUBLE TO WRITE TO ME, SAYING THAT HE SELECTED IT AS A FINALIST BUT WAS OUTVOTED BY HIS COLLEAGUES. THEIR JUDGEMENT HAS BEEN VINDICATED AS I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO PLACE IT FOR MONEY!
IT TURNS AROUND THE USUAL PATTERN OF SOPHISTICATED CLOTHED WESTERNERS IMPOSING ON NAKED SAVAGES AND SUBJECTING THEM TO STUDY.

Naked Anthropology

Walter Vivian

The aliens came in the night.

It was four days before Christmas. The night was clear and starry and there were the usual shooting stars and the occasional satellite passing by, but we were used to that. We'd even become blase about rocket launchings which we'd been able to watch up until ten years ago, when they used the distant range in the desert. Our sleepy little farming town had been brought right to the cutting edge of technology when the government and the Americans had built the aerospace transmitter with its fancy antennae strung around the town common.

Harvest was nearly over and it was as hot as hell, or as hot as Australian summers usually are, when I helped Old Billy the town drunk, out onto the bench, and locked up the front door. I can remember being mildly surprised to see a cloud blotting out the stars over the wheat silos, but I checked out the other doors and cleaned the front bar before climbing up the stairs to flop into bed. We'd had to feed and find beds for a coachload of Japanese tourists. Running a pub is busy work.

We were wakened early in the morning by the sound of excited chirping voices. I cursed the kids and turned over to try to sleep some more, but my good wife, Jean, nudged me in the ribs and said, "You'd better see about it", before she dropped off, sound asleep.

I pulled on my pants and waddled out onto the balcony.

There was a long shadow over the wheat silo and the railway shed. Hanging in the air between the silo and the aerospace installation that Hank, Elmer and Bob looked after at the edge of town, was a monstrous piece of rock, three or four acres of it! It was suspended about a hundred metres up in the air.

I tell you I couldn't believe my eyes and hung onto the verandah post because I felt weak in the knees.

Moments later, I ran down the stairs, unbolted the front door and ran out into the street to join the growing crowd of onlookers.

"I saw it first", said young Meggsie. "I was on me skateboard".

"Jesus!" said Father Ryan, crossing himself. He was in his jogging shorts and didn't look very priestly.

Miss Prime, the post mistress, prayed hysterically.

Billy, the town drunk, came over and leaned on me as he looked at it. He shook his head and returned to the bench and pulled his hat over his eyes.

"I wonder if Hank knows it's there", said a voice with a strong American accent, and I turned to see Elmer and Bob giggling nervously. It would be Hank's shift and he'd be dreaming over the monitors in the control hut of the installation that registered the mysterious space signals being sent or received by the lines of antennae that stretched

towards the hills. The irony of the situation was not lost on them.

"What's going on?" boomed Sergeant O'Hara in his best official voice as he rounded the hotel corner and stepped out from the shade of the verandah to gaze, suddenly slack-jawed with surprise, at the monstrous slab of rock hanging in the air. A forest of hands rose to point helpfully at the huge object.

"There's a space thing up there!" said Meggsie.

"It's true," said young Samantha Allen, in support, looking earnestly at the policeman as if he needed to be convinced of the fact.

"You'd better open the bar and get me something to drink", said O'Hara. "I'll keep watch."

I backed into the pub, my eyes fixed on the great slab of rock, scooped up a bottle of Johnnie Walker, a black Corio and another of Jim Beam, to cover all tastes, and hurried back to the crowd. We drank with our eyes fixed on the rock.

"It doesn't make any noise", said O'Hara, taking a swig of the Johnny Walker.

"No", I said, being careful not to blot out the scene as I drank from the black bottle.

"What should we do?" said Elmer, after he'd had a pull of the Jim Beam and handed it across to Bob. "They must've come down the wire. Down our signal."

"I can see some plants," said Meggsie. "It's probably flat on top."

Sure enough, there was a fringe of blue green and some white blossom like honeysuckle.

The tourist coach rumbled around from behind the pub, yawning Japanese tourists nodding at the windows, and turned down the main street to head towards the sunrise and breakfast at the next big town, sixty kilometres away.

Somebody brought out a tray of stale scones and some cakes from the Country Women's Association Hall.

"Stand back", I'm taking a photograph", said Izzy, editor of the Valley Times and Red Plains Messenger. Izzy is the only Japanese-Australian I know and a real character. I could imagine him mentally composing headlines. "That's pretty good", he said, peeling off the cover from the instant print. And surely it was. The space thing looked like a rocky island set in the blue sea of the sky.

The Raddle boys drove up in their station wagon. They'd been duck shooting and Craig brought over his shot gun. He looked at the sergeant, who nodded.

Craig aimed at the rock and fired. We howled with pain and it's a wonder that somebody didn't lose an eye, for the shot came zinging back, singing like angry bees. I pulled a pellet out of my neck and Jean had to pick another out of my scalp later on.

"You'd best not do that again," said Sergeant O'Hara.

The tourist coach came back into town, its passengers goggle-eyed and straining to view the spacecraft. Japanese of all shapes, ages and sizes spilt onto the road with cameras

whirring, flashing and clicking.

The morning wore on and as the heat of the sun's rays scorched down, we retreated to the shade of the pub verandah.

"I do believe there's people up there", said Father Ryan.

Sure enough, there were figures to be seen peering over the edge, like people do when they're looking down at the street from high buildings. They waved and we waved back.

A few minutes later there was a gasp of shock from the crowd. One of the figures fell from the space thing but gently decelerated to land in the main street, like abseiling with an invisible rope. It was very plainly a woman, for she stood there stark naked except for a circlet that held her golden hair in place and an elaborate necklet which hung down between her shapely breasts.

The crowd parted as she walked over to Elmer and inspected him by walking around him and opening his shirt to look at his very hairy chest, for Elmer was from a very hairy southern Italian strain of American. He looked pleased, embarrassed and aroused all at once, for the alien was very pretty but unaware of her nudity.

The woman approached Miss Prime and touched her breasts, as if to satisfy herself that they were real. Miss Prime began to have soundless hysterics.

Unconcerned, the alien marched into my pub. We followed her firm, bare buttocks as she casually looked about.

"She shouldn't be allowed around like that", said my Jean, confronting her. "I'll get her some clothes."

The alien said something like "Qwerty", and smiled at Jean, one hand gripping her necklet and the other fondling Jean's cotton batik shift that she'd bought in Bali and liked to wear in summer because it was cool. There was a moment of a sort of fuzziness and the alien was suddenly dressed in an identical cotton batik shift. We gasped in surprise.

The alien looked at me long and hard, peering into my eyes, which I suppose was only fair because I'd looked long and hard at her, but not especially at her eyes. It was only at that moment that I realised that her eyes were a deep blue and I felt uncomfortable.

"I am the anthropologist", she said and I noticed that she quite suddenly had acquired a long forked staff like the late Dr Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist, affected in her declining years. I'd seen her on television.

Qwerty gave us hell for the next three days. She was everywhere, prying into our lives. She opened bathroom doors, marched into bedrooms to see what was going on in intimate moments, upset both Father Ryan and the Reverend Jim by walking round their churches during service and asking questions. Father Ryan was particularly incensed to be asked how often he had sex and how many children had sprung from his loins. She checked out the hospital in detail and nearly caused a riot at the school, but fortunately it was the last day for the term, anyway. She spoke fluently with a sort of academic American accent

and a hell of a vocabulary that often left us puzzled. Her questions were incessant and often embarrassing.

Sergeant O'Hara tried to restrain her only once and found himself gently propelled backwards by an invisible force that persisted for about ten seconds so that he was half a block away from her and sitting in the water trough before he knew it.

We became used to her for she was otherwise friendly and obviously meant us no harm, although the loud noise of Meggsie's ghetto blaster seemed to annoy her mightily. It was suddenly whisked out of his hands to hang in the air about half a kilometre away, near the town dam, still playing.

We tried to to tell people about our visitor, but the telephones would not ring out. The Americans could not radio out from the Installation. No commercial travellers called into the pub. The Raddle boys reported that they couldn't drive far out of town because of heavy, impenetrable haze by the Ten Mile Bridge. The coachload of Japanese tourists booked into the pub and we were run off our feet.

On Christmas Eve at four o'clock, the aliens landed in force. The townsfolk watched goggle-eyed as alien men and women, all stark naked except for their necklets, drifted down from the craft and wandered through the town peering at us in a friendly fashion. It occurred to me that probably they regarded us as savages and we were the ones with the clothes! You know, until you're used to it, it's hard to look a naked person in the face.

A tall, very well developed, fair young man, marched into the bar and sat on a stool next to Izzy , touching him lightly on the shoulder. In a moment they were dressed alike in Izzy's tee shirt, baggy shorts and thong sandals. We laughed.

"G'day. I'm Qaz. I'd like a middy of beer", said the alien. I drew a beer for him and passed it across the counter.

"You have to pay for it", said Izzy. "Look". He pulled out his wallet to show some twenty dollar notes and passed one across to me.

"She'll be right, mate", said the alien and suddenly, he too, had an identical wallet full of notes. We laughed as he proffered a note. I looked at it. It was perfect. Izzy found that his credit cards had also been duplicated.

"No problem", said the alien, and there was another wallet then another and another on the counter and a pile of twenties.

The aliens clothed themselves simply by duplication. One shapely young chick took delight in trying out several lots. She duplicated Billy's old hat, flannel shirt, droopy dungarees and old boots and looked marvelously like something out of the chorus of Oliver. Another had the Plains Emporium in uproar as she walked up and down the racks changing her gear in a flicker as she touched each garment.

Their tolerance for the grog was not very good, especially with the hard stuff. They'd take a drink and sit back all sort of stunned, with dreamy expressions on their handsome faces.

What a joyous Christmas party we had! Townsfolk visited the spacecraft freely, but I was too busy so I promised myself a visit after Christmas. Apparently it was just a matter of

walking around the edge of the spacecraft until an upbeam was found and up you went. On top it was like a green park with sort of classical buildings, although reports are surprisingly hazy. The town kids played in the upbeams and downbeams until it was too dark to see.

The aliens visited our homes and chatted freely, but seeing that they were mostly half stoned, we didn't learn very much about them excepting that they were basically happy souls and had travelled from a distant galaxy. We thought of lots of questions to ask them, afterwards.

When I showed some concern that with the extra population and not having had a weekly delivery, the grog could run out, I was treated to an awesome display of the alien's powers of duplication and we had cartons and kegs stacked everywhere.

We partied on throughout Christmas Day and into Christmas Night. It was as hot as hell, with the warm scent of sun-scorched eucalyptus in the air, excepting at Elmer's place, where he and Betty-Lou entertained the Americans and they had softly falling snow and icicles hanging from the windows, courtesy of their alien guests.

My recollections are vague as I had a little too much to drink. I remember Qwerty, the alien anthropologist, being everywhere. I can remember the joyous feeling of goodwill and peace on earth. I'm not sure whether I wandered into an upbeam or a downbeam or not.

I was awakened next morning by the sound of Meggsie's ghetto blaster playing in the deserted street. I struggled out of bed to see that the sky was blue and empty. The aliens had left.

Mid-morning there was a hell of a bushfire and we had to forget our hangovers and fight all day to save the town.

Folk rarely talk about the aliens these days, chiefly because outsiders make fun of us and the media really sent us up as dingalings. Izzy's photographs have been dismissed as shots of a rocky island in the blue sea, taken from an aircraft. Hank and Elmer and Bob have been replaced and gone back home to the US of A. Sergeant O'Hara was invited to take early retirement. Father Ryan was called back to the city to assist the bishop.

But I haven't had to buy grog for nearly a year, and there have been some puzzled federal policemen staying at my pub, as they've tried to sort out the mystery of scores of bank notes around the town, with identical numbers, but all apparently legitimate and genuine.

Sometimes I'm tempted to join Miss Prime's group that meets on moonlit nights on the common, to conjure back the aliens by dancing around in the nude and singing peculiar chants. They drive the local bankers crazy, for they insist on drawing out their savings to have handy to be duplicated, as mostly they were the standoffish types who didn't fraternise with the aliens and missed out on our new wealth and prosperity.

Miss Prime pesters me to let her have Qwerty's forked stick, which I keep above the bar, but I use it to amuse travellers with my story. People tell me that my alien story is famous

across the country as the wildest yarn this side of the black stump, and I believe I even have a small reputation overseas, but especially in Japan.

And of course, anyone who's watched anthropologists on the television will tell you that they always come back a few years later for a follow up study. I'm waiting for the day that Qwerty saunters into the bar again, motherless naked, with perhaps a streak of silver in her golden hair, to claim her staff and have another look at the savages.#

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Writer/Reader Revealed

The new chairman of the Literature Board is Nicholas Hasluck QC, who introduces himself and his new work.

(IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT I ONLY KNOW THREE OF THE MEMBERS BY THEIR WORKS, I HAVE SUGGESTED THAT ALL MEMBERS OF AUSTRALIA COUNCIL BOARDS SHOULD HAVE A SHORT DESCRIPTIVE PIECE ABOUT THEMSELVES MADE AVAILABLE. I AM SURE THAT OTHERS FIND A SIMILAR LACK.)

Our Man K

(A note about the author of the novel Our Man K by Nicholas Hasluck)

Nicholas Hasluck was born in Canberra in 1942. After working for a period in London as an editorial assistant in Fleet Street he returned to Australia and since 1968 has been a practising lawyer in Perth. For a number of years he was Deputy Chairman of the Australia Council.

He has published many works of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. His eight previous novels include *The Bellarmine Jug*, winner of the Age Book of the Year Award in 1984, and two highly praised novels both of which were short-listed for the Miles Franklin Award - *Truant State* and *The Country Without Music*. His last book, *The Chance of Politics*, in which he introduced and edited a collection of his late father's commentaries about the Australian political scene, was on the best seller lists in Melbourne and Sydney for many weeks.

Nicholas Hasluck is also well-known for his casual pieces such as *Kafka Wobbles the White Board* and *Keating Takes the Comets on a Learning Curve* which have been appearing regularly in *Quadrant* and other journals in recent years.

A few years ago Hasluck was included in a study of eight leading contemporary Australian novelists, *Liars* (Penguin), published by the current editor of *Australian Book Review*, Helen Daniel, with writers such as Peter Carey, Elizabeth Jolley and David Ireland. Further details about Nicholas Hasluck's work appear in the *Yacker* (Picador) interviews edited by Candida Baker and *In Contemporary Novelists*.

This latest novel by Nicholas Hasluck - *Our Man K* - is not only a vivid portrayal of

Europe and Australia in the between wars period but also provides a thought-provoking glimpse of what Australia and many other countries might be like in times to come.

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Best of the Box

USTV

Twenty years ago, I had the opportunity of sampling television in the United States at New York and San Francisco. Contrary to what you would expect, free to air television was unbelievably bad, as the only relief from the commercial junk channels was the infant PBS, the Public Broadcasting Service. PBS attempts a similar coverage in the United States to SBS and ABC in Australia, but without government funding, so that much of its time is devoted to wheedling and begging for funds.

We've tried cable television here, and were annoyed to find that a similar format to US junk channels is dominant. Connected viewing is difficult, even when they are not running commercials, as the time is taken for promotions of forthcoming events in such large slabs that it is sometimes difficult to know the current subject! On one occasion we watched a program about the South Pacific interspersed with extensive promotions about a forthcoming look at the Inuits set in the icy north, or was it the other way round?

We found that for most of the time, we were watching cable-transmitted ABC & SBS and therefore lapsed our subscription. (I've since wondered why we have to have antennas rather than use our telephone or power lines to pipe clearer signal into our homes, but letters to the minister on the subject have been evaded.)

Master Works

It's a long time since we've had a master series to engage our minds. I'm thinking of the great works by Bronowski, Clarke, Attenborough and Sagan, and the writers of the masterly, "The Story of English".

I once had dialogue with members of a group in Melbourne who were planning a series on the history and development of education, which could be a fascinating topic, but nothing seems to have come of it.

Station Call Signs.

ABC has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in their little spacing clips between programs. They are generally well made and charming, but it is tedious to have them over and over again, rather like somebody relating the same anecdote for the umpteenth time. I think that I would rather look at the plain, unadorned squiggle for a few seconds instead. It would certainly be cheaper.

SBS is in similar case with it's elongated ellipses, presented in a multitude of guises, which I assume are meant to represent segments of the globe, as worked into a Mollweide's map projection. Somehow they achieve a twee, unprofessional effect which

does not do justice to the network.

Canning Cromwell

A recent ABC drama on the the English Civil War (I dumped my TV guide before noting the title) was beautifully presented and very evocative of the times. The Lord Protector Cromwell came out of it very badly, as strangely, the writers proudly based their scripts on three contemporary writings, one royalist and two ultimately disaffected Puritans. It would be rather like doing a piece on Paul Keating, some time centuries hence, depending on contemporary observations by Peter Reith, Bob Hawke and Bill Hayden!

I have previously noted that Oliver Cromwell's reputation suffers also from the sins of Thomas Cromwell, Henry V111's unpopular minister in the previous century. The two seem to be confused and coalesced into one demon!

Global Village

For a charming half hour, try Global Village on SBS on week nights at 6.00 pm. This wide-ranging French documentary series is re-packaged with English captions and covers the world, from the bizarre to the beautiful. The viewpoint and style are different and the story-telling is superb. In contrast to much American and local product, the subjects and situations are allowed to tell the story without the intervention of an interviewer on camera.

It is highly recommended.

High Comedy

In Perth, Channel Nine has taken Channel Seven to court over its claim to be the leading television news station! We await the judge's decision with considerable interest and wonder whether his honour will have to emulate the wisdom of Solomon in deciding between these two pretentious, undiscerning media champions. Perhaps, after the news contest, they'll modestly vie for the weather accolade, then Australian drama, and so on.

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Reviews

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Articles old and new

Tell Me A Story!

by Australian author Sherry-Anne Jacobs

NB Sherry-Anne, who also writes as Anna Jacobs, Shannah Jay, is one of Australia's most prolific authors, writing in several genres. With 23 books published/accepted since 1992, she's worth listening to. Visit her web site at <http://www.iinet.net.au/~jacobses>

There are so many elements involved in writing that it's no wonder those on the publication trail sometimes get bogged down in details. And of course, details are important, part of the striving for professionalism and excellence. But I sometimes wonder whether less experienced writers lose the plot - quite literally - and start fiddling with details too soon.

What sells a manuscript to a publisher, in my humble opinion, is the story - first, second and third! If you haven't got a good story, then you haven't got a sale.

As part of a story, you will of course need to create particularly vivid characters to whom your reader can relate, with strong emotions, interesting and varied personalities - but let's take that as done in this article. Whole books are written about developing characters and I'm not going to try to sum the art up in a brief aside.

So - you've got your basic plot - where do you go from there in order to produce a saleable manuscript? I'd like to offer you a four-part approach to writing and editing your story, which avoids some of the pitfalls unpublished writers fall into.

1. Get the main plot worked out and written. It doesn't matter at this stage whether you plot in detail before you start writing, or whether you develop a rough idea and then work out the details of the story as you go. Either approach is quite valid. It's a personal choice. My main advice is not to expect perfection this time through, just get the skeleton of the story worked out. Make the pieces of your jigsaw fit together.

2. Look at how you've told your tale. Give yourself time off, to distance yourself from your writing - at least a week, preferably a month - yes, really! - then go back through your story. This time, you're checking whether there is enough action to keep things exciting - twists, changes, surprises, withholding information - events, not fancy words.

And by the way, withholding or delaying information is just as important as giving out information, and is a much-neglected writing technique. As the creator, you need to know things, but do your readers need to know them yet? Not till later? Even later still? Can you keep the readers hanging out for more information, make them turn the pages because they simply have to find out what happens? Try breaking off the action at a crucial turning point and then switching to another scene. Don't tell/show readers all of what happens, or what it means, until later.

Think of a few surprises to toss in. Is the heroine getting along too easily? If so, tension will relax and your readers' intense interest may fade. Sock her with a new sub-problem, or toss in a new twist to the central problem, or add a new worry, maybe because of a misunderstanding that leaves the reader not quite sure of what is and isn't true, as well as the heroine. Put in a few minor as well as major confrontations. There are dozens of ways to enhance the basic plot.

NB Maybe, if you're less experienced, you'll need to wait again and then repeat this stage. Don't - DO NOT! - I mean it! - go on to the next stage until you're sure you've got the skeleton plot fleshed out. And double don't start fiddling with grammar and vocabulary, thinking that will make a big difference. It won't. Not yet, anyway.

3. Enhance each scene. Give yourself another break from the manuscript so that you can judge more objectively (stop groaning and just do it!) then go back and really work on enhancing each scene. You've got your story in place. You've looked at how you've told it. Now, start enhancing the action - not enhancing the vocabulary, but the actions. Add new emotional depth, smarten up the dialogue, add a bit of description, fire up a sexual encounter with your own individual imagination, make a scene so tender you have tears in your own eyes as you write.

NB1 We are still not at the fiddling, editing and polishing words stage.

NB2 You may need to repeat this action enhancement stage, too.

4. OK, now you can start fiddling, polishing and editing the words. This is the last stage. Not until the story is firmly in place do you need to work hard on your editing of details, for the obvious reason that if you have to cut a scene, you'll have wasted your time polishing it. I'll repeat my basic message here, because I'm so convinced it's true:

It isn't details of vocabulary and punctuation which sell a manuscript, it's the quality of your story and character interactions.

I'm not attempting to go into details of editing in this article. There are too many of them. And I don't want to encourage you to fiddle. Not yet. Of course you'll improve punctuation and vocabulary every time you go through your manuscript, but don't make that your main focus until you've got a ripping yarn put together.

CONCLUSION

Slow down on your submitting, slow down on your editorial fiddling, and bring all your wonderful creativity to bear on the actions and interactions. Please - tell me a really good story . . .

(If you want to go into this approach in much more detail, read Sherry-Anne's book PLOTTING AND EDITING. It's published electronically by Fiction Works at <http://www.fictionworks.com> or it can be obtained in hard copy from the Australian online bookshop at <http://www.bookworm.com.au>)

An Australian Academy of Letters/Literature

(I FLOATED THIS IDEA TO THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WRITERS' FORUM OVER THREE YEARS AGO. IT WAS NOT TAKEN UP, BUT I OFFER IT FOR CONSIDERATION TO A WIDER AUDIENCE.)

To complement the national institutes for the various art forms, such as the National Art Gallery and the Australian Ballet, it is proposed to create the Australian Academy of Letters to cater for literature.

As literature is unlike other art forms, which depend on the immediate proximity of clients and practitioners, such an academy could well function away from the population centres of the eastern seaboard. Accordingly, it is proposed that it be set up in Perth, which although Australia's fourth city and capital of the state covering one third of the nation's territory, does not host the national institute of any artform.

The academy would function as an adviser to government on the development of Australian English language, literary matters and the development of literature policy.

It would advise on awards and fellowships, also assuming the present functions of the Literature Board of the Australia Council.

It would maintain data bases on Australian literature, monitoring the work of libraries, universities and literary associations.

It would support the work of the literary organisations and academic bodies focused on Australian literature.

It would offer scholarships to talented young Australians to develop their literary skills at associated universities.

It would offer awards to recognise achievement and distinction in literature, to be known as Laureates of the Academy, and holders would be entitled to wear a distinctive badge and ribbon on ceremonial and academic occasions.

From time to time, it would publish digests, bibliographies and important literary works.

The Academy would be governed by a council consisting of core members including representatives from each state, who would meet as required, plus extra members who would meet annually as the augmented council.

A director, aided by a small staff, would manage the Academy, operating out of a relatively small building consisting of offices, a meeting room and interview rooms. There would be an emphasis on having and maintaining state of the art communications equipment. Fellowships to undertake specific projects could also be awarded.

Capital cost would be two to three million dollars to acquire a suitable small building, with perhaps another million for furnishings and equipment.

Recurrent costs could be met out of the present allocation for the Literature Board, supplemented by further monies to cover increased costs, of about two to three million dollars.

The proposal has a number of positive aspects:

It would help redress the national imbalance in the arts.

It would allow for a re-structure of our modes of operation in literary funding. (Much of the criticism of the Australia Council is in this area.)

It would induce modes of operation requiring the bridging of remoteness, bringing equity of access to literature.#

Porn Trawling

I have used the Net for three years with never a rude, nude person gracing my screen. Not a tittle or a tottle offended my gaze.

Of course, like any, red-blooded and essentially honest individual, I am not averse to glimpses of shapely members of the opposite sex, scantily clothed or completely in the buff. I've picked up an odd copy of Playboy and enjoyed it for more than the articles, but I've never been motivated to buy one.

As a student of the arts I've spent many hours studying scores of real naked bodies in detail as I drew them, in an unbelievably clinical exercise. So the idea of hunting crude pictures on the internet has never had much appeal.

But in the light of concerns expressed by some saintly members of parliament, I decided to experiment. I typed pornography into the search box of the recommended search engine and came up with a menu for 367,328 sites!

"Free Danish" looked interesting. It took four minutes to reveal the home page, but all that was free, apart from masses of titillating advertising, was a study of a busty blonde. You had to submit your e-mail address to enter further into the site. With visions of being lumbered with useless e-mails far into the future, I attempted to leave, but my browser was gripped by another "site", then another. I quitted with great difficulty.

I tried the menu again and clicked on "Spanish", meeting the same busty blonde, and advertising, as before. It took eleven minutes to disengage from the apparent new sites thrown up unbidden, which I did by quitting the browser.

Judging by the common formats listed in the menu, this was a considerable pornographic enterprise.

I tried again, using another well-known search engine which only had 260251 sites. At the head of the menu was a narrow panel showing a plump cleavage, with an irresistible invitation to zoom in. Almost immediately my browser was gripped by another site showing three busty young women, possibly cousins of the first I had encountered, and a requirement to submit my e-mail address to enter further. Again, it took considerable effort to disengage.

My internet service provider (ISP), advises me that what was happening was that the porn site was throwing page-sized banners onto my screen and using some mechanism, rather like a desperate old whore, to grip my browser, refusing to let go until it had finished. Apparently, this questionable device is legal.

I tried my own server, which boasts about being one of the larger providers in Australia and came up with no sites listed under pornography. "Sex" elicited five, with sex in the titles but no pornography.

Pornography is everywhere on the net, but in my limited experience, you have to look for

it, although I believe that there are some tricky devices, like the ones I've encountered, associated with music sites and other sites of interest to teenagers.

If porn is to be controlled to eliminate undesirable aspects such as portrayal of children, exploitation and sadism, how is it to be achieved? (Of course some unreal purists seek to eliminate pornography altogether.)

Because the net is international, crossing national boundaries, it is impossible for a jurisdiction to stop the creation of sites outside its own borders or to control them.

If pressure is put on service providers to monitor their customers, they can, with difficulty, disconnect any of their own clients who misbehave but can do nothing about overseas sites. The service providers are something like the postal or telephone services in relation to their clients. They cannot prevent them from writing or saying anything, or for that matter, receiving anything, without obtruding into privacy.

I have no doubt that there is some sort of filtering software available, but I suspect that it can only function in a gross sort of way, like Microsoft's home site denial of access to Netscape browsers. If certain words are proscribed there are likely to be unforeseen negative effects such as the stifling of medical and art networks. (My second attempt at pornography also threw up a number of anti-porn sites, which would doubtless disappear if filters were in place!)

The issue of pornography is complex, as one man's porn is another man's art. Probably the only issues which would achieve prohibition across the many national jurisdictions involved in the internet would be the grosser aspects such as child sex, sexual violence and sadism. It would be no bad thing if an international move were made to establish suitable definitions and to put bans in place.

If the ISPs are made accountable there will be difficulties as the search and categorisation process of material is presently far from perfect and much desirable detail and access will be lost.

I wonder if, instead of using the proverbial sledgehammer to crack a walnut, our concerned parliamentarians have ever tried tracking down objectionable sites and appealing to the sites' home legislators and regulators to do something about them. Direct action could be fruitful and much more sensible.

Publish or Perish - Self-Publication

Walter Vivian

Some dedicated writers write for the sheer joy of the process. It would probably not matter much to them if their work were not published. The remarkable Sydney Sheldon not only managed to write many best selling books but punched out half an hour of television script each day for many weeks of the year!

Some write to achieve fame and fortune, and would if they could, gladly offload the

writing task to a computer or a secretary whilst they basked in the limelight and autographed books.

Most of us enjoy writing, in our dilettante way, and look forward to publication or performance of our work as a culmination, a celebration of the process.

Sadly, competition for publication is intense in an increasingly literate society and opportunities appear to be diminishing. Newspapers and general magazines which once regularly published poems, short fiction and articles, have cut back or ceased the practice. Literary magazines are under threat.

Peddling manuscripts to publishers is a daunting task, especially in the light of comments that perhaps one or two in a hundred will be accepted. It is also a very slow process. Novelists can take some comfort in the stories about now famous writers who suffered many rejections before achieving success, but for most it is a fruitless task.

Self-publishing is a way of getting your work before an audience of readers and trying the market. Whether it is also a Florence Foster Jenkins exercise, she being the very wealthy lady who hired Carnegie Hall and a top orchestra to feature her own poor, breathy voice, solo, only time will tell.

If none of your work has ever been published, there is a risk of losing a lot of money. It could be better to use a photocopier to run off a dozen books and have them bound, or use a simple commercial binder.

If, on the other hand, you have managed in the past to beguile some editors or have had reassuring rejection slips, fix on a publisher whose style you like, and shape your manuscript accordingly, bearing in mind that photographs and multi-coloured illustrations are costly. To get the most for your dollar, work in numbers of pages to fit paper size. An A5 page is one sixteenth of a sheet, so if you produce a slim volume of 81 pages, you are paying very dearly for that 81st page!

Check your manuscript very carefully, for if you are your own publisher, the buck stops with you, and all typos, spelling errors and grammatical frankensteins are all your own work. It is not a bad idea to get a friend with some editorial skills to look over the manuscript, as it is very easy for your eyes to skip over familiar errors. Print it out ready for publication in laser quality print.

Get quotes from two or three printers whose work you like. (Hopefully, by now you will be aware that printers do not necessarily have anything to do with publishing.) It is not a bad idea to cite an example of a previously published book.

Fix on the size of the print run carefully, bearing in mind that the more you print, the cheaper the unit cost. In round figures, a slim book of verse costs \$1300 to set up and about \$1.00 per book thereafter. (The "plates" for printing are expendable and a second edition would require a new set, costing exactly the same.) A "boutique" run of 200 would therefore cost \$7.50 each. A thousand would reduce the unit cost, overall, to \$2.30.

There is a great temptation to reduce the unit costs still further with an unreal print run. I've heard of novices having 5000 books produced relatively cheaply offshore and having their house crammed with books and their car out in the rain, because of a storage

problem! Work it out for yourself. A run of 5000 novel-sized books 2.5cms thick, requires 125 metres of shelving. The more you print, the more you have to store and sell.

For that slim volume of verse, a boutique run of 200, or slightly more, is sensible. At a unit cost of around \$7.00, books can be sold for \$12.00 or \$13.00, to break even or make a small profit.

Marketing is the major problem. Whereas mainstream publishers have their own networks, you have to make your own contacts.

Most effort should be put into the launching. Later sales through bookshops, if they'll carry your books, is done at a not unreasonable commission of 43%, so that you get little more than the cost of production back from them.

Self-publishing, if you go about it in a systematic and professional manner, is an honourable exercise and a very useful learning experience for a writer.#

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Words Worth

Bugger me!

That mild swear word that generations have used, generally without understanding what they were saying, has been cleared by the powers-that-be, to be acceptable on television.

It always seemed strange that the word for deviant sex was almost acceptable, whereas the word for normal sex was very definitely not. "Bugger" derives from Bulgar, from a time in the twelfth century, when heretics from Bulgaria were saddled with nasty habits as part of religious propaganda, as having "unnatural sex with man and beast."

There is evidence that the convention of having some words set aside as swear words, has lapsed, and we are entering a period of more robust and complete use of language, in Elizabethan vein. Words that were once taboo in mixed company are now used freely by young people of both sexes. The notion that swear words are defined by convention is arguable, but supported by the fact that for many earthy little swear words, usually of Saxon derivation, there is a more or less acceptable equivalent of Norman French derivation, suitable for polite conversation.

Older people will probably never be comfortable with the breaking of taboos of their youth, but they should be broadminded enough to realise that the convention has changed.

I first became aware of it when I was in a position, literally and involuntarily, to overhear the conversation of children whom I knew to be good youngsters from good families. Both sexes freely used words that would have earned punishment for youngsters of my generation. They used them with innocence and lack of force, so that their potency was diminished.

I suppose Shaw started it with Eliza Doolittle in "Pygmalion", and her "Not bloody likely!" It was always a word of problematical value as an oath. I suspect that it had highbrow origins, being adapted from the pre-Shavian theatre where it was used accurately, to vulgar and ironic use in a whole range of offstage situations, especially where it could be applied with alliteration!

The sex-based swear words present something of a puzzle. Why did we use words that describe largely pleasurable and apparently desirable activity in such a negative way? Perhaps it is because the outcomes in primitive society could often be dangerous or very inconvenient.

Some cultures have conventions of "respect language" elements, which are used in talking to your superiors, whom you can therefor disrespect by not using it. There are elements of this in the way the royals are addressed, especially with the risible "highness". Swearing in English has been the opposite, as language that may be used in some company to show disrespect, generally men amongst women, or so-called lower classes amongst their betters. If swearing loses its disrespect language status, then giving verbal offence becomes much harder and requires a great deal more inventive effort!

To close on this interesting and provoking subject, it has occurred to me that three of our common, earthy, little Anglo-Saxon oaths that also describe body functions, are onomatopaeic. Think about it.

("Bugger" also has some claim to be an emergent job description of the clandestine kind.)

Awe, awful & awesome

Awe, (reverential fear or wonder, COD) seems to have gone out of fashion, whilst its derivative, awful, has weakened to be used to denote distaste or mere discomfort. Awesome, on the other hand, is popularly used by the young to denote anything that is mildly wonderful or pleasurable.

The fear has certainly gone out of awe.

Fulsome (Cloying, excessive, disgusting by excess, COD)

There is an apparent yearning for a word to indicate copious merit and "fulsome" is so often wrongly called into service that it will probably acquire new meaning. Commonly sentences are used something like, "So-and-So deserves fulsome praise for his efforts in serving the community", where "fulsome" is intended to be positive, indicating comprehensive or perhaps, "full-on".

(FRANK DEVINE HOSTS A DELIGHTFUL COLUMN ON DERIVATIONS AND MEANINGS IN "THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN".)

BLIMPS AND BLIPS - GOVERNMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE ARTS

(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.

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

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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

Poet Laureate

Australia is without a poet laureate and there are no perceptible moves to appoint one.

We are aware that Les Murray's name is often mentioned in this context but we doubt that after his recent amble through the prime minister's office and mind, that he'd be keen, especially as the government is hellbent on reducing and down-sizing things. Besides, despite his pre-eminence Les does not quite look the part. It is doubtful that when he passes in the street, people think, "That man is probably a poet." On the other hand, the poet laureate of the United States, who is a fine reciter of the works of others as well as his own, or Andrew Motion, the royal poet laureate of the United Kingdom, pass off unmistakably as poetic types. (I FORGOT THE NAME OF THE U.S. PL WHILST WRITING THIS, AND FOR A PANICKY MOMENT, ALSO COULD ONLY REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE OTHER PARTY AS PROFESSOR MOTION, WITH THE CERTAINTY THAT HIS FORENAME IS NOT EDWIN OR EDGAR!)

If looks were a consideration, my vote would go to Tom Shapcott or to another fine poet who looks the part, Roland Leach. This may seem sexist, but I don't know many women poets. If the late, great, beloved Gwen Harwood, she of the cornflower blue eyes, were in contention, she would be a strong candidate.

In any case, I doubt very much that Australia has a government that thinks very much about matters cultural, although fresh from his preamble triumph, John Howard could well be reserving the position for himself when he quits politics.

In the interim, with all humility, we at PixelPapers offer to fill the post in an acting temporary position without monetary remuneration or traditional butt of sack.

Naturally we look to important events on the horizon and speculate with a few lines, ready for the occasion.

GST

Grand strategic tariff!
Great stimulating titillation!

Saintly Peters and John
Toil to empty purses
Of undeserving poor,
Rewarding the rich
Who labour mightily
In God's vineyard
In creating wealth
Offshore shelf companies
And numbered accounts.

Greet the dawning of our
Gross supernatural tithes!

Horrors, we had barely committed our thirteen line tribute to the world's screens, when the news broke that the political hanky panky that is a necessary prelude, was over and the GST is virtually in. The pixels were barely configured into our GST paen!

An acting PL's lot is a sorry one, what with the peccadillos of princelings and politicians and bubbles bursting right royally.

Here goes again! It is, of course, a work in progress, and with apologies to the great Lord Macaulay and his Horatius.

John Howard of Bennelong
By Nine's god he swore
That the rich of Australia
Would suffer tax no more
By the Nine's god he swore it
and named a trysting day
When on the floor of the Senate
He'd have his monetarist way.

We fast forward a few stanzas.

Then up spake doughty Harradine
a Taswegian bold was he
I cannot see your bridge's props

Only an upper span I see
 What's in it for society's poor
 the common working man?
 And down came both Peters,
 Honest John and his magic plan.

More fast forward.

Then up spake Truthful John
 That ambling aspiring bard
 Who'll stand on my magic bridge
 Helping to keep guard?
 I will, spake pretty Peter
 stand guard by thy right knee
 and with honest Peg at t'other leg
 You'll have your GST!

This last stanza scans poorly and lacks something. And besides, the same characters are attacking the city and defending it. Should it be doubty Harradine?

It goes to show how complex these matters are. Perhaps we'll try free verse..

We must also consider that until constitutional matters are amended, it is the duty of the Australian Poet Laureate to take account of royal occasions in the United Kingdom. The ignoble outing of the Countess of Wessex, striking a classical off-the-shoulder pose in the back of a chariot, could be grist for the PL mill, or even the royal nuptials, which we were assured would be low key.

SO, WATCH THIS SPACE, AND IF YOU THINK THAT WE SHOULD GET THE SACK, WRITE TO YOUR LOCAL MEMBER.

Alleged Grave Signs From Nanon. (There is something familiar about some of them.)

On the grave of Ezekial Aikle in East Dalhousie Cemetery, Nova Scotia:

Here lies Ezekial Aikle
 Age 102
 The Good

Die Young.

In a London, England cemetery:

Ann Mann
Here lies Ann Mann,
Who lived an old maid
But died an old Mann.
Dec. 8, 1767

In a Ribbesford, England, cemetery:

Anna Wallace

The children of Israel wanted bread
And the Lord sent them manna,
Old clerk Wallace wanted a wife,
And the Devil sent him Anna.

Playing with names in a Ruidoso, New Mexico, cemetery:

Here lies
Johnny Yeast
Pardon me
For not rising.

Memory of an accident in a Uniontown, Pennsylvania cemetery:

Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake
Stepped on the gas
Instead of the brake.

In a Silver City, Nevada, cemetery:

Here lays Butch,
We planted him raw.
He was quick on the trigger,
But slow on the draw.

A widow wrote this epitaph in a Vermont cemetery:

Sacred to the memory of my husband John Barnes
who died January 3, 1803
His comely young widow, aged 23, has
many qualifications of a good wife, and
yearns to be comforted.

A lawyer's epitaph in England:

Sir John Strange
Here lies an honest lawyer,
And that is Strange.

Someone determined to be anonymous in Stowe, Vermont:

I was somebody.
Who, is no business
Of yours.

Lester Moore was a Wells, Fargo Co. station agent for Naco, Arizona in the
cowboy days of the 1880's. He's buried in the Boot Hill Cemetery in
Tombstone, Arizona (how very appropriate):

Here lies Lester Moore
Four slugs from a 44
No Les No More.

In a Georgia cemetery:

"I told you I was sick!"

John Penny's epitaph in the Wimborne, England, cemetery:

Reader, if cash thou art
In want of any
Dig 4 feet deep
And thou wilt find a Penny.

On Margaret Daniels grave at Hollywood Cemetery Richmond, Virginia:

She always said her feet were killing her
but nobody believed her.

In a cemetery in Hartscombe, England:

On the 22nd of June
- Jonathan Fiddle -
Went out of tune.

Anna Hopewell's grave in Enosburg Falls, Vermont has an epitaph that sounds like something from a Three Stooges movie:

Here lies the body of our Anna
Done to death by a banana
It wasn't the fruit that laid her low
But the skin of the thing that made her go.

Owen Moore in Battersea, London, England:

Gone away
Owin' more
Than he could pay.

Different Ways to Annoy People by Nanon

Leave the photo copier at work set to reduce 200%, extra dark, A3 paper, 99 copies (EXPERIENCE SUGGESTS THAT THERE IS NO NEED FOR CONSCIOUS STRATEGY TO ANNOY OTHER PEOPLE USING COPIERS!)

Sit in your yard pointing a hair drier at passing cars to see if they slow down

If you have a glass eye, tap on it with your pen while talking to others

Sing along at the opera

Insist on keeping your car windshield wipers running in all weather conditions "to keep them tuned up"

Reply to everything someone says with "that's what YOU think"

Practice making fax and modem noises

Highlight irrelevant material in scientific papers and cc. them to your boss

Finish all your sentences with the words "in accordance with prophesy"

Signal that a conversation is over by clamping your hands over your ears

Yell out random numbers while someone is counting

Adjust the tint on your TV so that all the people are green, and insist to others that you "like it that way"

Staple papers in the middle of the page

Publicly investigate just how slowly you can make a croaking noise

Decline to be seated at a restaurant, and simply eat their complimentary mints by the cash register

TYPE ONLY IN UPPER CASE

type only in lower case

Dont use any punctuation either

Buy a large quantity of orange traffic cones and re-route whole streets

Repeat the following conversation a dozen times: "Do you hear that?", "What?" - "Never mind, it's gone now"

As much as possible, skip rather than walk

While making presentations, occasionally bob your head like a parakeet

Ask your co-workers mysterious questions and then scribble the answers in a notebook. Mutter something about "psychological profiles.#

(USE LOWER CASE "I" FOR THE PERSONAL PRONOUN

MAKE SUBMISSIONS IN YOUR OWN INIMITABLE LONGHAND, ETC, ETC.)

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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? What's right with rhyming verse?

Are verbs as good as they used to be?

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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 Australia Council](#) has useful links to other arts agencies but be prepared to wait as graphics mount.

[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.

[Web Wombat](#) is a recommended search engine for Australia.

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/inklins/](#)

The QUOTATIONS HOME PAGE, contains a mass of information at :
<http://www.geocities.com/~spanoudi/quote.html>

FREE NETSCAPE

For downloading the new version, Netscape Communicator 4.6, Netscape has improved its downloading system so that it operates in similar fashion to installing from a disc. Simply type in <Netscape.com> to access their site and follow the directions. It takes about two hours to get the complete update, including a copy of Real Player.

Again, my new software did not gobble up address book, list of bookmarks and correspondence but I have yet to find the improvements.

For some reason or other the program crashed during the first run. As someone once said, (possibly Net. Anon) "The more things change the more they stay the same."

COOL RELIEF

If you are tired of slaving over a hot computer in a heat wave, or like looking at penguins, snow, ice or old huts, for instant mental relief visit Australia's Antarctic stations at

<http://www.antdiv.gov.au/>

Australian Writers Organisations On-line e-mail Addresses: (Please contribute any others that you would like to have listed.)

Australian Society of Authors <asa@asauthors.org.au>

Australian Writers Guild <awgsyd@ozemail.com.au>

(THESE TWO ARE THE PROFESSIONAL AND "UNION" ORGANISATIONS FOR WRITERS OF BOOKS AND SCRIPT, RESPECTIVELY. THEIR FEES ARE HIGH AND THEY MAINLY CATER FOR WRITERS WHO ARE GENERATING INCOME FROM THEIR CRAFT.)

Society of Women Writers (WA) <trudy@iinet.net.au>

Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA writers centre) <fawwa@iinet.net.au>

Peter Cowan Writers Centre (WA writers centre) <nwacowan@iinet.net.au>

New South Wales Writers Centre <nswwc@ozemail.com.au>

Queensland Writers Centre <qldwriters@peg.apc.org>

South Australian Writers Centre <writers@eastend.com.au>

Victorian Writers Centre <writers@vicnet.net.au>

New Zealand Writers Organisations On-line e-mail Addresses:

New Zealand Society of Authors <nzsa@arachna.co.nz> (The Society apparently includes the New Zealand PEN and has six branches.)

New Zealand Author <nza@clear.net.nz> (This the nzsa magazine.)

(Home Page URLs, if available, may often be found by re-jigging the e-mail address:
http://www.(address after @)/~(address before @)/
for example, pixpress@ iinet.net.au becomes http://www.iinet.net.au/~pixpress/)

Contributors

(Published contributors are invited to contribute their details to this section.)

Edel Wignell writes short stories, non-fiction, verse and scripts for adults and children. She has more than 60 published titles, mostly for children, the latest being *The Mighty Sparrow* (Waterford 'Read Along' Series, Electronic Education, USA).

Helen Jean Hagemann, is a student of creative writing at Edith Cowan University as well as a writer and administrator of the Peter Cowan Writers Centre.

Diane Beckingham is a well-known West Australian writer and teacher.

Alec Choate is the doyen of poets in the west, with an extensive record of publication and several books of verse brought out by Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

Kevin Gillam earns his living with his bow as a teacher of music and has had many of his poems published in literary magazines.

Rosanne Dingli has been writing short fiction for over 13 years. And boy, is she tired. (SHE HAS ALSO MANAGED TO SUPPORT HERSELF AS EDITOR, JOURNALIST AND POET AND HAD THE DISTINCTION OF WINNING THE STUART/HADOW SHORT STORY COMPETITION AND ALSO THE HIGHLY COMMENDED AWARD.)

Jim Cornish is a writer of whimsical (and other) poems and co-author of a chapbook with Fran Sbrocchi, an accomplished and prolific writer and poet who has brought out her own book of poems, *Flight Patterns*.

N.Anon has an ancient and honourable lineage. It is, of course, Net Anon!

Advertisements.



"Sappho's Delight", poems by Walter Vivian

\$12.95 posted.

Spring Burning: New and Selected Poems 1967-1997 by

Glen Phillips

Glen is well-known poet and sometime contributor to this magazine. He has enjoyed writing fellowships in Italy and China to draw on for some of his subject matter.

Publisher: Folio/Salt (John Kinsella)

The Wheels of Hama

Collected War Poems by Alec Choate

\$17.50 or \$19.00 posted from 11A Joseph St, West Leederville WA 6007, Ph: (08) 9381 8203

Alec Choate is the doyen of poets in the west, with an extensive record of publication and several books of verse brought out by Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

Brillig

edited by Roland Leach

Brillig is a brilliant little magazine for secondary students. In quality and sophistication, it displays work rivalling that found in some adult literary magazines. The slithy toves produce two issues per year.

Subscription is \$10.00 per annum or \$5.00 singly from Blackwatch, Presbyterian Ladies College, Box 126, COTTESLOE WA 6011.

Not a Proper Shop

Walter Vivian

This nostalgic book of poems would make an ideal gift for a west coaster exiled overseas or interstate. See reviews on PixelPress page. Available at Dymocks Floreat, Dymocks Claremont, Lane Bookshop Claremont, Collins Cottesloe, Bookcaffé Swanbourne and other booksellers.

ISBN 0-9587350-0-X \$10.00

Sudden Alchemy

The winning poems from the prestigious annual Tom Collins Poetry Prize have been compiled and published in this work.

\$24.95 from booksellers or FAWWA

Dancing On The Freeway

By Ethel Webb Bundell (LMP - Aus \$15.00)

Ethel Webb Bundell spins a tale of heartbreak and despair, which may be too familiar for some in *Dancing On The Freeway*. The story centres around Vee, who is coming to terms with the tragic loss, two years earlier, of her husband and baby son. She finds a dangerous kind of solace in the arms of Grant, who was once a brilliant journalist, but is now reduced to a pathetic drunk.

The issue of women who love too much is explored throughout, as Vee gathers her strength to begin the long awaited journey back to reality. A place long since vacated by Grant, who is more or less, in constant hallucinatory state as the story progresses.

In most films, or any other medium which tries depicting alcoholism, the worst case scenario for a drunk is to have him or her (mostly Him) driving down the street, and having a fender bender with another vehicle. This person's alcohol problem is then amazingly cured by this incident, or a few harsh words from loved ones. Bundsell therefore, strives to expose the side of alcoholism, unknown to many, a side which exemplifies how low "rock bottom" can be for sufferers of this disease. As she stated in the novel's introductory note, "I wrote this because, at the time, I felt the literature and information about alcoholism was far too hopeful.

Extremely well written, Bundell's story gives the reader's heart a good tugging with some wry humour injected along the way.

Chi Tran in *New Readers World Book Reviews*.

Flight Patterns

A collection of poems by Frances Arnett Sbrocchi, principally on the theme of migration and immigration. Available from Fran <naisburi@iinet.net.au> or

The Well Bookshop @ \$12.00.

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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