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BOOKS RECEIVED AND BRIEF REVIEWS

Brenda Niall, *Martin Boyd*. Australian Bibliographies. General Editor: Grahame Johnston. OUP, 1977. pp. 137. \$4.50.

The third in this new series of Australian Bibliographies, preceded by Alan Lawson, *Patrick White*, and Fred Lock and Alan Lawson, *Australian Literature — A Reference Guide*, reviewed in *LiNQ*, Vol. 5 No. 3, 1977. Brenda Niall's bibliography includes published material on Martin Boyd to December 1976 and references for a novel, early poems, short stories, articles, letters and book reviews previously little known. The bibliography contains carefully researched, useful material and is well set out.

Edward Mycue, *Damage within the Community*. Panjandrum Press, San Francisco, 1977. \$US3.00.

A collection of sensitive, fierce poems rising from the poet's experience of the damage within the community caused by the American Vietnam involvement, and the reluctant cynicism and desperate search for ideals generated by the nature of the involvement. Many verses prompted in America, Australia and elsewhere by the Vietnam experience have been self-indulgent and facile. These poems by Edward Mycue are of very different quality. Clever, ugly and competent illustrations by Richard Steger add another level of art, and other resonances, to the poems. This collection is recommended for its strength and depth.

Alan Gould, *Icelandic Solitaries*; Kevin Hart, *The Departure*; Martin Johnston, *The Sea-Cucumber*. Paperback Poets, Second Series. University of Queensland Press, 1978. Cloth \$3.95, Paper \$1.95 each.

Those who remember a time when the arrival of a new volume of poetry, be it ever so slim, was a major literary event, must feel both elated and overwhelmed by the constant issue of books of poems from Australian presses in recent years. First responses tend to be enthusiastic rather than critical and one recommends volumes with more heartiness than discrimination. This is all to the good, as the best of Australian poetry reflects events and attitudes in a way that puts them into a form and perspective.

The first discovery of new work is not the time for definitive rejection or acceptance. Gould, Hart and Johnston are not perhaps 'typical' Australian writers, as all have lived for some years outside Australia, and their poems present for the most part an external perspective on our closer interests.

Their work is sound and refreshing. In form the poems are remarkably similar: rounded, controlled, like intelligent conversation. Their images are an enlightenment. Nothing is meretricious. Their poetry has imaginative perception that not only says something interesting at its first level but digs down to deeper roots, to fundamental ideas and atavistic feelings. Sometimes each poet writes self-consciously as a poet, but it is a profound narcissism: the poet looks into the depths of the pool, and sees more than his own reflection:

See
 where this skald
 flees
 among the gorsed and windy barns
 hunted
by the swords of heaven.

See
 among the folk
 all laughing
this skald
 can't think straight,
the laughs
the fire-dance
 they make him squint.
He ogles all
 with an unbrothering stare.

from 'Of Eyvind at Grimm's house and elsewhere'
by Alan Gould.

And

Poetry makes nothing happen — you said that
 of Yeats, and touched a nerve.
Even so, like a mirror you had
 to make another world
 from what the world gave you.
Some mirrors will distort, but the best
 (like you) will simply re-
direct the light and show the face that we

can feel but never really know until
 we look. Mirrors remain,
and are not affected by what they see

from 'In Memoriam W.H. Auden'
by Kevin Hart.

And

None of this, you see, will really go into writing,
it takes time to leech things into one's sac of words.
The bloated sea-cucumber, when touched, spews up its entrails
as though that were a defence; my father's old friend
the gentle little poet Wen Yi-tuo, who collected chess sets
and carved ivory seals in his filthy one-room hut,
is gutted one night and flung into the Yangtze.

from 'The Sea-Cucumber' (for Ray Croke)
by Martin Johnson.

Different ideas about poetry and its makers, each persuasive and each made by a poet. These poets in the second series of Paperback Poets from the University of Queensland Press are well worth attention.

Nigel Roberts, *In Casablanca for the Waters*. Wild & Woolley, Sydney, 1977. \$3.95.

A set of witty writings, some of which succeed in saying something and some of which do not. This kind of verse does well at poetry readings and sounds like the best moments of small group conversation. Cover drawings and photographs fill out the scene, which is local to Sydney but reminiscent of brighter undergraduate and adolescent preoccupations and attitudes everywhere and anytime. There is much to be said for these preoccupations and attitudes, and I value them. Unfortunately, however, people who write poetry like the following, unless it's e.e. cummings himself, and people who like to read it, tend to over-react in later years and become the stodgiest boors/bores:

a poet is a man/who
camphors his chest/&
inhales/the mendicant air
of himself.

from 'As Bruce Beaver does.'

Well, we all have our off days.

Rudi Krausmann, *The Water Lily and Other Poems*. Makar Press, 1977.
Publisher's cost 75c, usual retail price \$1.20.

Like Alan Gould, Kevin Hart and Martin Johnston, Rudi Krausmann brings much to Australian poetry because he looks at our culture with the perspective of a poet who was born and lived in Austria, coming here in 1966. Typical of his irony and comprehension are the shapely, epigrammatic poems from 'Maps,' where 'australia' is characterized:

in the Opera House enclosed by sharks
or in the bush plagued by flies and fires

between the banal and the grotesque
the innocent and the raw face

how to identify
and keep pace?

advance or waltz
anyhow, a difficult state

The final local joke at our nationality problem is more piquant because it is juxtaposed with the poetic epigram on 'austria':

in the park
Mozart still holds the violin

a charming excuse
for living in the past

a glorious moustache
is now covered with whipped cream

unfortunately the sun rises
in the gloomy east

This kind of wit is founded, as was Oscar Wilde's, on truth and compassion. Krausmann also contemplates the poet, his gaze directed somewhere higher than the navel:

although
I am nobody
in a shallow river
although
I can't offer
a paradise
sentences & smiles
reason & bridges
I do not fail
to cast a tiny shadow
in the snow.

This extract is from 'The Water Lily,' whose epigraph is "Poetry does not matter."

What is particularly interesting in Krausmann's poetry, as in his play *Everyman* produced earlier this year at the Nimrod Downstairs in Sydney, is the compassion that neither blurs nor is undercut by the irony.

Technically this is a tone very difficult to create and maintain in writing, and the mind that gives rise to it is quite rare. The tendency too often is to move towards a naive romanticism toughened by a naive brutality sentimentalizing action and heroics, or towards a fixed, barren and passionless cynicism.

These finely lined poems are chiselled from life rather than honed by experience. They contrast well with the prose poems *From Another Shore*, Krausmann's first book written in English, published by Wild and Woolley in 1975.

John Manifold, *Collected Verse*. University of Queensland Press. Cloth \$9.99, paper \$4.95.

Those who first encountered 'The Tomb of Lt. John Learmonth A.I.F.' in school poetry books will find this collection of great interest. For many Queenslanders the poetry of John Manifold was their first realization that poets could be social critics of contemporary myths and mores. To this role of the poet, Manifold added the recording and writing of folk ballad.

Rodney Hall, *J.S. Manifold, An Introduction to the Man and his Work*. University of Queensland Press, 1978. Cloth \$9.95.

Rodney Hall's book allows Manifold to speak for himself and the result is a valuable and informative study. As a close friend of Manifold, and a poet and musician with many similar interests, Hall can present Manifold sympathetically, and his presentation clarifies many of the complexities that form the background to reading the kind of poetry Manifold writes. The history of Manifold and his family is a commentary on the history of aspects of Australian settlement, and illustrates the classic movement of sensibility from social status and elite cultural background to socialism and the culture of the people.

John Manifold's work will be discussed in a later issue of *LINQ*.

The Harold Kesteven Prize Poems, ed. Rolfe Justin Bradley. "The Cultural Centre Qld." \$3.00 plus 50c postage. Obtainable from Mrs Fay Foster, 15 Yarawa Street, Kenmore. Q. 4069.

This issue of *The Harold Kesteven Prize Poems* contains the winning and commended poems submitted for this prize, 1970-1976.

There is something thought-provoking about the concept of this little book — not so little, one hundred pages — and about its contents. Harold Kesteven was a former London journalist, turned farmer and artist, and a lover and promoter of literature. The introduction suggests that the

judges of these poems tend to look for affirmative, forward-looking and hopeful poetry and avoid the kind of poetry which reveals the writers as "weak conformists, not showing us a better possible world, but almost gloating over the irrationalities and ignorance of this one, or wallowing in their own neurotic miseries because of it" (p.4).

Nice, escapist, poetry, trying to be lovely? Is that what they want?

Not exactly. Perhaps the editor is reacting a little too harshly against contemporary poets, forgetting that Keats, the foremost English poet of beauty, defined poets as "those to whom the miseries of the world/Are misery, and will not let them rest." But the poems included in this collection are not safely platitudinous observations written by poets who refuse to look beneath the comfort of their platitudes.

Their faith and optimism are often hard won and certainly, in some cases, tenuously and bravely held:

Shadows

appear like rain wrinkles on darkening windscreens

and gentle trees

become negro sentinels

and the terror of small children

and ominous night sounds send men hurrying to light switches . . .

Peter H. Meggitt 'Sunday Afternoon'
1976 First Prize Poem

Poems like Patricia Shaw's 'Remember the Rain,' Barry G. Shield's 'Australis,' Ingrid Moedt's 'Small Things,' and Stuart Cunningham's 'Organ' suggest that to feel secure, to have faith, to seek tranquility and to accept the dynamic unity of life are more than ways of avoiding the harder struggle. If these poets have found for the time their centres of rest, they are not necessarily condemning those who are still fretted by misery.

From another direction, S.M. Acworth's 'Waterlogged Thoughts on a Derelict'

maybe he should be declared a national park

or a political issue

is a well-written, unsentimental comment on those who always select the most fashionable misery to be miserable about, overlooking immediate human concerns.

It is important that poetry should be written and published by those who do not have poetry as their vocation and profession. Perhaps much poetry, whether by Milton, Matthew Arnold or the boy next door, disturbs and harasses the reader even while he acknowledges its strength and beauty or grotesqueness. The Harold Kesteven poems do not disturb or harass in that way.

As a Queenslander, however, I do find them disturbing. The editor believes that this collection belongs to the minority of poetry and that here we have the positive counterbalance to the poetry that looks "back-

ward and inward in horror." Without accepting fully his judgement of much contemporary poetry, I feel that we are not greatly given to looking backwards and inwards with either horror or happiness. The Harold Kesteven poems express very adequately the majority attitudes and feelings. They make their mark as poetry adequate to the deep need of their community in their shape and style and lack of complacency.

Image magazine. Vol. 2, Nos. 1 & 2, 1978. Published and edited by Barry O'Donohue, 18 Durama Street, Rochedale. Q. 4123. \$2.00 annual subscription.

The editorial says that "good poetry begets understanding because it is for other people as well as the author, and the quality of a poem is in direct proportion to its ability to convey to the reader all feelings etc."

This definition excludes much bad poetry that huddles its meaning within its niggard bosom, but would allow in much obvious verse conveying banal meaning and feeling. Nevertheless the poems in these issues of *Image* are on the whole reassuringly thoughtful and well-turned, as well as intelligible. *Image* deserves the support of Queenslanders especially, for its intentions are good and its standards set out to challenge.

Aspect, Art and Literature. Vol. 3/1-2, January 1978. Sydney. Recommended price \$4.50.

Aspect, assisted by the Visual Arts Board and the Literature Board, continues to present poetry, prose and art work very stylishly. The material is intrinsically interesting and its cultural and sociological value is high. This double issue is given to the work derived from Papua New Guinea.

Derek Whitelock, *Adelaide 1836-1976: A History of Difference*. University of Queensland Press, 1977. Cloth \$19.95.

Merval Hoare, *Norfolk Island: An Outline of Its History, 1774-1977*. 2nd edition. University of Queensland Press. Paper \$6.50.

Two attractive books from the University of Queensland Press with historical and sociological importance. Present Australian concern with tracing our history in several art and cultural media has resulted in work of the kind represented here, which is readable, popular and well documented. These books will be reviewed in later issues of *LINO*.

Nick Joaquin, *Tropical Gothic*. Asian and Pacific Writing 2. General Editor: Michael Wilding. University of Queensland Press, 1972. Cloth \$9.00, paper \$2.95.

A collection of nine stories written between 1946 and 1966 by one of the leading Filipino writers, this book may be recommended to readers making their first acquaintance with writing in English in the Philippines, and to those whose interest is specifically in the short story and novella forms. Joaquin's work will be discussed in the next issue of *LiNQ*.

