

## Book Reviews

Patrick White, *The Eye of the Storm*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1973. pp. 608. £2.95.

In the year in which Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, one might wonder what kind of disservice to literature Patrick White has committed to have been awarded *his* Prize. Several disservices have been suggested in criticism of the latest novel, *The Eye of the Storm*: longwindedness, mannerism, obsession with the gross and physical, a general falling off from the earlier novels — criticisms which have been made of everything since *Voss* and which, if regarded as valid, are as true of this one as of the others. White does not change his ways. The subject matter, the imagination which shapes it, and the style which expresses it, remain much the same; evolution is slow, and White does not pursue novelty. He is one of a handful of writers (which includes Dickens, Dostoevsky and James) about whose individual works it is possible to have numerous and specific misgivings, yet whose total work grows by slow accretion until it occupies a space large enough to reduce most criticism of detail within that space to inconsequence. It is possible in White's territory to wish large parts rethought, rewritten, removed entirely, and yet to realize, if one values him at all, that the parts are not separable, from each other or from the whole. Such a realization quite probably threatens critical discrimination. It is certainly one which White himself has arrived at with difficulty, since discrimination, carried to its farthest point in his doctrine of the Elect, has informed his vision of things from the beginning.

White's territory is Australia. As a continent it is too old for criticism and as a society too young. Yet it is on this unpromising "subject" that he has fastened, determined to force upon it, or from it, moral and metaphysical structures which Europe has long since shrugged off and which reappear to disturb the inhabitants of the you-beaut country when they least want it. One feels, poor Australia. As if termites and a guilty conscience about the abos weren't enough — and now to be visited by a sense of unwanted significance. White is Australia's scourge and saviour. Its fascination for him is thus endless. It is in his hands a caricature of itself and a symbol of everything else, and though White's relation to it as "subject" is too complex for easy definition, it might be suggested by the passage from the present novel in which the central character, a blind and dying 86-year-old woman, is maliciously painted and cosmeticized by her nurse: "From the doorway Flora Manhood looked back, afraid of what she might have created. Old Betty Hunter's green and silver mask glittered and glimmered in the depths of the room. Nobody could accuse you of malice when you had only emphasized the truth." White's novels are full of artists, of one kind or another.

In the attempt to come to terms with their "subjects," they become locked in endless cycles of creation, distortion, and even assassination, when the recognition of truth occurs. White is only the last of a series of assassins.

The note of the assassin has always been strong in White's novels. It has been detected mainly in his savaging of innocent stupidity, and in his obsession with the flaws and functions of the body, which has been notorious for so long that it should not now occasion either comment or surprise. The real assassinations in White are not to be found in the "social satire." They are the acts of love and destruction (often self-love and self-destruction) by which characters are beaten and reduced until the masks of the flesh are abandoned. The peculiar ability of so many of White's characters to inhabit various forms before the last refinement is a recognition of the many manifestations of the physical through which the spiritual is glimpsed — and the recognition that, in the end, all the physical must be destroyed: "If you could have said: I am neither compleat wife, sow, nor crystal, and must take many other shapes before I finally set, or before I am, more probably, shattered." Thus White's endless preoccupation with textures, the minute examinations of surfaces for signs of dissolution. Such signs are White's stigmata, they mark out those favored for destruction and are seals and badges of admission to a select company which he has gathered together since Theodora Goodman went through her successive dissolutions in *The Aunt's Story*. Since then more riders have been admitted to the chariot, in twos, fours, or singly — the latest, and in some ways the least likely, being Elizabeth Hunter. But that she is, for all her rapacious egotism, one of the elect, is not in doubt. Her equally rapacious daughter "was saddened, also, to think it might never be given to her to enter the eye of the storm" — an experience of her mother's which is the focal point of the novel, and White's account of which is one of the finest things he has written.

Elizabeth Hunter's experience at the eye of the storm does not outwardly change her. She is still, at the end of her life, a contriving egotist, in combat with her appalling children, exacting tribute from the weaker people who tend her, clinging to jewels she can no longer see. Behind the painted face and the blind eye is the knowledge of that other eye of which she was once, herself, the center: "All else was dissolved by this lustrous moment made visible in the eye of the storm, and would have remained so, if she had been allowed to choose. She did not feel she could endure further trial by what is referred to as Nature, still less by that unnaturally swollen, not to say diseased conscience which had taken over during the night from her defector will. She would lie down rather, and accept to become part of the shambles she saw on looking behind her: no worse than any she had caused in life in her relationships with human beings. In fact, to be received into the sand along with other deliquescent flesh, strewn horsehair, knotted iron, the broken chassis of an upturned car, and last echoes of a hamstruck piano, is the most natural conclusion." To be will-less; to allow oneself to be received; to become part of a shambles — in short, to abjure judgment and dis-

crimination when everything else in the management of one's life demands them. Such a condition or state of being destroys, for the moment, the desire to create or impose. It is thus an impossible state for an artist, and White's artist figures significantly do not achieve it. The only other character in *The Eye of the Storm* who shares Elizabeth Hunter's experience, though she knows nothing of it and would probably not understand if told, is the night-nurse, Greek-born Mary de Santis, with whom Elizabeth Hunter is "frequently united in a worship of something too vast and selfless to describe." The relationship between the two is described by White with a kind of intense reticence not apparent in the handling of the other characters, many of whom it seems he cannot, after a while, be bothered with. The Hunter-de Santis relationship is a continuance of those established in *Riders in the Chariot*, and is described in the same way: "Only yourself and de Santis are real. Only de Santis realizes that the splinters of a mind make a whole piece. Sometimes at night your thoughts glitter; even de Santis can't see that, only yourself: not see, but know yourself to be a detail of the greater splintering." The cabbalistic imagery is more naturally assimilated in this novel — is in fact only a part of the pattern of center and circumference in which all the incidents of *The Eye of the Storm* are finally arranged.

Whether or not the latest novel marks any advance in White's art can only be decided by the reader who sees this art in terms of linear progression. Absent from this book are the imposed religious and aesthetic orders of *Riders in the Chariot* and *The Vivisector*, which seemed finally to thwart the purposes of those novels. The order here, like that of *The Solid Mandala*, is defined by the title and central symbol. Taking up much of *The Eye of the Storm* are the histories of Elizabeth Hunter's actor-son and princess-daughter who, as the novel begins, are returning from Europe for the kill, and who end up destroying each other. Also Elizabeth Hunter's sizeable domestic staff — a gallery of White characters, several of whom are examined in close, punishing detail. That large sections seem peripheral is at least partly accounted for by the image of the cyclone itself — a still, undifferentiated eye which it is impossible for White the novelist to see with, or even say very much about; and a mass of surrounding circumstance, all incident and appearance, about which he continues to say a great deal. The balance between the two is not evenly maintained, but that they are ultimately dependent on each other is as clear in this novel as it has always been in his work. White's territory, like the cyclone and like the continent itself, is a crowded periphery around a still center into which few enter and where even fewer remain.

A. F. Bellette

*The Next Revolution?*

Murray Edmond, *Entering the Eye*; Dennis List, *Pathways into the Brain*; Hone Tuwhare, *Sap-Wood & Milk*; *Cave*, nos. 3 & 4 (February & November 1973) — all published by The Cave-man Press, Box 1458, Dunedin, New Zealand. n.p.

Several years ago I was flattered to receive from two young New Zealand poets a request to write an introduction to a projected anthology, *The Next Revolution*. The book never happened, but there are signs that the revolution is on: e.g., one or two of the publications of Sam Hunt's Bottle Press; the publishing of Alister Taylor (responsible for Tim Shadbolt's *Bullshit and Jellybeans*, which caused such a furore down there a couple of years ago); a number of new magazines, including *Cave*.

Since one of its editors wrote to me that it is modelled somewhat on *Tuatara*, I am interested to see how *Cave* is developing, and in particular that it presents itself as an international magazine. For nearly two decades after the Second World War New Zealand writing was hagridden by nationalism and by Auckland-Wellington factionalism. It is no mere coincidence that Louis Johnson, Fleur Adcock, and a good many other writers left New Zealand during the 1960s. As one who, back around 1963 or so, tried to engage the work of Olson and Creeley to the New Zealand scene, I am delighted by Murray Edmond's remark in his essay "The Idea of the Poet" (*Cave* no. 4) that "poets living in New Zealand must cease to be concerned with New Zealand poetry, New Zealand literature and New Zealand publishing as such. These are secondary concerns. Our world and our civilisation especially has no business with such nationalism." How heartily one agrees! In some form, the statement has been made many times over the years, but one senses that now it can have positive effects. There's a new wave of New Zealand poets and they seem largely to be free of the parochialism of the recent past. *Cave* is open to the opposite sort of weakness. In format it resembles the British *Second Aeon* and *Poetry Review*. *Cave* reaches out for international contributors, but I hope will reach beyond William Wantling and the ubiquitous Bukowski, good enough in their way but not the best to be had. More to the point, New Zealand obviously has a fresh crop of talented writers, such as Ian Wedde, Alan Loney, Bill Manhire, Murray Edmond. All these, and others, are doing work which comes from a strengthening tradition, and they can all see beyond their own parish.

The reviews and essays in *Cave* are good, thoughtful, perceptive work (though I feel a little wry about the witty dismissal of my friend Kendrick Smithyman's latest book, *Earthquake Weather*. I haven't seen the book itself) and the magazine's presentation is a welcome change from the "ghastly good taste" of the old *Landfall*.

There is a tendency to overvalue the work of Hone Tuwhare, presumably because he is a Maori poet. His work's chief strength comes from its complete non-literariness. *Sap-Wood & Milk* is a lighter weight book than Tuwhare's *No Ordinary Sun*, but it reveals a poet enviably at ease with himself:

If only I could move from this bloody pedestal I'd show  
the long-hairs how to knock out a tune on the souped-up  
guitar, my mere quivering, my *taiaha* held at the high port.  
And I'd fix the ripe *kotiros* too with their mini-*pupiu*-ed  
bums twinkling: yeah!

Tuwhare's work is limber rather than dense. He carries his serious concern with international politics quite lightly, has a nice touch of irony, and makes good use of the technique of under statement. *Sap-Wood & Milk* is embellished by Ralph Hotere's graphics, which have a warmth of line and tone new to me in his work.

Murray Edmond's *Entering the Eye* shows awareness of the New York school such as Berrigan, Warsh, Waldman (in Edmond's "Night Shift" poems). Fully alive to his own scene, as his group of Grafton poems shows, he is also conscious that Olson and Creeley do not live on another planet. As a poet 25 years old or so Edmond, at this point, seems somewhat comparable to the young Baxter. He has less grace, through perhaps a clearer head:

What is it they are digging up  
with such bravado in the gully?  
Yellow metal scoops & scrapes a surface,  
steps out a road, artery of desire,  
stream of illusion, a certain sword  
thrust through the gully's broken crutch.

He takes similar areas of experience to Peter Bland, but his sense of place and of the confined life of suburbia includes the possibility of escape routes through inner space, that at least there is an answer to be waiting for. One possible answer is already there, in the promising amplitude of the poems.

Edmond in one poem says, "Not even change is constant/but change is the only necessity." Dennis List has a poem called "The Necessity of Chaos," which his note tells us is "a protest poem for the simple-minded." The parallel in book titles is interesting, too, — for Edmond's *Entering the Eye* List has *Pathways into the Brain*. Self-realization as fulcrum and focus, this too is a change. Gone is the academic subservience to Eliot's dictum about the separation of the man who suffers and the mind which creates, a dictum followed, most harmfully by New Zealand critics and reviewers in the 1950s and early 1960s. List's is a most engaging book, less forceful than Edmond's but with more charm. Influenced by rock and pop lyrics, he provides disarming commentaries on each poem and has some intriguing notions, such as the Ethnological (parallel to Botanical) Gardens. Here are a poem and commentary (in the book they are on facing pages):

*The Camels are Coming*

Written June, 1967, published in *Argot*, March, 1969.

This is full of serendipitous misprints in the original version—for example, *profustion* is so much better than *profusion* that I couldn't bear to change it back again. As for "wild oats," I can't remember if this is the written equivalent of thinking aloud, an obscure reference to Titus Oates, or a mixture of *oases* and *dates*. It doesn't matter now. "John the Baptist" refers, in particular, to the painting by Bosch.

*The Camels are Coming*

If all the Arabs were abolished  
 think of the wild camels  
     the wild dates  
     the wild oates  
 the wild profustion of Arabia  
 without those bearded, restless beatniks,  
 Call your camel and hundreds of  
 bears giraffes heliothrix  
 pouring from the oases  
 Onagers and quaggas at your doorstep,  
 A graceful quandry of quans neighing  
 in delight, at John the Baptist  
 grinning by the desert  
 at his unfeathered friends.

Light fingered, light-headed, this is its own thing. Nearest to it among earlier poets is Smithyman, but it carries on (and off) a whole inconsequential, faintly surrealist world, very fresh and so much an escape from "N.Z. lit." that it adds a whole new range of possibility to New Zealand poetry. Edmond also opens new ways. Best of all, the people around the Caveman Press seem to have a self-certainty and a feeling of mutual involvement which are genuinely re-invigorating.

Mike Doyle

*Books Received*

- BLISSET, WILLIAM, VAN FOSSEN, R. W., PATRICK, JULIAN, eds., *A Celebration of Ben Jonson*. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974. pp. 194. \$8.50.
- BOUYSSOU, ROLAND, *Les Poetes-Combattants Anglais de la Grande Guerre*. Toulouse: Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1972. pp. 464. n.p.
- BROPHY, ELIZABETH BERGEN, *Samuel Richardson: The Triumph of Craft*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974. pp. 131. \$7.25.
- CHANDRA, G. S. SHARAT, *April in Nanjangud*. London: London Magazine editions, 1971. pp. 64, 60 p.
- COLIE, ROSALIE L., FLAHIFF, F. T., eds., *Some Facets of King Lear: Essays in Prismatic Criticism*. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974. pp. 237. \$15.00.
- CRAIK, T. W., ed., *Minor Elizabethan Tragedies*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1974. pp. 285. £2.95 (hardbound), £1.50 (paperback).

- DENHAM, ROBERT D., *Northrop Frye: An Enumerative Bibliography*. Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1974. pp. 142. \$5.00.
- FIELDING, HENRY, *Jonathan Wild and The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1974. pp. 305, 80 p.
- FIELDING, HENRY, *A Journey from This World to the Next*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1974. pp. 144. £1.50 (hardbound), 70 p. (paperback).
- FOWLER, SANDRA, *In The Shape of Sun*. Tel-Aviv: Shalom Publications, 1972, 1973. pp. 34. \$1.25.
- FURNESS, R. S., *Expressionism: The Critical Idiom Series*. London: Methuen; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973. pp. 101, £1.20 (hardbound), 55 p. (paperback).
- GADO, FRANK, ed., *First Person: Conversations on Writers & Writing*. Don Mills: Burns & MacEachern; Schenectady: Union College Press, 1973. pp. 159. \$10.95.
- GIFFORD, DON and SEIDEMAN, ROBERT J., *Notes for Joyce: An Annotation of James Joyce's Ulysses*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; New York: Dutton, 1974. pp. 554. \$11.95.
- GORDIMER, NADINE. *The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing*. Braamfontein: Spro-Cas/Ravan, 1973. pp. 76. R 2.00.
- HALL, ROBERT A. JR., *The Comic Style of P. G. Wodehouse*. Hamden: Archon Books, 1974. pp. 147. \$8.50.
- IVASK, IVAR, ed., *The Perpetual Present: The Poetry and Prose of Octavio Paz*, Don Mills: Burns & MacEachern; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973. pp. 157. \$10.25.
- JENSMA, WOPKO, *Sing for our Execution*. Johannesburg: Ophir/Ravan, 1973. pp. 123. n.p.
- JUMP, JOHN D., *The Ode: The Critical Idiom Series*. London: Methuen; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973. pp. 67. £1.20 (hardbound), 55 p. (paperback).
- MACDONALD, ALASTAIR, *Shape Enduring Mind*. New York: Vantage Press, 1974. pp. 98. \$3.75.
- ROBERTS, CHARLES, G. D., *Selected Poetry and Critical Prose*, W. J. Keith, ed., Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974. pp. 326. \$5.95.
- SCOBIE, STEPHEN, *The Birken Tree*. Edmonton: Tree Frog, 1973. pp. 80. \$3.00.
- SMIDT, KRISTIAN, *The Importance of Recognition: Six Chapters on T. S. Eliot*. Thomso, 1973. pp. 95. n.p.
- STIGEN, TERJE, *An Interrupted Passage*, Amanda Langemo, trans. Boston: Twayne, 1974. pp. 261. \$8.50.
- VOSS, ARTHUR, *The American Short Story*. Don Mills: Burns & MacEachern; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973. pp. 399. \$9.25.