

Nicholas Hasluck, The Bellarmine Jug - a novel, Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, Vic., 1984, \$5.95 Australian r.r.p.

David Malouf, Harland's Half Acre, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, U.K., 1984, \$6.95 Australian r.r.p.

These two books, very different in style and subject matter, are nevertheless both concerned with ~~what the coming of Europeans to the new world of the East, and what they make of that new world and what it in turn makes of them.~~ But whereas Malouf explores his concerns through the life of one man and the generations of family and friends who frame him, Hasluck ~~explores~~ ^{weaves} ~~his~~ ^{around} themes through ~~the focus of~~ an episode of a couple of weeks duration at the Grotius Institute in postwar Holland. Hasluck's work unfolds, revealing layer on layer of human design, level after level in the complex patterns of history. Malouf tunnels deeper and deeper into one man's experience, viewing it now from one point, now from another, but always ~~seeking~~ seeking that final single vision which will reveal the truth of it all, but which is of course always withheld. The events of the second world war and the subsequent threat of nuclear destruction reverberate through each novel, and in each there is a sense that the author is pondering deeply the issues of freedom and commitment, violence and creation, which hang on their characters' every action, and of which tyranny and war are but particular expressions.

David Malouf's Harland's Half Acre is, at one level, quite simply the ^{Frank Harland,} story of [^] ~~a boy,~~ ^{fourth} ~~apparently this~~ generation Irish-Australian descendant of the first settlers at Killarney, in southern Queensland, who is brought up by an aunt and later by his father, moves to Brisbane to learn the techniques of art, and then wanders around Queensland as a near derelict, painting all the time, until in old age, now recognised in the south and wealthy, he settles as a hermit to paint out his life on Moreton Island. But Malouf gives us very little of this story as a chronicle. Only in the first section, 'Killarney', do we get a direct narrative of Harland's life, and even ^{Malouf emphasizes} ~~here it~~ not so much the events as ^{that} the way Harland is brought into consciousness, the way his life is created for him, ~~on which Malouf lays his emphasis.~~ ^{that} This section ends during the Depression, when ^{loses his job and} Harland commences his wanderings as a painter.

Childhood and youth create in Harland those elements which constitute his life as an artist. His mother dies six months after he is born, and when his father remarries Frank is sent to live with an uncle and aunt, who receive him with affection but without warmth. The highlights of his life during this time are the visits of his father, a compulsive romantic and storyteller, who creates ~~his~~ past and ~~his~~ family for the child who has been removed from them.

can from the product of his work. His father, for all his charm, lives only for himself, and thus helps to precipitate the tragedies which affect the other brothers, yet survives them untouched. Like Frank's nephew, the father remains true to himself, the one expressing all charm, the other sensitivity. Because they are true to themselves, do nothing against their grain, they fail to create anything, ~~including~~ the full human beings they might have become. Malouf thus presents us with the opposite of the romantic image of the artist who becomes, giving us instead the ~~image of the~~ existential image of the individual creating himself from the structures made available in his circumstances.

This theme is developed by the contrasts among the characters in the other families with which Frank comes in contact. In fact, after the opening sequence, it is largely through their eyes, and particularly through the words of Phil Vernon, only child in a savagely competitive matriarchal family, that we follow Frank's career, which serves as touchstone and measure for these other lives. Each ^{of the novel's five} sequence ends with a death and an act of violence, which destroy any security and hopes which have been built up and ~~force~~ force the characters to travel on in search of their fate. At the end of the first, Frank has a vision or hallucination - which may in fact be an actual attack by metho drinkers - which leaves him drained yet ^{finally} detached from common humanity. At the end of the second the unity of generations in which Phil has been living is ruptured by the death of his grandfather and his grandmother's savage attack on his mother. The third - chronologically earlier - ends with the ~~suicidal~~ suicidal shooting of the couple from whom Frank has learned how to ~~survive~~ survive the savagery of the twentieth century. The fourth ends with the suicide of Frank's nephew, destroying the illusions that he could buy back family, country, continuity, and ~~precipitating~~ precipitating the final vision which sends him to the island where he makes in paint the only land which he can truly own or give to others.

Yet Malouf's novel does not present a world in which art provides the only answer to destruction. When Phil Vernon as a child first sees Harland's paintings he recognises that they open the way into a world beyond the immediacy of frustration and suffering. When he sees his final exhibition he ~~recognises~~ ^{recognises} that the works were ~~the made things among the things of~~ "the made things among the things of natural or accidental growth", but also "part of another nature, not only his . . . an unknown language, of struggles, triumphs, defeats, rites of passage, common loss; the history of a different star." But he also realizes "the immense distance I felt between the man I had known and the dweller on that star, whose loneliness I had barely touched and had understood only as I translated it into my own terms." Yet in that realization Vernon creates a truth in his own life. Others ~~make~~ make similar truths, establish for themselves the order which takes ~~from~~ what the creator has made and ~~with~~ ^{from} it make their own lives. In Harland's words, ~~the~~ "The creator is responsible for what he makes, not for what others make of it. . . We make our own lives. We're the ones who have made the world." (p.83) Thus Phil's father makes his world through practical compassion and through the energy with which he builds works of art from his exhibits of fruit and vegetables at the — annual show; his Aunt Ollie makes order with her daily service of pots and pans in the kitchen; Frank's brother belatedly creates it when he opens his ramshackles house to Maoist students and makes them his family. These people may not be artists, but they combine Frank Harland's qualities of work, compassion and an openness to the world. Those who, like his father and nephew, or Phil's other aunts, merely cultivate their own sensitivities, remain unfinished human beings.

Malouf in this novel is continuing the quest of his earlier works to discover what justifies our lives, what it is for which we need, what a human being needs. Unlike Patrick White, whose novels make a similar quest, he discovers it not in a transcendental truth which we glimpse through suffering and awareness, but in a truth which, while it transcends our suffering, is made rather than given.

Hasluck's novel, by contrast, is concerned much more with how we keep alive principles of honesty, justice and decency in a world, ^h whether that of the seventeenth or ^{of} the twentieth century, which is characterised by "Scientific breakthroughs. Subversion. Carnage. Riches from the new world causing inflation in the old. Professions of faith by conquistadores masking a lust for El Dorado. Rival doctrines tearing countries, and even families, apart." (142) The battleground of his novel is the Grotius Institute, named after the man who attempted to bring the sanity of ^{universal} legal principles to this turbulent world, but who saw his work applied to justify Dutch imperialism, and who lived out his life in patriotic exile after the failure of his attempt to conciliate ^{competing} ~~religious~~ religious legalistic fanaticisms. Similarly, the Institute ~~which~~ which bears his name attempts to stand above petty nationalisms but is embroiled in the political strife of the cold war and decolonisation, so that eventually its upright Director is forced to stoop to petty sophistry, possible major fraud, and certainly treachery to a colleague in order

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Unlike Tolstoy, the answer he finds is not six feet of earth, but a half acre of painting.

to preserve the integrity of his Institute. The students react initially with a stand on principle, but are driven by their own ambitions and jealousies, as well as by the interaction of crusading zeal, cowardice and vicious mean-mindedness, so that within the confines of an Institute dedicated to the supremacy of reason they enact all the dramas of the cold war and the ^{domestic} witch-hunting which was its ~~domestic~~ corollary.

The issue which precipitates this turmoil is the concealment of a document about the Batavia mutinies on the Abrolhos Islands off the West Australian coast in 1629. The document is concealed because it might threaten the legitimacy of Dutch rule in the East Indies by suggesting that they were fermenting heresies, or might ~~xxxxxxx~~ serve Dutch interests by ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ nurturing millenarian movements which ^{could} will split the emergent state of Indonesia. The particular responsibility for ^{concealing} the removal of the document from the files is never finally ^{sheeted home} resolved. The characters offer us several possibilities, but they also warn us never to trust their words, and in particular never to trust the words of authority. This is the central lesson offered by the Institute, which thus, like Hume, ~~xxxx~~ in the name of reason subverts its own appeal to reason.

The novel's structure enacts its own search for truth. The story is recalled by one of the participants, Leon Davies, who ~~xxxx~~ thirty odd years later is being interrogated by a British security man who believes that the ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ episode at the Institute was being manipulated by one of the Cambridge moles who infiltrated British intelligence and ~~the~~ Foreign Office at the time. This identity is one of the few things clearly established ⁱⁿ by the novel, ~~xxx~~ perhaps because it is almost peripheral to ~~xxx~~ its major concern. Yet, in its very slightness, it epitomizes the betrayal of personal loyalty which is ~~at~~ the heart of the novel's moral concern. This concern is traced through the pattern of the ~~xxx~~ detective story which shapes the novel. So the interrogation opens with the foolish act of bravado and deception which both embroiled Leon in the affair and compromised him, thus preventing him acting quite straightforwardly. The investigation leads us back into the time of the document, when betrayal and fanaticism led to similar bloodshed to that which the Director and his colleagues witnessed under the Nazis. It leads us to the apparently timeless landscape of Australia where this treachery occurred, and falters along the trail of the survivors who may have cultivated their creed in northern Australia and ~~thus~~ given it back to Asia and, ultimately, Europe. With each step of the investigation we are led into further problems of fact and motivation. The problem of detection thus leads us continually back to the central problems of truth and responsibility.

As the Librarian, Niessman, puts it when Leon Davies finally tracks him down, "What is the truth when you have a melting pot of cross purposes? ~~When people are acting strangely, disguising their motives, there is probably one of the old unmentionables at the bottom of it all. Greed, perhaps. Sex. Lust for power. . . .~~ truth will always be conditioned by ^{the} context. There is the lawyer's truth . . . exactly what happened and in what order. ~~But~~ against that must be weighed the truth of the situation as a whole. What made things happen? What is the root cause, the emotion ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ behind it all." ^(p. 141) Similarly, the Director distinguishes ~~XXXX~~ between facts and truth, and ^{A explains} suggests that ^{while} whereas undergraduates ~~can~~ luxuriate in ideals only to spend the rest of their lives learning that the "real world is mundane, mendacious, hypocritical," the task of the Institute is to show that the "human affairs are too complex to be governed by a single set of principles". (p.127) Yet neither ^{the} Director nor the Librarian gives Leon - or anybody else - the whole truth. Both have had to learn to lie to survive during the Occupation, ~~and~~ ~~although~~ the Librarian provides the only example in the novel of ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ~~XX~~ pure courage when he tells the truth of his own culpability rather than betray a colleague, but his act is futile. The ^Director claims that friendship is more important than ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ truth of justice, but betrays a ^{trusted colleague} friend for the sake of the Institute. Leon sticks to his principles, wins academic success, and spends the rest of his life in futility. The security man finds his mole, but he probably knew that all along. The bomb continues to menace all human values despite the ~~speech~~ ^{done} at the demonstration with which the book closes. The only justice ^{done} is that the villain comes unstuck at Watergate. We are left with a complex structure of words which reveal no truths except that they are the only means we have for imposing order on the mysteries of history. Hasluck's words open a way into a new world, but leave us uncompromisingly in the old.

'Previous generations were taught to read. This generation must learn to read between the lines.'