

Cops for information

## OVERLAND

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John Herouvim  
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28th February, 1989

Dear John,

Thank you for your magnificently detailed letter of 20th February. You can't know how enormously encouraging your response has been to me as I sit here at a long table absolutely covered with paper, literally thousands of contributions and letters. There is so much on the table that I find it almost impossible to write thoughtful and responsive letters while at the same time having to read carefully so much that has come in. Perhaps your key sentence for me was: "The more humanity becomes unfashionable the more Overland is necessary." That I think will be a guiding principle for selection of material by all those involved.

I would like to take up with enthusiasm your suggestion of promoting selected items from the magazine through the radio programmes you mentioned. At the moment such promotion is beyond either John McLaren or myself as there is so much else to do. Michael Dugan has been appointed Treasurer to **The** Overland Society and is doing a splendid job in controlling and improving our financial position. If you could take up the challenge of making particular items from Overland the subject of discussion on the programmes you mention, it would be of signal value. Perhaps you could telephone me to make a time to look at the proof sheets for the next issue when they are available.

Of course one cannot expect even the friendliest and most attentive of readers to like everything in the magazine and you will find, from time to time, like everybody else, there will be items completely outside your particular sympathies. For instance, you didn't like George Turner's piece on Bruce Grant's book. Others thought it the best thing in the issue. I will worry only when we don't get some negative responses to some parts of the magazine. We have an important article by John Jenkins on Concrete Poetry in the next issue. Stephen and I accepted it more than a year ago. The majority of our readers won't like it but we think we are on track in challenging readers in this way.

Yes indeed, I would certainly like you to review the second edition of Right Words. Go ahead straight away; keep it fairly short.

I will circulate your letter to members of **The** Overland Society because it raises so many interesting points. I haven't circulated any <sup>other</sup> such letters although I have shown a few to Nita and John McLaren. If you have time, I would appreciate, as we all would, further comments on the magazine from time to time. With much thanks,

Barrie

13 Schild St  
Yarraville Vic. 3013  
PH: 689 9543  
20 February 1989

Dear Barrie,

I want to tell you what I thought of 112 & 113, and since 114 is due soon-ish I'll do it now.

You should be proud, very proud, of them. The range of articulate Australians collected together in those pages, and the range of issues discussed, are unequalled by any other Australian publication I've seen. Overall I feel the same after reading 112 and 113 as I did after 104, and I'll tell you about that in a moment.

Stephen and I met when I interviewed him in 1984. I sent him a copy of the interview tapes so that if someone else wanted to interview him about cognate matters, they could first listen to my interview. Stephen wanted this because it was more efficient than his saying the same thing over and over.

Similarly, it is more efficient if I transcribe part of my letter to Stephen about 104, because it is exactly how I feel about 112 and 113.

Number 104 is one of the best-edited magazines I can remember reading. ... What I liked best and least is an entirely subjective issue which I think is separate from the inherent appeal of the magazine. That appeal stems from the range of issues raised and topics traversed, and the engagement generated by the cogency of the writing and/or editing. ... When I try to identify why I liked no. 104 so much, I come up with the following:

1. When I finished reading it I felt like I'd taken my mind for an invigorating (i.e. both enjoyable and useful) walk. I put it away feeling I'd read something like the socially- and culturally-aware literate intellectual's version of the Reader's Digest. (That sounds mordant, but it ain't meant to be. I'm just writing in a hurry ...

No. 104 was both disparate and focused enough to encompass, between two covers, most of the terrain which I like to view but can't spend much time in. Reading it was recreation, stimulation and education all in one; it was "value for time", a sort of intellectual-cultural bargain.

2. The quality of the writing. If what writers said and how they said it were anything to go by, one would venture that almost all of the names appearing in 104 belonged to honest, no-bullshit, thinking people. They got their point across and it was high quality stuff, exceptionally free of the interstitial stylistic fine print that distracts readers by evoking a picture of the writer trying to show off.

3. "Temper democratic, bias Australian" was there, garbed in an attire modern enough to look neither anachronistic nor faddish ... No. 104 was full of modern-Australian writing about modern Australian issues. Almost all of it smelt clearly of the political, literary and emotional Left, and the stuff that was anti-Left had sound reasons for being that way. Some of the writing was more modern than Australian, and some was the other way: but nearly all of it was modern-Australian.

The next time I enjoyed and profited from an O'Land to that extent was with 111. I was jotting down notes for a letter to Stephen about it when I learnt of his death. In my letter to Nita I mentioned what I would have said:

about how democratic in temper and Australian in bias the latest issue is, how reassuring and human, gentle and wise so much of the writing is, how it held me without gimmicks and warmed me like blood.

112 and 113, by being AGAINBT (as-good-as-if-not-better-than) 104 and 111, merely intensify my self-interested, reader's wish to see O'Land continue. The more humanity becomes unfashionable the more Overland is necessary.

However, while all editors like to hear this sort of thing, serious ones also like details—specific subjective scraps from which to stitch, as best they can, an idea of the 'general' reader's 'general' response.

Geoff Goodfellow's "What Price?" (112, p. 34), Barry Dickins's "Festival of Ideas" and Ken Levis's "Audition" (113, pp. 3, 72) were stories imaginatively and grippingly constructed from creative rumination on things largely unremarkable. Couldn't put 'em down.

Regarding others:

"The Job" (113, p. 26), convincing and interesting.

"Isobars" (112, p. 2), too writerly and demanding.

"The Wolves of Manhattan" and "Letter to Squirrel" (112, pp. 32, 45), undiverting.

The non-fiction material is exceptionally well-written and important, supple prose and logical argument from good thinkers. O'Land stands as one of the few surviving liberated areas in Australian public culture. It avoids both corrupt and mindless consumptive culture and 'creative' and 'critical' post-human posery. In 112 and 113 gem followed gem: articulate, informed and citizenly debate; polished and pithy reports from researchers who are re-making understandings of our national self; necessary and revealing inquiries into the macro and micro of Australia. Here are the voices of the best sorts of experts, the disinterested de-mystifiers who persist in talking about what's right and wrong, what's sensible and what's stupid.

Such writing was Hirst on an Australian republic and Thorne on community literature (112, pp. 40, 42); yourself on public issues, Darroch on Kangaroo, Mansfield on libraries and books (113, pp. 17, 34, 68). Such were the contributions of Butterss on Frank the Poet, Spate on the Great South Land (112, pp. 58, 69) and Burns on Poor Fellow My Country (113, p. 45). O'Land should sell itself by selling its main strength: it publishes stuff worth knowing about, stuff worth thinking about, stuff worth mentioning to others. Of all the column- and curriculum vitae-fodder that's churned out, here is stuff worth taking seriously, because it's written to inform, to enlighten and to convince — not to fill a space or to impress a narrow brotherhood of fellow mystagogues. O'Lands 112 and 113 actually do all the things many others in the ideas business say they're doing. This is an excellent thing. Making rhetoric real is one of the most heroic and worthy of practices, and material in O'Land often speaks with an authority that makes it the "Ockham's Razor" of Australian magazines.

I know that O'Land approaches public issues and literary affairs in an old-fashioned way, engage but not enrage. There is a public taste for this old-fashioned flavor. Television and radio programs with a new-information-entertainment format attract these sorts of people, and often present to a popular audience material like that which appears in O'Land. Scholarly and specialist issues can be presented popularly (e.g. Davey's "Modern Legends" and Seal's "Septic Tanks ...", 112, pp. 51, 54; Moore's "Historian as Detective" and Grey's "Australia and ... Vietnam", 113, pp. 39, 57.)

*9/11  
asked  
G.H. to  
do this  
B.H.*

When we discuss plans for O'Land's future it might be worth considering the promotion of selected items — and through them the magazine itself — on programs such as "Good Morning Australia" (ch. 10, 7.00-9.00 a.m. weekdays), "'Til Ten" (ch. 10, 9.00-10.00 a.m. weekdays), "TV AM" (ch. 7, 6.00-7.30 a.m. weekdays), "Eleven AM" (ch. 7, 11.00-12.00 a.m. weekdays), Ramona Koval, Mary Adams and Doug Aiton on 3LO, Late Night Live (repeated 4 p.m. most weekdays) on Radio National, etc. etc. etc. And of course, Terry Lane. If others felt the idea worth pursuing I would be willing to write up a proposal that could be taken to radio and t.v. people who are friends (or friends of friends) of O'Land.

To O'Land's great credit, its writers do not seem to be writing to show they're "in the know". What is imparted, instead, is a genuine wish both to communicate ideas and experiences and to involve the reader in a search for their meaning and significance. Outstanding writing of this sort was provided, for example, by Yule, Dening, Hewett and Mathews in their reviews (112) and by Edmond, Dawe and Lockhart in 113, pp. 7, 26 & 62. All these voices and the others I've mentioned come together and become O'Land's voice. I'm sure many readers stopped, and felt worried or sad when they read in "On The Line" that

Little magazines should not live for ever and Overland was to a great degree the product of Stephen's extraordinary network of contacts ... Two fine and well-argued letters argued the case for closure.

I should also mention what I didn't enjoy. Most of the poetry in O'Land, as in other magazines, I do not persist with. It's not something I've learnt to do, or learnt to enjoy. Poems I understood, enjoyed and appreciated were, "For Those Who Say Work", "On Special", "Couple In A Bar" (112, pp. 30, 31, 64), "Faking It", "Sonnet 39" and "Boy Swing" (113, pp. 23 & 53). I thought Turner's "Australia; Where to From Here?" (112, p. 22) was flat, ponderous and dull. The photo of Marjorie Tipping (112, p.82)

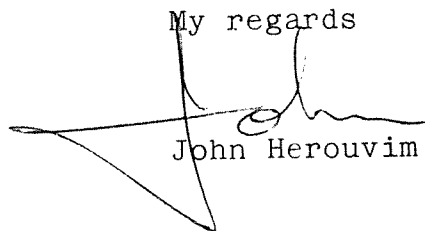
was too large, and I wondered why she was the only author whose photograph was used. "Plotting" (113, p. 29) had the feel of the list about it and, for me, was more like plodding even though it was written with economy and fluency (but this comes from someone who reads only three or four novels a year). I think it would be more appealing if the text were illustrated with a few covers, as ABR does.

*Accuracy  
enough  
Among has  
used this  
as his  
note - title  
in Philology(2)*

If you would like me to review the second edition of Right Words, let me know. I have an advance copy, ~~xxxxxxx~~ and a collection of reviews of the first edition from Penguin, and some correspondence with Stephen about clauses, class distinction and the not un- "disease". I would envisage writing mainly, but by no means only, about the revisions and additions made in the new edition, and I won't whinge that my name is mis-spelt in the acknowledgements.

I hope some of the foregoing spiel is of use to you and to Overland.

My regards



John Herouvim