

Westerly Articles in Electronic Form

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and security but a burial trench. At the mercy of my dreams appeared Sophie Lindauer-Grünberg, pale as brick dust. Her face wasting, crumbling to ash, blasted by the force of my terrible youth. And, waking in fright, I mourned for the first time my innocent victim and our shared fate.

The stories are arranged thematically rather than chronologically. So skilfully are their fictions presented that often the reader may be deceived into reading them as fragments of pure autobiography. But it would be a mistake to assume, for instance, that the narrator, the sharp-eyed 'I' of the childhood pieces, remains one and the same person. By the subtlest rearrangements of emphasis and detail, of delicate shifts in the angles of observation, the effect is obtained in this cohesive collection of a voyage round a group of central characters. The child who speaks of her stay with the scarifying Miss Vizard in 'On your Own' does so on a different level, and in a different key, from the young girl in the marvellously-realized 'Teddy': perhaps the triumph of the whole book. So complex is the human animal, so suggestible Ms Zwicky's prose, that we can do little other than pause and ponder on the successive varieties of identity possessed by that mysterious 'I', pinned so persuasively on the pages of each story. 'It didn't happen quite like that,' one of the characters remarks, 'but the truth can be pretty boring at times.' What is significant about these stories is, of course, their poetic truth: almost without exception, beautifully rendered.

What is also impressive is the range of theme, subject, setting: we encounter the parents of two young children, all semi-stranded in the airport at Honolulu. There is the merciless annotation of the break-up of a marriage; the George Grosz-like depiction of the antics at a family wedding; the private thoughts of a Visiting Fireman: 'a drop-out himself after two years at university, he felt weakened by the sadness of educational institutions. The corralling of youth in their fumbling prime, Eden spoiled.' Equal in strength to the earlier portrait of Teddy with his lumbar trouble ('Shagger's back, you mean') is that of the truly awfully Warren Lamb ('P.S. I would remind you that I am a friend of Ottoline Trench'): an eager member of that great army of word-jugglers more interested in wearing the mantle of the poet than in sitting down and

devoting a lifetime to the grind of trying to get poems right. It is as hair-raising a portrait in words as one in paint by Francis Bacon.

As a postscript, Ms Zwicky adds 'Gone West', an assembly of journal entries and items from a commonplace book. Less skilfully arranged and ordered, this could well have acted as some kind of uneasy coda to the stories. In fact, the reader moves easily from the one mode to another, and in which we again see, vividly and directly, the effect (in particular) of the West Australian scene on a creative imagination of considerable power. The extracts end here with an entry for September, 1981:

Down by Shenton Park lake, where turtles have to cross a suburban road to lay their eggs in neighbouring gardens, not five miles from the city centre, there is still a sign: 'Caution! Turtles Crossing!' There's a kind of truth about the place in that, whichever way you look at it.

I have only one complaint: that slightly more vigilant editing has not eliminated from the general text a number of repeated references to 'the haul and slam of linkages' during journeys by train, the impression created by telegraph-poles of crucifixions or Stations of the Cross, and to 'whiskered' warts. As Lady Bracknell might have said, 'To use two whiskered wards may be regarded as a misfortune; to use three looks like carelessness.'

CHARLES CAUSLEY

1. *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Richard H. Taylor (The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1978).

Dal Stevens, *Jimmy Brockett*. Penguin Australia, 1983. 257 pp. \$6.95.

It is one of the mysteries of Australian literary history that Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory* became a household word whilst *Jimmy Brockett* went out of print and was forgotten.

The two novels are uncannily alike, both providing a meticulous blow-by-blow account of the rise to wealth and notoriety of a poorly-educated self-made "businessman" and political manipulator. In each case the central character is initially interested in crooked sporting fixtures (especially boxing and wrestling, in the

case of Jimmy Brockett) and eventually drifts into an uneasy manipulative alliance with the Labour Party, only to grow increasingly disenchanted with Labour's refusal to endorse the jingoistic attitudes of pre-war "patriotism". Each author makes frequent but intermittent reference to the central character's private and domestic life, and in both novels the pain and failure involved in human relationships is used to offset any sense of "glamour" or "success" that might arise from achievements in the public domain.

The two books were published only a year apart: *Power Without Glory* in 1950 and *Jimmy Brockett* in 1951. Hardy's novel, of course, became a source of controversy and a *cause celebre*—but does this really account for the demise of what is undoubtedly the better novel of the two?

Stevens allows Jimmy Brockett to tell his own story in his own idiom—a tactic which instantly enlivens the narrative, for Brockett's language has a rich colloquial humour:

Some people are so dumb they wouldn't know Santa Claus was in bed with them unless they heard the toys rattle. (p. 90)

I was as busy nowadays as a one-armed bill-sticker in a gale. (p. 178)

Most facets of Brockett's character are defined (or at least implied) by the limitation of his language. Other people—whether they are friends or enemies, intimates or mere associates—are addressed as "brother" or "sister", and Brockett often talks about himself in the third person:

I'm a dinkum Aussie, through and through, but Jimmy Brockett knows good tailoring when he sees it. (p. 1)

Confronted by a display of paintings of the female nude, Brockett's language reveals more than he realizes:

I don't know much about art, but I know what I like. I couldn't keep my eyes off the toms without their clobber. Some of them were a bit on the hefty side for my taste, but all the same it was better to be that way than flat like a hallstand. (p. 21)

Thus Stevens' control of language and viewpoint is more honed than that of the early Frank Hardy.

In its structure, too, Stevens' novel is more sophisticated. Although both novels develop mainly through a linear accumulation of events, both strive to give some sense of "circularity". *Power Without Glory* ends with John West, now old and near death, thinking back to the incident with which the novel began. *Jimmy Brockett*, by contrast, begins with an account of the public reaction to Brockett's death. This places the character in a wider framework right from the outset, counterbalancing the narrow focus of Brockett's first-person narrative. And to maintain the reader's awareness of Brockett as a public figure, Stevens concludes each chapter with brief "documentary" material (such as an anecdote about Brockett's habits, or an excerpt from an article written about him after his death).

Some of the novel's delightful subtleties emerge from this "documentary" material. It is asserted at one point (p. 53) that an incident in Randolph Bedford's *Naught to Thirty-three* actually refers to Brockett (a situation which is unlikely since Brockett is fictitious—but which is also quite plausible since the fictitious Brockett is clearly modelled upon many real-life counterparts). Stevens later quotes, without comment, a letter-to-the-editor about Brockett published in a local newspaper. The letter is merely signed "Oldtimer", but its phrasing suggests that it might have been written by Brockett himself.

More important than these teasing "in-jokes" are the different community attitudes to Brockett which emerge from the "documentary" material. The novel is sub-titled—with conscious irony—"Portrait of a notable Australian", and to many Brockett is a larger-than-life legendary figure:

This pushful, raffish, humorous Australian became a legend during his lifetime. (p. 52)

To others, though, he is evil and dangerous:

Brockett was the first of the Australian muckrakers and there are ugly stories of blackmail hanging to his name. (p. 223)

Even in the "documents" which seek to offer a more penetrating and objective appraisal, radically differing viewpoints emerge:

The simple truth is Jimmy Brockett symbolized much of what Australians with their pioneering background admire. (p. 52)

Brockett was the last of the "great brutes" of the era of capital accumulation—last of the robber barons of a new country. (p. 146)

It is a measure of Stivens' skill that the novel manages to show that *both* these statements are true.

And therein lies *Jimmy Brockett's* superiority to *Power Without Glory*. As the difference between the two novels' titles implies, Hardy is writing primarily to advance a thesis whereas Stivens' focus falls upon the human individual (though with sufficient structural apparatus to place that individual within a wider perspective). The reader "disapproves" of Brockett just as much as he or she "disapproves" of Hardy's John West, but in the case of Brockett

the reader is forced to confront the distressing fact that the man is, after all, a human being and that he is, despite everything, capable of human feelings and aspirations and failings. So, without wishing to ignore the anger and energy that informs even the earliest work of Frank Hardy, one is forced to conclude that *Jimmy Brockett* is an infinitely more tough and "hard-nosed" novel than *Power Without Glory* because it refuses to simplify or gloss over the underlying humanity of its villain.

Why, then, did *Jimmy Brockett* lose the contest with its rival? Any answer is of course mere speculation, but one cannot avoid the worrying possibility that Australian readers found Hardy's dogmatic assertions more satisfying than Stivens' cautious and considered explorations. Should this speculation prove correct, the demise of *Jimmy Brockett* is not a mystery but a scandal.

VAN IKIN

KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD

The centenary of Katharine Susannah Prichard's birth (5 December 1883 in Levuka, Fiji) was celebrated in Western Australia and London. Readings from Prichard's work and commentaries on it took place at her former house at 11 Old York Road, Greenmount, which has recently been classified by the National Trust; discussions of aspects of her life and writings occurred at the University of Western Australia's Summer School; a radio programme on her work was broadcast on 6UVS FM; and Ric Throssell, Prichard's son, was guest speaker at the Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA Branch) Corroboree in February 1984. In London, in December 1983, Professor John Hay organized a successful seminar at the Australian Studies Centre, University of London, on Prichard's work; an edited selection of papers from the seminar will be published by the Centre for Studies in Australian Literature at the University of Western Australia in 1984.

DONALD STUART

Donald Stuart, the well known novelist and short story writer, died in Broome on 25 August 1983. He is commemorated in this issue of *Westerly* by Jean Lang's poem 'It is time now' on p. 65.