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### Monash Days

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## Monash Days

### Disciplines

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## WERE WE EXPERIENCED?

### Monash and the Monash Poetry and Political Scenes 1967-71

#### Prologue

##### *Ciao Baby*

*Bravado came by stops and starts  
(confidence was all we lacked)  
the year Ciao Baby topped the charts;*

*though learning too played many parts:  
the hunch, the theory and the fact  
synthesised in stops and starts*

*might earn a Bachelor of Arts  
(wheels of knowledge clicketty-clacked  
the year Ciao Baby topped the charts);*

*or as when innocence departs  
(ramparts stormed and cities sacked)  
came love in raucous stops and starts,*

*loosing virtues, loosing hearts;  
the beast, guess what, turned double-backed  
the year Ciao Baby topped the charts.*

*See how life crawls as much as darts,  
first to be packed, then unpacked;  
oh such sour-joyous stops and starts  
from when Ciao Baby topped the charts.*

#### Why I Am Not A Barrister

Politics and the judicial process were very much in the air, early 1967 (the year 'Ciao Baby' topped the charts) for this was the time that Ronald Ryan was hanged. It was becoming such a personality-based media drama, this killing, with Premier Bolte's gruesome arrogance, the invidious position of Mr Justice Starke, Opas QC's heroic defence, the passionate anti-hanging article in the Herald by Gorman QC, Father Brosnan with his snowy-haired humanity and above all Melbourne's very own ultimate loser, Ryan. And after that 8AM when a whole community concentrated on one single event in a way I have never experienced since, I headed out to Monash to enrol in Law.

The execution and the way it was politically handled somehow assured that capital punishment would be abolished. 'Un-Australian' is hardly my kind of adjective though I do believe it applies to politico-judicial killings. It certainly inspired a (reasonable) play, a (bad) telemovie, an award-winning biography, two of Bruce Dawe's most powerful pieces and the following monologue (one of three) from my verse novel 'The Lovemakers' where the speaker is a Melbourne barrister from the 1960s who is defending an man later executed. (The other monologues concern his summing up and his thoughts some hours after the execution.)

from *Cross QC: Three Villanelles*

*for Michael Prideaux*

**(i) R v Kent: The cross-examination**

*...after what's been said and what's been done  
it distresses I understand, this evidence.  
Let's get it right though: then he dropped the gun?*

*A criminal shot, a colleague dead, just one-on-one:  
life's never been like this before, it's far far tense  
than any courtroom, right? Yet, after what's been done,*

*after you've heard I'm gonna get you, son...  
please constable, take no offence  
but get it right: he dropped the gun*

*and then he aimed it? Where'd you read that? The Sun?  
(Your Honour I withdraw.)*

*But what amount of sense  
does this make: after all's been said and done,*

*with a partner dying wouldn't you make a run  
(the only thing left to prove your innocence  
is time)?*

*And yet Kent doesn't. My client drops the gun.  
What guilty men act this way: lot's a few, none?  
(When a life's at risk all words swell immense,  
soon as they're said.)*

*As for what was done:  
we have it right? Then he dropped the gun?*

Of course enrolling on the day Ryan was hanged no more put the hex on my meagre attempt at a legal career than it put the hex on the career of Julian Burnside QC. For me it is still easy to be fascinated by the bar and I admire all those who reach that position and beyond for their ability to grasp those initial subjects that had me floundering, let alone any subsequent ones.

The following, from a sequence of dreams, dreamt, lived and imagined, is an adaptation of a dream I recently had, inspired I believe by an email from a former student, telling me how she had been accepted into Slater and Gordon's Nowra team.

### *7 (for Jodie Magee)*

*At the age I am now have become a barrister. It is my first case and I am defending a man in Horsham who has allegedly murdered his wife. Robert Richter QC is prosecuting and this fills me with certain apprehension. I am also anxious about the questions I will ask and how I shall address the jury. At some stage I get into an innocuous conversation about Horsham with a rather dowdy female jury member, later thinking "I shouldn't have done that, I hope no-one finds out." But my biggest worry centres on combining the careers of poetry and the law. Then an answer to this problem arrives in the person of Robert Richter. 'Welcome to the bar my learned friend,' he says. 'I'm glad you're here because I've just started writing poetry and I'd love your opinion on what I've written.'*

At the University of Wollongong, where I am employed in the Faculty of Creative Arts each faculty is represented at general meetings of other faculties. I volunteered for Law, it was the least I could do.

### **The Monash Poets**

The bulk of my academic time at Monash in 1967-68 was spent on non-Law electives: English and History subjects. Possessing neither the requisite intellect for Law (though it may have arrived in later life) nor the pre-requisite high school subjects for Arts at Monash or Melbourne, in 1970 I enrolled at LaTrobe, those Monash subjects I had passed being accepted towards their degree. I am thus a LaTrobe BA in History. There is a bit of English hanging around and a small amount of Politics. I should have studied a lot less of the former and a lot more of the latter.

Of course when it comes to poetry I still regard myself as a Monash poet. It was there that I met John Scott and Laurie Duggan, it was there that I participated in the legendary (enough) bookshop readings, it was there that I moved a few stages along from being the would be Augustan wit of Blackburn South High School. True there were undergraduate poets at LaTrobe, but they were dull and they still are. By this stage (1970-72) my friends remained across town at Clayton, or were out in the work force.

Jo (Joachim) Mauch was the assistant manager of the bookshop who in 1967 decided to hold regular poetry readings on the first Thursday evening of every month. He would invite a more established poet as a guest and throw open the stage for the mainly undergraduate audience to participate. Sherry, like on a lot of university occasions in those days was the fuel. That bookshop I might add has long since been disbanded. It was further to the west of the present one and much, much smaller.

Until the 1950s when Melbourne University based Vincent Buckley lead poets like Bruce Dawe, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Evan Jones and R A Simpson there had never been the remotest feel of a

poetic tradition in this city. True is was the town of Bernard O'Dowd (a museum exhibit) John Shaw Neilson (certainly a poet) 'Furnley Maurice' (a modernist try hard) and C J Dennis (but really only two or three pieces in 'The Sentimental Bloke') and true Messrs Hope, McAuley and Malley lived here for some time, but from Patterson, Lawson and Brennan onwards it was Sydney who had poetry's running. That's why I suppose our readings and the parallel ones at La Mama in Carlton still seem like explosions, if not quite as explosive as we thought. If we had uneasy relations with La Mama (a slightly more 'bohemian' enterprise) it was only because we thought we had to, rather like a stand-off between two similar enough high schools.

I missed the first two or three Monash readings due to an exciting time I was having rehearsing and acting in a production of 'Mother Courage and Her Children'. I enjoyed this endeavour but knew that if ever I wanted to pursue acting and I could convince/ fool myself if it was in my grasp it would demand the kind of commitment I knew even then poetry demanded. So I acted out my eight brief lines and moved on.

July's guest was Bruce Dawe and after I read some poems (vigorous observations propelled by an 18 year old's wit) Dawe announced 'I like your poetry.' I downed an amount of sherry in celebration and got to raving to someone, John Batrouney about Swinburne's 'A Forsaken Garden'. Some weeks after that, one day before my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday I wrote 'St Bartholomew Remembers Jesus Christ as an Athlete' a piece I still acknowledge and which I read at the August reading. Next day in the Union I got to talking with John Scott.

John Scott was an enthusiast, without whose zeal the readings and the poetry scene would have limped badly. He discovered poets in magazines and books and often helped turn them into our gods. Ted Berrigan out of the New York School was one in question, his early 60s series 'The Sonnets' helping us escape, in John Forbes immortal words 'the talented earache of Modern Poetry.' Scott saw what Berrigan did in this work and adapted it to his own purposes (one of the mainstays of poetry, let's face it) and so did I.

There was a MacRobertson High School girl I was interested in, but felt that she'd little time for me, except to enjoy pleasingly oblique phone calls (I wonder what they really sounded like?). There was a very blown up map of the streets and roads of Greater Melbourne in the Union and I would stare at her street near Burwood station and then just expand out and out, getting to know my city. I got it into my mind that if you had the resources and resolve you could chart what every Eastern Suburban teenager was doing on a particular Saturday night. Doubtless in East Berlin the Stasi were already doing similar, though my fantasy was of a far more literary bent. I entitled this speculation 'The Eastern Suburbs Theory' all of which evolved into the idea that in Melbourne there were no degrees of separation, everyone just knew everyone. Perhaps I viewed life like one of those big multi-narrative Robert Altman movies? Well I did and still do.

Then I watched a documentary on the Russian Revolution, Otis Redding was killed, and the shades of the Russians and Otis combined with the girl (and other girls) and my 'theory' and the Berrigan sonnets, to produce this:

### *Three Sonnets*

(i)

*how, after those months, we met again (remember?).  
I called, must have been mad around August confessing my trivia,  
conferring delight you asked if I was nervous,  
'No!' why should I be even dried the dishes  
as we listened to the radio                      how, not much later  
I heard that Otis Redding had been killed,  
(wouldn't have known him if Crazy Wayman hadn't squeezed on those tracks)  
I said –what's he trying to prove-                      yet  
there it was for all our debates Al, Otis rhyming  
,proving everything on Michigan's bed                      'course  
A Modern Death Befits A Modern Man                      as  
blessed and doomed, all the Russias ground on through the Holy Frozen Water,  
not having you, any of you to retreat, to respect,  
they have I suppose died either modern, or frozen*

(ii) *Otis Redding*

*(and) at the same time, unaware they were playing you into the lake  
(and) glory! the industry had to leave you die Otis,  
wouldn't have known who you were, if squeezing  
the stations hadn't sponsored the tribute tracks, saying:  
I searched, and was found blazing for glories I was glad to go out of:  
(In Ending,) Otis                      one opus of quizzed admiration; who wants  
the screaming crossed soul by crotch, (Michigan Music)?  
you gave and how, I little know,  
tribute in a bitter, man kind of love.  
Redding, Redding, remorse will smash any epilogue chance,  
any sweat-liturgy you sang and I might have attempted  
once                      I walked in the rain until one once  
to shout                      O, 'tis (forever!) Redding;  
but in this my poem, it is only one of others*

(iii)

*So, to you it concerns itself                      yes  
what I could have said was  
:as to murmur 'Madness!' was (my Toorak Road!) madness,  
though we loved through the lovers  
at any rate                      let's dabble with our lip-on-lips  
even with the Russians and Otis buried out stanzas back*

*and hope (old, cheesy grin- but it was mine,  
 that none of us have laboured any inconceivable horrors  
 that is perfectly understood and unsatisfied I said  
 nothing I said- we used to have goodnight prayers at 'club'-  
 a walk (run!) 'round th' block its your time you're wasting thank you god for  
 everything  
 I said, I and by now you have become just trivia, a fault  
 mine exclusively mine but  
 after seeing any of you again, the fault will start and how? How*

Scott's enthusiasm for 'Three Sonnets' boiled to over-flowing, he became the St Paul to its gospel. Was it embarrassing? Not really, though I could imagine with other folk it might have been. But his enthusiasms were about as two edged as anything I have experienced in poetry or life. For no-one could sulk like Scott and in making his zeal seemingly indispensable it evaporated if ever he wasn't in the mood, his sulking being accompanied by a fine-tuned Tony Hancock type whinge which as we got older became less funnier and less funnier.

I like to think I was the first person in Australia to have bought and read Berrigan's 'Tambourine Life', a deadpan and witty sequence of vignettes from Lower East Side Manhattan living, though a poem that those whose bedrooms were in Dandenong, Clayton or Blackburn could readily grasp and thus be entertained. I saw it in Melbourne's Paperback Bookshop (in Berrigan's 'Many Happy Returns' volume, one of just 700 throughout the world) bought it and rushed out to meet Scott and his girlfriend Margot 'Tog' Fleming in Carlton, where we were to raid La Mama that evening, riding in to shoot up the town. As for 'Tambourine Life', well it mightn't have been quite a 'Looking into Chapman's Homer' moment, but I knew this one was mine, and to discover something in that way cannot happen every year.

Scott spent 1968 in an Education Department studentship funded bohemian bliss: living with 'Tog', driving about Melbourne suburbia often accompanied by your correspondent, writing strange, fabulous poems that certainly pushed boundaries, even if at times such boundaries proved dead ends. Enrolled in Third Year Honours English and Third Year History he didn't just 'cut classes', putting it more simply he never arrived. History of course was a failure. In English, however, having never read the texts, attended the lectures or tutorials or submitted essays he still sat the exam and was somehow awarded an Honours 2B. Unless this was due to a weird form of retrospective special consideration (surely before such a concept had been formulated) this was hardly one of Monash University's greatest achievements. 1969 saw him complete his undergraduate degree, though any attempt at Honours English was stymied by the fact that his studentship forbade failure if a Fourth Year was to be entertained. This annoyed him. Of course he continued writing his dense, inventive, difficult (in the positive sense) verse, though of all the Australian poets of our generation he soon became the one least interested in poetry, and he moved, successfully for a while, into fiction.

Laurie Duggan arrived in 1968. His progress was slow to start when it commenced unfolding he became of this country's most versatile poets. He was very much a 'go anywhere, write anything, in any style' man and still. If his first Monash pieces didn't have the fabulous baroque excesses of



Scott or my own 'Now let's really catch the reader and/or listener off guard' approach to poetry's entertainment, when Laurie really started flying we knew it. Scott's reception to the break-through sequence 'East' proved to be a gigantic fillip. Laurie's instant parodies of those such as Michael Dransfield and Geoff Eggleston were probably never formally written down but survive in dinner party memories, although the Eggleston one was performed in front of that man during a La Mama raid (he somehow liked it). Laurie's autobiographical 'Adventures in Paradise' gives a pithily good idea as to his vision of the Monash days. He has never been taken as seriously by Australia's (so called) literary community as he should. and it is to their loss.

### **Others Of The Personnel**

Attendance by members of the English Department, let alone other teaching areas of the university were few enough. Philip Martin, D C Muecke, and Tim Bass were usually came, Dennis Douglas was known to put in an appearance, Jennifer Strauss and Dennis Davidson, yes but less so. Most of these wrote poetry at some stage, though the greater part of the running was made by the guest poet and us undergraduates. Philip Martin was an indefatigable supporter as he would be later for much of Melbourne's poetry. His work's greatest virtue along with being a well crafted and restrained versifier, was that if you had to wear your heart on your sleeve, very well then start wearing!

Amongst those who started becoming our backers at this time were Colin McDowell who often communicated in enigmatic chuckles and a slim, black-garbed Peter Craven, later to become arguably Australia's greatest critic. It may be that Peter's very appreciated partisan support of Scott, myself and to a lesser extent Laurie started around this time. (Oh yes and there was a Literature Club and its critical magazine, but by then I was starting to realise that such an attitude to poetry, prose and drama had little to do with my own.)

Did any women poets attend and read? No, except for Val Prickett, a sharp tongued honours student who once snapped 'Clever dick!' at something well, 'clever dick' that Scott had said. But why didn't any women poets attend? Of course we will never know if there were any girls who cowered at the idea, and ten, twenty, thirty years on there would have been plenty, up front and reading, but here might be a few good enough reasons: Thursday was hardly a 'social' kind of Monash night, public transport was meagre (I often hitched) most girls didn't drive, their Medicine and Engineering boyfriends weren't interested. And remember what these years actually were. In early 1967 Liz Milsom (a 'big kid' I'd met through 'Mother Courage') and a friend of hers (both all of 21 or 22) told me how Monash was just (and only just) shaking off a reputation as a place a girl went primarily to get a husband. Call me naïve but at 18 I had never heard anything quite like it, and got the impression from these two that there was still a lot of this stuff around. As for poets: well let's face it, male and/or female Monash was hardly swamped with them, we were a small, solid coterie, brought together by the luck of time, place and energy.

Scott's best friend was John Westcott a man of good solid intellect (though one to be eaten away by English Department English) and the kind of poet who would have been greatly improved by the workshop process. Tall and prematurely bald, supercilious and mean he no doubt had some kind of adult role thrust upon him quite early and was thus from my 2010 vantage point immensely sad. He wrote one very good poem but gave the game way. Best friend or not Scott

had an intense hatred of him which was reciprocated by Westcott through the agency of certain of Scott's friends, that is he made sure his hatred of them was well known. (I wasn't one.) My memories of this, the tragic, contradictory, creepy world of post adolescent males still remains hauntingly firm.

John Romeril, even then far more a playwright, read certain small, gnomic pieces, though his slow, befuddled delivery and his even more befuddled apologies alerted those in the know that this young (if older than us) man was stoned. In my innocence I had to be informed, for most surely he was the first person I'd seen in this condition.

Zealous if wooden Science student John Gough never quite got there, a pity really because a Creative Writing course with all its workshop challenges might have strongly aided him. Years later when I was poetry editor of Meanjin he submitted promising material. I got in touch asking for more but received a most agitated reply. His wife, having discovered he was re-attempting poetry simply shredded him. Doubtless in the interests of marital harmony he had to stop, publicly at least.

John Batrouney was our greatest tragedy. He produced well tuned, mature poems but then having found a girl friend, stopped. Well after university and well into marriage she left him and he fitfully returned to poetry. Following a period as a high school teacher he took to heroin, became an affable enough junkie and died in the Richmond Railway Station toilets. Whatever manuscripts of his poems there were may have been left with the Users Union, some kind of addict's support group.

My friend Greg St John didn't write poetry but he had a good working knowledge of the stuff and could certainly say why he liked or did not like a piece. He was that kind of 'civilian' near to indispensable to poets, one who can say 'This one sounds okay', 'This one looks good', 'This one's utter bullshit!' He was at a number of poetry events, though I particularly recall his reaction to a young woman reading at La Mama, ending her account of some drug experience with the line 'O! O! O! O! Opium!' Greg would recite it for years, possibly up to the time he was killed by lightning at the age of 29 on, of all places Mount Vesuvius (true story).

Outsiders might track us down, such as Geoff Eggleston, eternally fabulous ratbag then all of 23. A distant cousin of mine who later became a kind of free-loading mascot of Montsalvat he muttered through Monash readings on a couple of occasions with lines like 'After the first, fast, furious fuck...' which 43 years on is at least memorable.

Russell Deeble, said a 'Truth' front page story was in a tussle with news reader Kevin Sanders for the hand of model 'Bobo' Faulkner. An advertising executive and/or TV Week journalist Deeble was also an extremely bad poet who proclaimed his lines wearing a sheepskin coat and had for a manager Sweeney Reed, a tragi-comic little-bignoter who would have been better off running a milk bar. They performed at Monash, apparently liked our scene, and later in the year (complete with video-recorder) hi-jacked proceedings, the result appearing on some late Sunday night current affairs show. (I boycotted the former and missed the latter.)

Bob 'Blacky' Upfold was not a Monash student. A doleful, witty Dylan parodist (though this was a description he opposed) he dressed in black and had a 'Who is this man and where is he from?' air about him. Well he might have been from Ormond but he was *not* the kind of prospective son-in-law enamoured by businessman fathers and their blue rinse wives. Westcott purloined and later married Blacky's ex, even going to the extent of asking her old man for permission!

Rob Smyth was wise-crackin' and restless, with a commendable refusal not to take himself too seriously. Discovering us sometime in 1968 he added a well appreciated fervour to proceedings. Though he often wrote rather quiet love poems to someone few of us ever met, with ampersands, slashes and spacings etc they looked like the goods. Through his connections in Philosophy (he was no English student) he roneod two editions of a magazine, 'Mirabeau Goat Poems'. He later went into Rock journalism for a while and didn't return to poetry. Why? His restlessness maybe, which was a pity. His friend Robert (pronounced the French way) King instituted Junk Poetry, the name saying it all: plenty of shouting, strip-to-the-waist posturing and smart arse asides. Most of us accommodated it with undergrad relish.

Our most flamboyant reciter John M Hooke wasn't a poet per se but rather a high velocity eccentric, the kind of character undergraduate life forever demands. He composed music (his 3 Pieces for String Trio was performed at a reading) seemed to have some kind of beyond-the-grave relationship with Mahler ('Dear Gustav') often declaimed in a kind of pidgin German, daydreamed about conducting the Vienna Boys' Choir, invariably wrote in green ink and spent a lot of his time dressed as Sherlock Holmes (deerstalker and pipe included). He wrote just one poem, the Des Knaben Wunderhorn influenced **NEIN!!**

*One evening, as a man was walking in the countryside  
he stopped under the shade of an oak tree  
and saw a bird sitting there.  
He liked that blackbird.  
'Won't you sing for me?'  
'NEIN!!'  
And so he walked away and wept.  
The song flowed on through the night.  
And so, while the earth slept,  
the birds conduct a discourse in their own language.*

This piece of inspired naivety became like our mascot (often concluding readings). The NEIN!! was meant to be shouted, usually by all those present, whilst the final line would be spoken by Hooke in staccato mode, at breathless top speed. A few glasses or more of sherry and it was almost vying with 'The Waste Land' or 'Howl' or 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night' as a contemporary classic. Those of a more serious bent such as Westcott were disgusted, Hooke was lowering the tone. Meanwhile Scott kept him on as court jester until his patience was exhausted.

By about mid 1968 Jo had left to run the La Trobe Bookshop and the readings then commenced a journey through rooms in the Union and the Ming Wing until they petered out in mid 1969.

## Poetry Meets Politics

These were about as political a time as Australian campus life could ever achieve, though poetry and politics became only entwined about two or three times during those years. Of course certain poems with 'political' subject matter made their appearances from amongst the student body though the only piece with any impact coming from a guest reader that I recall was Vincent Buckley's weird diptych 'On Being An Anti-Communist Poet', which was recited to our amused bewilderment. With the title to one of its sections being 'This Hurts Me More Than It Does Yevtushenko' how could it not be? (NB: in the very recently published Collected Buckley this does not appear.) Of course when Bruce Dawe read, his wonderfully polemical social verse held the floor, though the most famous Dawe piece at a Monash reading was his endearing, eloquent and still quite relevant footy poem 'Life Cycle', in July 1967 given its world premiere.

And then, somehow- I know not how- the far, far left, more vanguard than vanguard Monash Labor Club sponsored a reading featuring Rodney Hall, a friend of their ally Humphrey McQueen, at that stage a Glen Waverley High School teacher. Now this was going to be an event as elusive to the revolutionaries as it was to the poets. Hall read some poems and delivered an essay 'One In The Eye For Plato.' What with Buckley's Yevtushenko poem and Hall's Plato piece we were spoilt for titles in those days, though don't ask me what it was about.

One of those attempting poetry at our readings was rumoured to have DLP connections, though his verse remained centred in the safer shoals of unrequited love. Poor Joe Sampson: he would have to read such a piece in front of Rodney Hall, he would have to leave very soon after with a pithy Hall phrase of dismissal following him: 'Good. Now we can get back to real poetry!' No Marxist-Leninist could have ever delivered such punishment to an NCC lackey. 'Unrequited Joe' might have been the butt of our jokes but tonight this treatment made him almost one of us. For Rodney Hall was near enough to a Tonight Show host, a showman, and we thought he was ghastly. Didn't he know *we* were the showmen? We liked our guest poets laconic (Dawe) comic (Leon Slade) nervy (R A Simpson) urbane (Chris Wallace-Crabbe) and even dull, but put on this Tonight Show act, give one in the eye for Plato at a reading virtually hijacked by the Maoists and you would be our enemy for life. Not quite. Years later after mutual mellowing some of us got to meet and like Rodney Hall. He became a strong supporter of John Scott's prose work and gave one of my verse novels a fabulous launching speech in Canberra. I also had a chance to interview him publicly. I asked the first question, he extemporised for half an hour. I asked the second and the same occurred. Ever the showman.

(Thinking about our attitude to him in 1968 can only remind me of an event, not long after when I and other Essendon fans launched full-throated venom at a certain Richmond back pocket after he had ironed out one of our very very finest players: 'You mongrel, Sheedy, you mongrel!' End of footy digression.)

Poetry and politics collided albeit obliquely when the ABCTV show 'Under Attack' came to town, convening in the small Union Theatre. This program set controversialists and those somewhat 'on the edge' against their detractors. In this case it would be James McAuley confronted by a phalanx of Monash radicals, starting with anti-war and often Labor backing

Liberal club president Alan Oxley and then heading left and left and left. Poet of rhyme and metre, classicist, University of Tasmania academic and reactionary critic, leading Roman Catholic layman (a convert to boot!) and NCC grey eminence, two thirds of the brains behind Ern Malley, a CIA agent of influence (surely!) and one time jazz pianist, did ever an Australian poet live a more remarkable life? The theatre of course was packed, which would not have been the case had McAuley been reading his verse. Funny that.

So the show chugged predictably along until one John Bailey, DLP activist, small businessman and mature age student stood up and announced that he had evidence that the ABC was supplying questions to their student lackeys. It's strange how this kind of anti-ABC posturing from that corner of politics has at least a 43 year pedigree. It was denied by the students, the program's moderator and even McAuley had a bemused 'Search me...' look about him. Then after his splash of slapstick subsided Bailey just shut up, later to disappear from student politics.

What else do I recall? Well one of the panellists indicated that under today's capitalism the most any Good Samaritan could do would be to 'Chuck a Bex' at the victim by the side of the road and tell him to get better. Something like that. All in all it was an entertaining flop. With McAuley and the Monash Four having so little in common, it thus became a half hour of head-butting at glorious cross purposes; so perhaps the ABC should have supplied the questions! Years later I got to know Mick Counihan, one of the panellists. His admiration for McAuley, though not his politics was very evident. With the man's debating skills and middle aged sophistication and patience Mick was certain: 'He wiped the floor with us!'

### **The Rise, Rapid Decline...**

I knew of Robin Rattray-Wood as some kind of campus personality, in the thick of acting and Lot's Wife, bookshop work and the Revolutionary Vanguard, in short trying out for anything. (But for a bout of laryngitis in early 1968 he would have played Romeo to the young Wendy Hughes' Juliet.) He was a supporter of the poetry readings and wrote one or two pieces. Over the summer break he had adjusted his politics somewhat and returned a minor leftist apostate, to which a 'controversial' series of Lot's Wife letters entitled 'The Rattray-Wood Abortion' will attest. In his first of these Robin gave the incoming freshers an unsolicited, wise-beyond-his-years lecture on just about everything, but particularly Monash politics. Demanding with a bumptious surface-confidence, a difficult friend though still a friend, not everyone *liked* Robin, which was a pity because Robin wanted to be liked; unless he thought the person was a deadshit and said so.

We met sitting next to each other at the first reading for 1968 and Robin, having the above laryngitis needed help in transmitting a number of longwinded questions aimed at the guest poet. Thus phrases would be croaked in my ear and I would haltingly yell them forth. This doubtless annoyed a number present, but Robin was such a dab hand at annoying those susceptible to annoyance (as he was) whilst I didn't mind helping out. He could grate magnificently. Parents never quite got a handle on him, whilst he, coming out of probably the poorest background I had ever observed, was always on what you could describe as bourgeois-watch. One father, whose daughter was being briefly dated suspected him of being a 'poofter' and was thus glad when she called it off (a strange if believably true story). In one tutorial Robin attended he asked those present not to smoke, and some got most annoyed; surely this was a man ahead of his time.

In March 1968 Robin started up a new communal-enough household in Logie St Oakleigh and observing this experiment put me off such an idea for about a decade. Mess is a male student given, something plenty take near pride in, but the squalor to which this place descended still for me remains the benchmark, with jealousy, depression and madness turning it into some form of ‘Will we get out of this alive?’ psychodrama, all soundtracked by Jefferson Airplane’s ‘Surrealistic Pillow’ and Dylan’s ‘John Wesley Harding’.

Robin shared Logie St with Alan Robertson, a chirpily ruthless lothario and David McMullan, an intense depressive with whom I’ll always associate the act of rolling your own (I never saw him do much else). One afternoon they were beside themselves with the prospect of their newcomer, a 25 year old Maths PhD student from Sydney ‘Who’s just like Allen Ginsberg!’ Well he had a beard...and with his compact physique plus low-level afro Richard Buckdale combined a commitment to Maoist mayhem with certain eccentricities sadly derived from too much acid. When Paris erupted he invested in a ‘ham’ radio to see if he could reach Danny the Red and his comrades (he couldn’t). Discovering that Chairman Mao’s birthday was Boxing Day he suggested that all the university Maoists rename the previous day Christmao’s Day (they declined). Did he *really* believe this, or was it only meant to be *that* bad a pun? The answers are probably yes to each, yes to each combined, and no, no all round. Then Richard, bastard child of the Great Helmsman and Timothy Leary walked over the edge and almost took us with him.

I present a warning re the following anecdote: I have tried to lessen the impact of certain aspects of it, but the operative word is tried, and I don’t think anyone could have succeeded.

On Friday June 7 1968 a letter with a cheque arrived from The Age announcing acceptance of my poem ‘St Bartholomew Remembers Jesus Christ as an Athlete’. I rushed around the suburb drumming up support for this upcoming and first publication day, which I assumed would be tomorrow (luckily I was correct). There would be a Logie Street party that night (a fine place to celebrate) and one about three or four weeks having proven a success why not now? Some of the poets and their crowd would be present and I had co-opted Greg St John and his sister Helen (whom Robin had his eyes on). But a good proportion of the event would contain Buckdale’s Maoist comrades from the Labor Club, a group now light years away from that ‘capitalist roader’ Whitlam. (It would take a finer tuned theoretical mind than mine to deduce whether to *really* call them Maoists, but let’s just do it!)

We arrived to be informed by Robin and Alan Robertson that: ‘Whatever you do don’t accept anything from Buckdale.’ Why? ‘Because he’s taken shit, his own shit, and has cooked it up with certain herbs and spices and is going to serve it on Salada crackers to, well, his comrades in the Labor Club.’ Why? ‘Because...because... because he thinks they’re too bourgeois. Tell your friends, tell everyone, the man is out of control! We’ve tried reasoning...’ Ahhh yes that all purpose cry of those who have reached the end of the road.

We were on their back porch. In the dark, further down their already overgrown yard, I saw Buckdale darting about, carrying something (a frying pan?) humming loudly to himself, like he was in a kind of R Crumb cartoon. I alerted Greg, Helen and many others what I still hoped was a practical joke. Scott, ‘Tog’ and their very large and hyper-camp friend John Garnett arrived. We

told them the alpha of the St Bartholomew news & the omega of the Buckdale saga and then, as well as needing air, Robin and I went on one of our first 'subliminal walks'. Meaning? Well since each of us possessed an ardour towards certain pretty girls, whom we knew would reject us, we would go on a walk, talk about them (and anything else) and thus sublimate our passions...errr get it? For a number of years, before each party we both attended was well underway, this became a kind of ritual; for these were those kind of days.

### **I Think We Need An Interlude...**

Now, before we return to the party this seems a good time to present the following poem dedicated to Robin, which, written from the vantage point of 1974 (I am still very proud it) distils for me a great deal of what young men like us went or rather put ourselves through. (Without our 'subliminal walks' could it have been written?) It also tries to capture the political spirit of those times, with the hero of the piece being say two thirds Robin to one third me.

#### ***Eating Out***

*(for Robin Rattray-Wood)*

*Gentle, inaffluent,  
susceptible to portions of pity though  
a mild cynicism increased  
as he left high school and  
The High School Student's Union  
(articulates in berets with  
little yellow stars: 'Semantics, man...'  
'Aww that's a cop-out, man...');  
susceptible to cool, correct sympathy  
(slight commitment)  
any girl concerned to teach him  
wines, driving, boredom.*

*And Nicol, she was joining NIDA yet  
they kept company for a few weeks  
of a dry summer (shifts and  
blouses flapping over the line).  
What's she like to live with?  
Ahh that's romance, attainable  
as clap. All construction:  
a partner in sorrow would be  
wonderful: poor pet, poor pet. (Such  
prey we are to prey!)*

*Windows of dwarfs, in Xmas  
the city was presentiments, expenditure,*

recalling for him an earlier attempt  
(each day begins a year)  
'How often should I see you?'  
and the mother with hands smeared  
in drycleaning fluid. Nice  
nice nice nice. He shivered  
for their kingdom of constraint,  
but no quibbles, virginity is  
amazing, beautiful as the back  
of Sarah's waist,  
how neat it was!

'See a show?'

'You're hosting!'

Then

lets.

Mrs. Salmons (was it Salmons?) suspected  
at least casinos: 'Where will tea  
be?' hinting at liquor 'Eh?'

Why it's toast, Ma'm, it's a evangelical  
coffee house, Ma'm. Shook hands.

Coming back her father beaming Young Ones!  
and Sarah asked 'Excuse me?'  
left for sleep. That body:  
small, neat, redoubtable, it  
seemed unfair; but quit the thought.  
We were a debacle!

This year, Nicol. On weekends,  
before her course,  
they trotted round the palm tree parks,  
up to rotundas, her home at hand  
through lime-white colonnades, there,  
a lot for him:  
table manners, the correct liquor. Some  
minor heiress in a cheesecloth blouse  
sustaining his dictum:  
'My word, Marxism is exotic!'

For last year (as a friend referred)  
Les Chinois stoic in Bakeries, their cache  
of humorless invective; yet oh the design!

Living is divergence, plus  
'how swell'. A trainee life-assessor and  
Sarah would be very very happy. Not hers



*some fuming dialectician  
(their High School Student's Union pronouncing  
such ministry 'Lethal as a nail gun').  
Some years further  
here's he, sitting in a bandstand,  
the NIDA trainee saying 'Sometimes  
I can't conceive of letting a man near,  
you understand?'*

*Romance is, you know,  
danger; though a few nights  
before her parents drove Nicki  
over to the flight she took him  
eating. ('Daddy's a solicitor  
with conscience.') Workingmen mean  
a lot and the waiter asked him him  
regards wine, 'Sir?'*

Damn brief, ought to have been  
forgettable (I'm forgettable too) kissing  
this forthcoming actress, oh poised for  
an unsorrowing wave off the tarmac:  
the oversized sunglasses, the smart,  
pudding-basin bum, cheesecloth.

*A lift? Please.  
On his prize bush, aphis. Nicol's father  
stated aphis and how to end it  
(talking of steps to Mr. Potter, gardener).  
Yes, a lift...with music to town  
and you in my arms...easy, adult, radio  
smarmed away its 'Happy day happy day.'*

### **And Fall of Logie Street**

Even if madness has often been my literary bag, scatology (even supposed scatology) never has. What can I say? The Maoists showed their bourgeois stripes by rejecting Buckdale's 'food' though it must be added that when asked he did explain. This brought forth the following.

Very annoyed Maoist heavy: If you were any bigger I would hit you.  
Backdale, in touché mode and glancing up: If I were any bigger I wouldn't have done it.

How long had he been preparing that one? All his life probably. Why did Logie Street and their friends let him get away with even the thought of it? This question has hovered about me for decades. Well here goes: he was older, more academically advanced, more committed to his

beliefs, certainly madder, in short whether we wanted one or not an authority figure. And as I write this I find myself saying 'Yes, good try, but...' As I said before, I tried.

Meanwhile the night's mayhem went into overdrive Who didn't get blotto? I tried (that word again) a conversation with Buckdale but refuse to go into details. I recall a number of Maoists sitting around on a bed singing old Wobbly songs (let's face it more in their tradition than 'The East is Red') whilst Dylan's 'I'll be Your Baby Tonight' was repeated over and over and over on the record player. Buckdale certainly required someone that night and persuaded the 125 plus kilo of flamboyance John Garnett to go to bed with him, for it would seem his first (his last?) camp (as it was then) experience. We stayed up till dawn and beyond, as only 19 and 20 year olds truly can. It may have been the weirdest night of my life but I wasn't going to let the its madness swamp me and St Bartholomew, and with Robin went to an Oakleigh newsagent and bought 'The Age'.

Over the forthcoming months the disintegration of Logie Street was totally underway. Such was his 'power' that one of Alan Robertson's many girl friends thought we should all chip in and buy him a motor bike, but he was getting out, right out; Buckdale would leap from his bedroom haranguing anyone passing with his acid-mutated Marxism (I was often a target and since he fascinated me I let him prevail, but then I wasn't living there); Robin railed at the stupidity of it all; David McMullan kept on rolling his Drum; and their parties just got much much worse.

### **Ready! Aim! Fire!**

I recall reading a Herald interview with former Monash Law Dean David Derham upon his retirement as Melbourne University's Vice Chancellor: silver-haired sleek, amiably urbane and about as Victorian establishment as you could be. Well, the interviewer wondered, those student radicals Derham had to deal with, were they taking their orders from Moscow, Hanoi or Beijing? And the professor just didn't quite know. I'm sure he didn't, because for all their supposed Marxist/Maoist underpinnings, those guys weren't taking orders from anybody, they were obeying (in true order) their heart, their loins, their head, helping to make that fabulously fluid instability which was a hallmark of the time. (Though I'm sure Derham never encountered Buckdale.) And I might add, some of them didn't worship liberation so much as power: for flip the libertarian coin and sure enough it turns into an authoritarian one, no matter what the belief system.

There was a television report (4 Corners, probably) on what the Liberal Party actually stood for and believed. And do you know, since they had been in power federally almost all my life, and in the state since I was 6, I hadn't really asked that question. They were the party of government, surely, what else could they be? Still, the very idea as to what their beliefs were intrigued me. And here somebody was going on about 'the individual' and the 'primacy of the individual', which coming from the party of capital punishment, book and film censorship and conscription seemed at best contradictory, at worst hypercritical. I thought these words from that crowd pretty much humbug and always will.

Though nothing could quite beat the Sunday Afternoon quasi-fascist blathering of B A Santamaria, 7 minutes or so of the stuff, on Channel 9, initially sponsored by the Roman Catholic hierarchy until Knox succeeded Mannix and forced Santamaria to rely on his own funds. What Australian demagogue ever held more unelected power, what crackpot was ever proven so utterly

wrong? I saw him in action once or twice (calling Bob Dylan Bobby Dylan, as if he *really* knew what he was talking about). I reckon a good proportion of his viewers must have been lefties, it gave them something to do of a 1960s Sunday arvo. Footy was yesterday (or worse in the other half of the year!) but still there was plenty of barracking to be done, an enemy to be confronted or if you had a mind to, analysed. (Kind of like those student Maoists who regularly bought the Financial Review.) A fluid time indeed, days when the Monash Labor Club turned Maoist, whilst the Liberal Club opposed the war and sponsored Labor Party luminaries such as Don Dunstan at their lunchtime meetings (one of the big highlights of my undergraduate life). Then things really turned Alice-in-Wonderland and someone ran for MAS under the LCP(M-L) banner: Liberal and Country Party (Marxist-Leninist).

The left in all its various shades was everywhere. The war and conscription had the right snookered. Deep down how could any student at university (any male at least) publically support the war when they were of an age to volunteer? Whenever conservative commentators who happen to be contemporaries of mine harp on as to how deluded even the mildest radicals were in those days (and believe me so many of us were very very mild) I find myself asking that kind of question the Gerard Hendersons never ask: 'Where were you when the fellas were being shipped off to Viet Nam? Why didn't you follow them?'

The student left certainly had an amount of brain damaged, power-crazed Stalinists (LaTrobe had to suffer quite a few of those) but certain others that I met were of a far more courageous and humanist bent and although I couldn't quite adjust to an amount of what they believed they certainly had my respect. Dave Nadel was a good even saintly man according to a number of folk I knew. I always enjoyed my encounters with him. One girl who had ended up at his place after being kicked out of home tells how upon her arrival he had given her an informative lecture on contraception and announced that the next day she was seeing a GP for the pill. He had no designs on her and she still expresses her indebtedness. Folk talked about Jim Falk lying on a lounge room floor, absorbing any amount of Beethoven, an act that might have been thought hyper-bourgeois by any number of Cultural Revolutionaries.

And so, on late Christmas Day 1969 see me with my friends the Jones Sisters (one of whom was Nadel's girl friend), Falk's girl friend Sue, Nadel and Falk, in Falk's Toyota Landcruiser, heading south to the Aspendale dacha of Albert and Kerry Langer, the drive being accompanied by singalong versions of Beatles' hits: from 'Love Me Do' to 'Maxwell's Silver Hammer' via 'Yellow Submarine'. Of course after the cops had pulled us over for driving along the Beaumaris foreshore the drive was a touch more sober. But for pigs these pigs were nice pigs... *and never let it happen again!*

With a trust from a branch of the Smorgan family and an IQ heading past the moon, Albert Langer, Australia's most famous student of his day, was brilliant, shy, demonised and a solid part media invention. Decades later I would see him at parties held by my friend the anarchist poet Pi O and his sister Thalia. Berating Langer about the virtues of anarchism Thalia would then ply him with appropriate texts which Langer, still large and bearded with the air of a messianic rabbi, would dutifully read. When, in the 1990s an article by him on the evils of compulsory voting appeared in Quadrant of all places I rushed up to Peter Craven in the street announcing that truly I had seen everything. But hadn't I already?

For why was there a cap pistol complete with a ribbon of caps at Albert and Kerry Langer's? We'll never know, though it turned into an indispensable prop for that Christmas evening. 'Let's play,' it was suggested 'revolutionary firing squads!' This being a game for three I and the girls sat by and watched as one would point the pistol, one would shout 'Ready! Aim! Fire!', whilst to the *Crrrack!* of the toy, clutching an area around the heart, one would fall with a gurgling martyr's howl onto a convenient assembly of beanbags. Ahhh if only Santamaria could see them now! Well I saw them and my vision of leftist student politics never quite recovered. Boxing Day I visited John Scott: 'You'll never guess where I was and what I saw last night...'

One morning in May 1970 I was at Monash needing to get to Bundoora. Someone motioned me towards two Monash Maoists who were heading that way to help occupy the LaTrobe Admin. They let me join their expedition. Then news arrived over the car radio: Edward Heath had just won the British General Election, truly annoying the Maoists, though why the replacement of one bourgeois party by another should have concerned them I have no idea. One of the two later became famous as 'Loophole Lennie', a barrister, and now he and his fellow Maoist started up a condemnation of certain student politicians and others they considered as 'Tommy Travellers' i.e. spies, agent provocateurs, this adding to the general paranoia surrounding the election of 'Grocer' Heath. But then, around Alphington/ Fairfield popular culture came to the rescue and the airwaves filled with John Williamson's 'Old Man Emu', the revolution being put on hold for a singalong. 'Haha!' exclaimed Lennie, 'I can root the legs off a kangaroo!' Well into middle age I would come across 'Loophole' in Carlton bars and yes he seemed to recall the journey, being quite sure the other Maoist (a bit too urgent, a bit too zealous?) was most certainly a Tommy Traveller. Early in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century I wrote the following.

### ***Old Man Emu***

*"Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven!"*

*~William Wordsworth*

The Prelude

*Yes there's a sun for each generation.*

*And now it's*

*rising time: the next thing to anarchy sweeps the globe;*

*better, they're shutting down Admin at LaTrobe,*

*and you're with two Law-Ecops Maoists*

*hurtling to Bundoora. Music-lovers, they lay all details*

*over chart-and-flashback late morning radio:*

*how those who sing are singing for ASIO*

*an album full of Tommy Traveler's tales;*

*how they can't fly but they are telling you*

*once they're certain who to purge, the purges...*

*(Those Red Guards were a benchmark? We'll be topping it,  
one day.)*

*Elsewhere, a student leaves an interview  
with second thoughts: one of those back o' the crowd urgers  
who thinks he's making history, or stopping it.*

Around midnight, sometime in 1971, when Greg St John and I were visiting a friend in Parkville, it was mooted that we drive across town to see how the latest administration occupation was going. And if it sounds as if you could drop in on an occupation as you would a theme park well (a) the event had theme park elements to spare and (b) you could, anyone could it seems attend. For wandering through, as if he owned the administration, the occupation or both, was B A Santamaria, on an inspection tour and getting away with it. Truly this laughably self important man was a blight on our nation, though I suppose the event showed how democratic the occupiers were: they would allow anyone in on their act!

### **In Retrospect, Really In Retrospect**

These memoirs only cover a fraction of my life during that time. Accounts of family life and relationships, of friendships with those not in or on the fringes of the poetry scene (other than those student politicians I encountered) of the amount of tenth rate employment I tolerated, of the general post adolescent chaos I and others lived through, will have to be put on hold. My obsession with Melbourne and its suburbs certainly dates from that time and it has remained a cornerstone of my imaginative life. Of the academic life Monash offered I still retain fond memories of Anne Hone and Colin Doxford as History tutors and of John Morgan, David Cuthbert, Ian Turner and Duncan Waterson as History lecturers.

Of those poems I still regard as worth re-publishing (in a Selected Poems) four remain from my actual time at Monash: 'St Bartholomew Remembers Jesus Christ As An Athlete', 'Three Sonnets', 'Remembering Marjorie Asleep' and 'The Window Cleaner'. Another seven could be accounted for from my years as a 'Monash poet' with Scott and Duggan: 'Forger At Midnight', 'Scottish Soccer', 'Go on, tell me the season is over', 'A Molester's Fortune (7a.m.)', 'Warburton 1910', '17', and 'St Kilda'. Of course a great deal of what I have written since has been inspired by what I did and more probably what I saw during those days. If an amount remains unfinished, well that's the way I work and it will be completed, one day.

In those oh-so-political days where did poetry stand? As a side show, more than probably, which of course was a good preparation for later life. Whilst for me travelling about the eastern, south eastern, and southern suburbs was as much a part of being a poet as any life in some Carlton terrace. Scott, Duggan and Wearne continued raiding La Mama, it still remaining a mutual case of 'What planet are these guys from?' All of which lasted say eighteen months more. We journeyed to Sydney (Laurie moved there, I tried and recoiled) and met the Adamson/ Tranter/ Roberts/ Forbes crowd, Glebe and Balmain's finest. Then soon we, they and the La Mama mob became yoked together as poetry's Generation of '68, a term originally used as a joke by the participants nearly a decade after the event. More than anything else we were united as much by what we opposed. As I have written elsewhere it was like being all arrested at the same demo. Although a sub-section of a sub-section of a section of contemporary Australian poetry the Monash poets

were more than a mere name however. If we were together on campus for just one year, we met, partied, showed each of our work and shared plenty (or should that be enough?). As for poetry and anything else we wanted to produce we were starting to learn that all this could take a long, long time.

When a poem I am writing is rolling along well and its potential is unfolding, when something I am proud of is being created, something that hasn't been seen or heard before, then the excitement of those Monash days can still return. And something else as well: for the entire poem or collection of poems needs to be completed and that may take weeks, months, even years. The seeds of this particular knowledge also commenced sprouting at Monash. Somehow (though don't ask me how) we were teaching ourselves (albeit at a very basic level) to be ruthless with our work; and in that case Messrs Scott, Duggan and Wearne have succeeded as much through stamina and tenacity as talent.

### **An Epilogue**

The following written within the past ten years tries capturing that time. The Groop's song 'Woman You're Breaking me' was another hit of 1967. There are a number of references, true, which doubtless could be explicated in a similar if more private kind of memoire. So for the present my advice will be: 'Just go along for the ride...I did.'

#### ***Woman You're Breaking Me***

*...determined that every day shall be recalled; and the weather, I'll always remember the weather;  
one night in the drizzle, hitching Warrigul Rd. the driver calls me Charley Horse  
Please don't 'understand' this, you're here to enjoy the myths, play the layman  
but Charley Horse? weeks on at some party I attend with Wayman, I'm called that again;  
so I invent the Eastern Suburbs Theory; and in love with names, plain names,  
I've a poem commencing 'Jill, Amy, Max and myself...' who do very little;  
Coventry, Karlis, Wayman and I go on a binge, a binge at the Gwynnes;  
R R-W and me, we concoct the subliminal walk, it sublimates nothing;  
at home there's little for JFW quite like turning me coy to see where such  
wonderful weaponry lands us; well let me cringe but what a shame I'm attempting  
every domestic diplomacy possible, bar the grovel; who said 'the fringe'? there was none;  
who needed any 'fringe' when you mainstreamed it with the Otis Redding Sonnets,  
knowing, as Scott learnt them by heart, they were almost as big as  
Woman You're Breaking Me; I start a page of What About The Other One? my novel...*



**Were we experienced?** Monash Poets Alan Wearne (L) and John Scott (R), first floor of the Ming Wing, October 1968. Decades later, Scott: ‘You look like a member of The Searchers.’ Wearne: ‘And you look like a member of The Jimi Hendrix Experience.’