

ARTHUR BOYD: A LIFE

By Darleen Bungey

Time which eats the stories of our lives
Preserves a cruel freshness here to show
How energetic certainty contrives
To tell us what we think we almost know ...
Peter Porter, 'The Rider Haggard Window, St. Mary's Ditchingham'

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| KINGSTON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY | |
| | Acc No |
| Class No | |

Bundanon, November 1999.

Jamie Boyd walks into the kitchen. He has the same intensely blue eyes as his father. He has the same gentle expression. His hospitality is ingrained. He immediately offers: Coffee? Cake? Tea? Bread?

He has the same stammering, hesitant sentence patterns as his father, all commas, dots and dashes, the odd full point offering a rare conclusion. But when I say, "I would have liked to have known your father", his reply is swift and succinct. "There are the paintings."

Arthur wrote a clutch of personal letters in his lifetime. He kept no diary. Loathed speech making. Avoided interviews. Mistrusted words. He revealed so little of himself that his youngest daughter, Lucy, confessed, "I'm not sure how well I really knew him". Jamie believed his father was "... a bit of a mystery ... reclusive by nature ... partly hiding something in himself". Polly, his first born, labelled him "an enigma, probably one of the most secret people on earth". And his wife, Yvonne, admitted her husband would never tell her "how, or what, he felt".

In the most revealing letters Arthur Boyd ever wrote, love letters to Yvonne in his early twenties, he warned her (and no doubt any future biographers) that his letters were "only a shadow of me, I'd hate any person to judge me by them, they are a weak shadow".¹ Vincent van Gogh's letters to his brother, Theo, filled a book. But in Vincent's undelivered dispatch, found on his body after his suicide, he told Theo he had reached the conclusion, "... the truth is, we can only make our pictures speak".² Many would agree, believing that a painting tells us all we need to know about the artist. However, when we look at the wide-open, light-filled, last landscapes that Vincent painted from the window of his room in the sanatorium at Saint-Remy, it changes our perspective to discover that he deleted the bars.

Biography, too, is based on distortion; the most brilliantly shining facts always clouded by perception, time and place. Peter Porter, in his 2004 National Biography Award lecture,³ said he believed all appearance to be a mystery, all stories partial, and any biography, in the end, no more than a biopsy.

A brush stroke transforms, as a memory transforms, as a word transforms. Yet, despite the inadequacy of the words set down in the following pages, they are driven by a need to make connection. Just as we attempt to understand the land, sea and sky and make maps to find our way, we search for tracings in other lives to help us navigate our own.

¹ Arthur Boyd to Yvonne Lennie, 1943, Bundanon archives.

² Written by Vincent to Theo in Auvers-sur-Oise, late July 1890.

³ This lecture was delivered by Peter Porter at the State Library of NSW in October 2004.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| CHAPTER ONE | 4 |
| Under the Mulberry tree | 4 |
| CHAPTER TWO | 24 |
| To the market square..... | 24 |
| CHAPTER THREE..... | 44 |
| ‘Sky blue trades in lamb white days’ | 44 |
| CHAPTER 4 | 54 |
| Worlds away from Rosebud..... | 54 |
| CHAPTER FIVE..... | 66 |
| Death, Love, War..... | 66 |
| CHAPTER SIX..... | 97 |
| The empty stage | 97 |
| CHAPTER SEVEN..... | 116 |
| Cripples, Lovers, and other Victims..... | 116 |
| CHAPTER EIGHT | 134 |
| Through the Unknown, Remembered Gate | 134 |
| CHAPTER NINE | 154 |
| No Peace | 154 |
| CHAPTER TEN | 177 |
| Family: forged and fractured..... | 177 |
| CHAPTER ELEVEN..... | 193 |
| “It’s a hard life” | 193 |
| CHAPTER TWELVE | 217 |
| Where the roads dip and where the roads rise..... | 217 |
| CHAPTER THIRTEEN | 248 |
| Speaking Australian | 248 |
| CHAPTER FOURTEEN..... | 280 |
| A Heart in Two Places | 280 |
| CHAPTER 15..... | 311 |
| And the walls came tumbling down | 311 |
| CHAPTER SIXTEEN | 328 |
| Days on fire | 328 |
| CHAPTER 17..... | 349 |
| It’s Time..... | 349 |
| CHAPTER 18..... | 380 |
| “This reservoir of blue” | 380 |
| FINAL CHAPTER | 435 |
| And all his years of exile fell away | 435 |
| Bibliography..... | 456 |

CHAPTER ONE

Under the Mulberry tree

'My mother...was the backbone of our family. Without her, our life would have fallen to pieces'. Arthur Boyd, interview Victoria Hammond, 1989.

Arthur Boyd painted his entrance into the world.

In a sunny little study expressed in broad strokes Arthur, at the age of thirteen, painted his home. His focus point was a light-struck window, partially hidden behind a scrabble of green leaves and trailing roses. As an elderly man he would tell his grandsons, "It was there ..." his fingers tapping against the window, "that's where I was born".⁴

But, on that particular day, 24 July 1920, no roses bloomed in the bare, mid-winter garden. Inside, as the midwife bundled the baby into the arms of his mother Doris, a single fire in the adjacent sitting room struggled to warm the thin skin of the tin-roofed bedroom. The simple wooden house, set amid paddocks and an orchard with a pottery workshop and kiln in the garden had been originally planned by Merric Boyd as a bachelor's camp-out. When his bride Doris moved in with her paints and brushes and filled her days with painting landscapes and decorating Merric's pots it remained an artist's camp.

In 1913 Merric named the new house Open Country and for the next decade the name would fit. The suburb of Murrumbena, about 12 miles from Melbourne, was semi-rural. By 1918 the entire side of Wahroonga Crescent would contain just three houses. It was a family affair. Merric's parents, Emma Minnie and Arthur Merric Boyd had designed the substantial brick building with the formal garden at the top of the crescent. And Evelyn Gough, Doris's widowed mother, had built the modest wooden cottage at the base of the slope, complete with a chicken-coop covered in pumpkin vines.⁵ The families were sentinels, guarding the stability of Merric and the well-being of the fragile Doris.

If we could look past Arthur's painted garden and through the painted window, back to October 1915 and the morning after the twenty-seven year old Merric and twenty-five year old Doris had wed in St. Stephen's Church, we would see a defining scene. Merric is delivering a cup of tea to the bedside of his new bride. He has risen early to make this infusion of leaves, freshly picked, from the mulberry tree growing beside the house. It is undrinkable. Doris happily drinks it.⁶

Merric was a man destined to stand apart: from his siblings, from his fellow students, and from his neighbours. All he needed to do to be considered strangely different was to

⁴ "In a sunny little study ..." This incident was filmed by director Don Bennetts and used in a documentary *Testament of a Painter*, broadcast by ABC television.

⁵ "And Evelyn Gough, Doris's widowed mother, had built ..." Evelyn Gough had originally rented a house close to Open Country in Murrumbena, where Doris gave birth to her first born, Lucy. Forever after, whenever her father passed this house he would never failed to raise his hat in homage to her birthplace. They had chosen her grandmother's house for her birth, Lucy believes, because the facilities were better than Open Country. Many of the recollections in this chapter are owed to Arthur's eldest sister. In her ninth decade, her powers of recall were so sharp and sure it seemed at times she was describing an event that had happened only the day before. Interviews were conducted in Melbourne: December, 1999, October & November, 2001, March, 2003.

⁶ "He had risen early ..." Lucy Beck interview.

open his mouth⁷ There was no sharp grating edge to his vowels, no slippage into the vernacular. Years later, should any of his children stray from his example he would send them on a verbal exercise: “How does the cow go round the pound belonging to the county council?” They would continue their journey ‘round and round the pound’ until their father’s ear was soothed.⁸

Merric’s speech patterns came as no surprise. His great-grandfather, Sir William, the British-born first High Court Judge of Victoria, was a leader of the Temperance Society. His grandfather, W.A.C. a’Beckett, a man who needed the leanest reasons to support an extravagant celebration, was more high society than high bound. Merric’s younger brother, Martin, was an amalgam of these two ancestors with their high proud heads. He inherited his grandfather’s passion for family crests, commissioning versions rich with such notables as Thomas a’Beckett.

Merric’s insistence on refined speech was not in any way driven by snobbery. It was never a matter of putting on side, simply a cleaving to his idiosyncratic standards. One particular recipient of Merric’s vigorously chivalrous behaviour found herself travelling on a train she had no intention of taking. This was due to Merric’s determination she board the carriage before him: “No, no ... after you,” insisting again and again, as he raised his hat urging her to embark, ‘after you, good lady, after you’.⁹

Doris first met Merric when his younger brother Penleigh brought him round to her house. Her reaction, “he seemed harmless enough”, suggests Penleigh had briefed her to expect a brother who was not.¹⁰ Doris was Penleigh’s girl before she was Merric’s.¹¹ They had met as students at the Melbourne Gallery School. Penleigh seemed besotted with the young Doris, painting her portrait over and over again. In 1909, they became unofficially engaged. But within three years the handsome, charming, talented Penleigh

⁷ “All he had to do to be considered strangely different ...” Merric’s brother, the novelist Martin Boyd, will describe the bullying Merric suffered at school because of his “...unconscious ‘English’ voice”, partly inherited and then strengthened during time spent as a child in England. Boyd, Martin *A Difficult Young Man*, Landsdowne Press, 1965, Melbourne.

⁸ “Years later, should any of his children stray ...” Ibid

⁹ “One particular recipient ...” Many of the charming and witty family stories were originally sourced from David Boyd’s as yet unpublished autobiographical manuscript which he kindly lent to the author. Information was also garnered from a work by David Boyd that preceded this, titled *Transcription of tapes containing biographical notes on the Boyd family and antecedents*: Tourrettes-sur-Loup, France, December 1972 (Bundanon archives). This was prepared for Geoffrey Dutton who had been commissioned by British publisher, Tom Rosenthal to write a history of the Boyds. Dutton, thwarted by Guy and Phyllis Boyd, eventually bowed out. Information from these sources will be cited as ‘David Boyd, biographical notes’.

Another source was found in David Boyd’s lengthy and revealing correspondence to old friend and confidante, John Yule. (Manuscripts, State Library of Victoria). Yule, like Dutton, had considered writing a history of the Boyd family, but the project was never completed. Added to this were interviews with David Boyd, conducted in Sydney, December 1999, November 2000, and February 2004.

¹⁰ “Her reaction, he seemed harmless enough ...” Lucy Beck interview.

¹¹ “Doris was Penleigh’s girl before she was Merric’s”. According to an aside in a letter to Arthur and Yvonne from Phyllis Boyd, 18 May, 1967, Merric had been engaged to ‘Cousin Edith’. Bundanon archives.

was exhibiting where his parents had before him, at the Royal Academy in London, meeting a Queensland artist, ten years his senior, and marrying her in Paris.

Yet Doris remained entwined with the family. Throughout her life all four Boyd siblings adored her. Helen, the youngest child and only daughter, thought Doris charming and unique. Martin thought her a lady, and later a heroine. But it was Merric who was completely devoted. After Doris and Penleigh broke their engagement, Merric, in what even then seemed an anachronism of gentlemanly behaviour, formally asked his brother for permission to court Doris. He had a simple statement to make to her. "Be mine". Merric must have waited some time before declaring those two words. He had been sketching portraits of Doris as early as 1909. A delicate sculpture of the young Miss Gough, produced by Merric in 1914, expresses sensitivity and tenderness, and no doubt his feelings towards her.¹² Around the same time Merric's mother, Emma Minnie, painted a watercolour of Doris as she sat on the banks of the Yarra River. She saw a graceful young girl with a fine, gentle profile, dressed in white and sketching in a golden light.

Merric, the eldest brother, would follow his younger brothers to war. Penleigh and Martin had both seen active service on the Western Front long before Merric finally enlisted. It was said that the day after war broke out Merric turned up at the recruiting depot only to be turned down.¹³ Other versions have Merric resisting family pressure and the white feathers delivered to his door. Merric was never one to run from a just fight but either in deference to the military conditions for enlistment at the time, or conversion to his wife's pacifism, or because of the Lucy's birth, he did not sail out with the Australian Flying Corps until 30 October, 1917. At around that time Penleigh returned, suffering from exposure to poison gas.

Martin, making use of family connections, had entered an English army regiment as an officer. It would be hard to credit that even the barest notion of networking occurring to Martin's elder brother. When Merric arrived in London wearing a Private's uniform. Martin avoided being seen with him in public.¹⁴ Instead, Martin arranged a dinner with Doris's cousin, General Gough, in the hope of facilitating a commission for Merric. While the three men were chatting, sitting around the study fire in the Goughs' Belgravia home, Lady Gough entered the room. Merric, true to form, leapt to attention, and there, stiff of back and solid of purpose he remained despite a bark from the General to ignore the female presence and sit down again. Not only did Merric disobey the

¹² "A delicate sculpture ..." A letter by Merric from Open Country to The City of Caulfield, 5 August, 1921, states that he had been 'making Art Pottery here since 1913'. Guy & Phyllis Boyd papers, National Library of Australia.

¹³ "It was said ..." Merric's attempt at signing up was reported in an article on Merric Boyd in *Melbourne Daily*. The clipping is in the possession of Yvonne Boyd and not dated. Enlistment papers for the Australian Flying Corps are dated 2 July, 1917.

¹⁴ "When Merric arrived in London ..." Lucy Beck interview.

decorated soldier's commanding order but added an instructive flourish: "In Australia a gentleman never sits while a lady stands".¹⁵ The request for a commission was denied.

Merric saw no action in the AFC in his role as 'motor transport driver'. On February 18, 1918, he was granted leave to study at the Central School of Science and Technology in Stoke-on-Trent, where he completed with a commendation a course in art pottery.¹⁶ This was supplemented by a working sojourn at the Wedgwood factory; here, under the tutelage of Thomas Mellor, Merric was able to experiment with new techniques. On the six-week journey home Merric gave pottery classes aboard ship for the rehabilitation of ex-servicemen. His teaching earned him a congratulatory letter from his commanding officer. Having previously failed to complete courses in Australia at Agricultural College, Theological College and the National Art School, at the age of thirty-one this had been a fulfilling time.

Nine months after his homecoming, Doris presented him with a healthy son. The future looked positive and it showed in Merric's new-found confidence in his career. On his enlistment form against 'Occupation', Merric had scrawled 'Artist'. On Arthur's birth certificate against 'Occupation', once again he writes 'Artist' but then, in a larger, more forceful script, 'Potter'. Within forty years, in summing up Merric's unique and expressionistic clay and glazes, a critic would add several more words to his job description: 'Australia's first and most original art potter'.¹⁷ But the man who arrived home, full of new ideas for kiln constructions and glazing techniques and sure of his creative course, had no idea what to say to the three-year-old Lucy whom he had last seen as a baby in her mother's arms.

Up to now the only man in Lucy's life had been her gentle 'Gramps', Arthur Merric Boyd. He fascinated her with cheeks that wobbled when he ate and a white walrus moustache that waved like semaphore flags, sending playful messages, whenever he spoke. Her domain had been feminine, run by two grandmothers and her mother, Doris. In a family where everyone was given a pet name, Lucy was nicknamed 'Gibbidees' after her attempt to name the troop carrier *Euripides*, the ship that would bring her father home from England.

On 20 October, 1919, Penleigh had driven the family down to the wharf to meet his brother's ship. But Lucy didn't know the man who walked down the gangplank with the leather straps over each shoulder and around his middle, tightly harnessing his heavy brass-buttoned jacket. He stood as straight as a martinet and pronounced his words with the same correctness. He didn't look a bit like pale, soft Gramps. He was muscular but spare, with olive skin drawn tight over high cheekbones and a chiselled chin; his moustache was dark and clipped, his hair black and his eyes deep brown. At first he

¹⁵ "....Martin arranged a dinner with Doris's cousin, General Gough ..." David Boyd, Lucy Beck interviews.

¹⁶ In England, after the armistice ..." Army records show Merric was granted leave from 18 February to 20 May, 1919, to undertake tutorage at the Central School of Science and Technology, Stoke on Trent. Additional leave grated from 21 May to 20 July, 1919.

¹⁷ "Within forty years ..." John Yule, 'Merric Boyd', *Modern Art News*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1959, pg 15.

didn't know how to talk to her. All he could think to say was, "Meow ... meow" like a cat. She didn't understand him. Once, her father's voice became so loud and cross her mother said: "Don't you ever speak to that child like that again". Her mother's reprimands were so rare they were never forgotten.¹⁸

It took Lucy time to get used to her father, but when she did she liked his strength. Gramps would blow smoke rings from his pipe and make shadows of animals on the wall with his hands. But her father's strong hands could make sturdy animals out of clay. He would get down on his hands and knees, and pretend to be a horse and let her ride him. She felt secure in his arms when he lifted her high, cradling her from the dog that frightened her. When Arthur arrived, Lucy had to start getting used to another kind of masculine presence.

...let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each slight or incident scores upon the consciousness.
Virginia Woolf.

His sister is calling him over. She is under the big tree. He is happy but that changes when he reaches his sister. She grabs him and holds him down with her knees. She tickles his nose with a long piece of grass. It makes his eyes itch and makes him sneeze. She knows it will do this. She has done this before. He doesn't cry. He doesn't say a word. He turns and runs away.¹⁹

His sister is making him stand outside the bathroom door, holding him there. Lena, the person who helps his mother, is on the other side of the door. She has told him he must not come in. But his sister, who is tall enough to reach the door handle, opens the door and pushes him through. The bathroom is small, he is small, and Lena is big. She stands in front of him with no clothes on and screams and calls him a spy. His sister has run away. His mother comes and picks him up and sits him on the steps outside the house. He listens to his mother shout at Lena. His mother never shouts.²⁰

Up on the high part of the garden, through a gate, Gramps lives with the little granny. Down closer to Daddads' cow and horse and through another gate lives his bigger granny. She has a black dog that tries to lick his face. Big green and orange balls hang on strings climbing up the fence. His sister thinks they might fall and crush the birds that

¹⁸ "Once her father's voice ..." Lucy Beck interview.

¹⁹ "His sister is calling ..." Lucy Beck interview. Also confirmed by Arthur Boyd in Margaret Chalker's interview that was conducted 24 & 25 January, and 18 February, 1996, at the National Library of Australia, Canberra (source, Oral History section, NGA). At this late point in Arthur's life, he was tiring yet he relates certain stories and retells others, with little alteration made to earlier versions and often with a fleshing out. Perhaps an important difference is that he is not being quizzed by an art historian. However, across all recorded interviews there is one common and revealing denominator: Arthur's defensive weapon of silence, occurring often at the exact same points of discussion. Direct quotes from Chalker's valuable interview conducted January and February 1966 at the National Library of Australia referenced throughout as 'Chalker tapes'.

²⁰ "His sister ...". Lucy Beck interview.

make the eggs. He runs after the birds calling their name. Then, instead of everyone calling him Arthur, they call him 'Chookchooks' and 'Chookie Boy'.²¹

Sometimes when Daddads milks the cow he squirts the milk straight into his mouth. Sometimes he misses and they laugh. Gibbidees plays games that don't always make him laugh. If he walks down the path in the garden he comes to Daddads' other house. Daddads wears a white coat when he goes in there. He stays there a long time and Mummums carries cups to his door. At the end of the day, when she makes the food, she calls him and sometimes even then he doesn't come; and then their voices change. Daddads' hands have white and brown stuff on them; and when he puts his hands through his hair it gets stuck there, too. Sometimes Daddads makes a fire in the brick place next to his little house in the garden, and he and Mummums stay up all night and keep making the fire. After the chimney goes red and after all the burning is gone, Daddads breaks some of the bricks apart and brings out lots of shiny coloured things. A lot of them have the colours Mummums makes and turns into trees and sky with her brushes. When Daddads sees his pots he is either very happy or very sad.

At the end of the day he watches Daddads put little sticks in the big machine in the small room and make hot water, and wash off the sticky white and brown stuff. When it is his turn Mummums washes him in hot water in a tub close by the fire if it's cold. When he is clean he sits on cuddly Granny's lap and she tells stories and sings. At the other house Gramps plays the piano and Granny reads stories to Gibbidees from a big book full of coloured pictures. These pictures aren't like the pictures that Granny or Gramps or Mummums make of grass and trees and skies and water. A lot of these pictures make him feel afraid.²²

"I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection".
Sigmund Freud.

Life for Arthur, up to the age of almost three-and-a-half, must have been as comforting as the babyish nicknames, used into adulthood, suggest - the few pinpricks of fear too small to deflate his cosy containment. But, in the last days of November, 1923, he would have sensed the sorrow that blanketed Wahroonga Crescent. Emma Minnie and Arthur Merric had lost their first son, Gilbert, at the age of nine, in a fall from his pony. Now they were to mourn the loss of a son for a second time.

Penleigh's eldest son, Pat, never forgot the day they returned from England and their father collected him, his brother Robin, and his mother from the ship. All the way home

²¹ "Up on the high part of the garden ..." Lucy Beck interview.

²² "... a lot of these pictures ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes

the two boys listened to the incessant arguing between their parents. Pat was only seven years old but the memory was etched into his mind when, just days later, his dashing father died in a crash in the very same car, aged just thirty-three.²³

It must have been a form of solace when, on August 23, 1924, nine months almost to the day after Penleigh's death, Merric's third son, David, was born. Then, in less than fifteen months, Doris became pregnant again with her fifth child. Merric and Doris adored their family. It was obvious to those close to them that they thought their children the most marvellous creatures. Yet, never ceasing to decorate Merric's pots, Doris, as she entered her fifth pregnancy, was exhausted. With four children under the age of nine years and two, if not three, adults (depending on whether domestic help was living in or out at the time) all cooped up in such meagre accommodation, life must have been chaotic and claustrophobic. Having once been the centre of attention, Arthur would have been aware of Guy's presence distracting his mother and then his sense of displacement would have increased with the arrival of David.

At about this time Arthur tried to assert his position, to make himself useful, anxious, no doubt, for his parents' attention and approval. He had been watching his father stoking the kiln. Merric's firings were exciting epic affairs with the furnace reaching 1200 degrees centigrade, flames rising from the top of the chimney, the entire stack eventually becoming a glowing pillar of light. Firings would last up to forty-eight hours. In the middle of one such firing Merric was still asleep when Arthur, rising early, found "the most marvellous glowing fire" and having watched his father stoking the fire, proceeded to emulate him by "chuck(ing) more coal on the kiln". When his father awoke Arthur was devastated to learn that rather than help he had "mucked up all the glazing".²⁴ It would have seemed like the equivalent of taking his father's pay packet and losing it. It was a memory that never left him. He would have a lifetime's horror about forcing himself on a situation and taking charge, in case he "mucked up".

After returning from the war Merric had applied for assistance from the Repatriation Department and been rejected.²⁵ Despite that initial setback, and with a loan from his family of one hundred pounds, he had built two enormous kilns, one with eight fireboxes, and managed during the post war years to establish a substantial reputation among collectors and critics alike; his pieces could fetch the extremely high prices of fifty and sixty pounds. But of far greater value to Merric, his life was rich. His joyful preoccupation with work and family is apparent in an inscription to his youngest son David (nicknamed Dayford) on a small circular pot. Under Merric's signature it reads, 'Dayford aged 2 carried this in his hands in the green state'.²⁶ The years Merric and Doris were producing their family were the years Merric thrived. His output was great and varied. He threw household objects that accommodated Doris's delicate brushwork.

²³ "All the way home the two boys listened ..." Telephone interview with Anne Boyd, widow of Pat, the eldest son of Merric's brother, Penleigh Boyd. December, 2001.

²⁴ "In the middle of one such firing ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

²⁵ "After returning from the war ..." Letters Phylliss & Guy Boyd. NLA. Op cit

²⁶ "His joyful preoccupation with work and family ..." David Boyd interview, Sydney, February, 2004.

Note: 'Green state' is clay before firing.

And he created what were, by now, his signature works: pots and jugs and bowls with images of Australia – koalas and gum trees, kookaburras and post and rail fences – sculpted into a meld of both familiar and strange organic beauty.

In 1926 an accident occurred that would have life-altering repercussions. Arthur and Lucy had gone to Henley for the Melbourne regatta with Granny Gough to see the race and the fireworks and to picnic with their cousins by the Yarra River. The invitation came from Evelyn's daughter Lettie, the well-off Mrs Madder and her husband Ralph.²⁷

Apart from the babies, Open Country would have been quiet. So quiet you could have heard a teacup against a saucer, a branch scratching against a window, a frog croaking down by the creek. Then confusion. Cries, screams, running as thick smoke billowed from the pottery, for the first time with no creative purpose. The flames, rapidly feeding on the intense heat, leapt so high that a terrible red glow was seen in the night sky from every corner of the district.

On their return from Henley as they turned towards Murrumbena the occupants of Uncle Ralph's car wondered at the bruised sky. Arthur remembered the tyres of Uncle Ralph's car running over something lumpy at the top of the crescent. They were to discover, seconds later, it had been the firemen's hoses. By the time the horse-drawn fire carts had arrived and the hoses were dragged down from the upper road, the pottery had been destroyed. When Uncle Ralph's passengers spilled out in front of Open Country the firemen had given up on the pottery and were ensuring the house was safe.

How did the mind of a small boy cope with this confusion of celebration and calamity? Only hours before he had watched an explosion of fireworks light up the sky, and now the fire that had signalled pleasure, brought pain. He had left home for just one evening and had fun, and from that a catastrophe had ensued.²⁸

In the previous weeks Merric had been working at white heat, figuratively and literally. In pursuit of stoneware and new glazing techniques he had been pushing up the heat in the kilns. He had been experimenting with a round gas kiln installed in his office and the unusually high temperature of this kiln had ignited papers. The fire had destroyed not only the pottery, including the pottery wheel and kiln, but his carefully recorded recipes for glazes and all the work he had completed and stored for a forthcoming exhibition.

There is a favourite Boyd family story about Merric's discovery in the ashes of the fire. It was a piece of pottery, fired by the tremendous heat and cooled by the fire hoses. It had achieved the *sang-de-boeuf* glaze Merric had been chasing for some time and he insouciantly commented that it was a pity he had to burn down the pottery to achieve it. This irony, employed at such a difficult time, can be seen as an elegant example of

²⁷ "But in October 1926, an accident occurred that would have life-altering repercussions". Memories of this event come from various sources including Patricia Boyd interview, Melbourne and Beatrice Bewley op cit, Lucy Beck interview, and Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

²⁸ "How did the mind ..." After discussing the circumstances of the kiln fire to Margaret Chalker Arthur ends his recounting with the statement: "...that was a really traumatic thing". Chalker tapes.

Merric's quixotic slant. In fact Merric was badly traumatised and suffered a breakdown. Without the solace of work he walked around for weeks in his slippers and dressing gown. He underwent psychiatric treatment.²⁹ There had been little money previously and now, without the means to work, they would be close to poverty. Due to the trauma of the fire, Doris was threatened with a miscarriage and hospitalised.³⁰ After Mary's birth the doctor warned Doris that another pregnancy would be life threatening. Merric, a passionate and physical man, faced not only a crippling setback to his work but a lifetime of celibacy.

Arthur, at such an early age, would have seen the pottery and his father as one and the same thing, indestructible. To discover they were not would have been frightening enough. But to watch his mother taken to hospital and his father sink into depression must have left him feeling abandoned. Then, like a follow-up punch, another unimaginable scene occurred in front of Arthur's eyes.

They were out in the phaeton, trotting down a dirt road, on their way to visit Doris's sister, Lettie, and her family. Doris cradled Mary. David was on the driver's seat, sandwiched between his parents. Lucy, Guy and Arthur sat facing their mother and father. Perhaps, for a hopeful moment, it appeared as if his father was merely pulling a face. But then the flooding fear as the unhinged eyelids, the lolling tongue, and the gaping mouth, remained, while all the time Merric's body jerked, convulsively, backwards and forwards. It was both strange and horrifying that the journey continued with its steady rhythm while Merric's contorted body had drummed out such a discordant beat, the reins flying out of his flailing arms as if controlled by a mad puppeteer.³¹

Exactly when Merric's epilepsy first manifested itself is uncertain. His immediate family have suggested that the shock of the fire was the trigger and that, as years went by, it was exacerbated by celibacy. Due to Doris's avoidance of the subject, it is impossible to know. Lucy remembers Granny Gough once turning Merric's head to the side and inserting a spoon to prevent him swallowing his tongue. However, if there was enough warning before a seizure occurred, Merric was removed from sight. The children were told that the strange sounds emanating from behind closed doors were Daddads playing gee-gees or it was his nervous indigestion.

As a child, Merric had suffered fainting turns and revealed a fierce, erratic temper. Some believe that these were early signs of the illness, not acknowledged because of the severe social stigma of the time. For centuries epilepsy had been seen as demonic, a possession,

²⁹ "He underwent psychiatric treatment". This is reported in Anne Bertouch, *Guy Boyd*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne. 1976, p25.

³⁰ "....Doris was threatened with a miscarriage ..." Arthur's sisters hold differing accounts. Mary believes her mother was hospitalised before the fire "my mother had already been off to a tiny private hospital and she had ... come home." Lucy believes it was the shock of the fire that caused Doris's hospitalisation.

³¹ "They were out in the phaeton ..." This incident remained in Lucy Beck's mind, seemingly as fresh in her nineties as when she witnessed it.

an evil state. Even the enlightened, those objecting to epileptics being incarcerated in madhouses, called the place of care a “colony”. Epilepsy was seen as akin to leprosy: people avoided it, shunned the sight. A newspaper report, in 1907, described these “unfortunate epileptics” as “a burden to others and a misery to themselves”.³²

Emma Minnie’s behaviour, after she learnt Doris had accepted Merric’s marriage proposal, suggests she had been guarding the knowledge of her son’s affliction. According to her daughter Helen, her mother became extremely anxious and immediately got out her gig and horse and travelled across town to see Doris. Helen sensed Emma Minnie did not want Merric to marry but had no idea why.³³ Decades later Dr Guy Springthorpe, a friend of Merric, would express disbelief that Helen had been kept ignorant of the fact of her brother’s condition. Both he and his father had known about it as long as he could remember. Some suggest that the reason the location of Murrumbeena was chosen was simply to be close to Dr John Springthorpe Senior, a family relation through marriage to a cousin of Emma a’Beckett, and a confidant. But whatever Emma Minnie had to say to Doris on that day didn’t deter the younger woman. It was around this time Doris gave up Catholicism and converted, as her mother had previously, to Christian Science.

After Mary’s birth and Doris’s decision to cease physical relations, Merric moved into his own room. It was separated from the main bedroom by a small triangular bathroom. At night Merric would stand on the threshold of the bathroom and say long, longing goodnights to his wife as she lay surrounded by their children. Often Doris would have to get up and shut the door on her husband.³⁴

As time went by, part of the large central room, called the Brown Room, was partitioned off as sleeping quarters for those children overflowing from their mother’s bed. To make space, *The Prodigal Son*, a plaster sculpture of Merric’s from the early years, which had never been cast in bronze because of the expense, was moved out into the garden. It sat under the mulberry tree for years to come, and the children played around it and climbed over it. Each season the mulberries fell, splattering the suplicate body like wound marks. As one generation grew and was replaced by the next, it slowly broke apart.

³² “Even the enlightened – those objecting to epileptics being incarcerated in mad houses ...” In 1907, a newspaper report discusses ‘The Talbot Colony of Epileptics’ and a visit made to the colony by Lady Talbot and his Excellency the Governor. Cutting from Springthorpe boxes, State Library of Victoria.

³³ “Helen sensed Emma Minnie did not want Merric to marry ...” Throughout this book much is owed to the work of Brenda Niall and her fine biography on Merric’s brother: *Martin Boyd: A Life*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1988, and *‘the Boyds’* Melbourne University Press, 2002. In the addition of her published scholarship she has personally shared reminiscences of the Boyd family, provided contacts, and kindly allowed this author to read the transcript of an interview she conducted with Helen Read, nee Boyd.

³⁴ “After Mary’s birth and Doris’s decision ...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

Exclusion ... being shut out ... was really quite an early development. Arthur Boyd.³⁵

He is going to school and he is late. His sister is going to school too, but he can't catch up. He runs, calling, 'Wait for me ... Gibby, please wait for me.' She races on ahead. She never waits.³⁶

He is going to school. His sister is going to school too, hand in hand with Mummums and Daddads, on the other side of the street. His sister keeps calling out, 'Chookchooks! ... Chookie! ... Chookie Boy!' He puts his head down and keeps walking, looking at the ground. He is embarrassed, especially by his father. He doesn't look over.

In January 1928 at 8.55 a.m. a white warning flag flew. It signalled five minutes before the headmaster's large brass bell would summon Arthur Boyd into his first day at Murrumbena State School. For the next six years the bell tolled for the shy, gentle, round-faced boy with hair cut by his mother in a long, straight bob. Built in 1917, the two-storeyed, stone-pillared, brick-walled, red-tiled school building towering over the surrounding suburban bungalows, squatted stolidly on a bare two acres, just a couple of blocks away from Open Country.

Arthur was a year late and one of the oldest boys in a class of sixty when he arrived at Murrumbena State School. He would have been desperately hoping that this new school would be more encouraging than the last. He had spent his first year at St Peter's, predominantly a girl's Church of England grammar school in the adjoining suburb, being studiously ignored: 'I learnt nothing ... because nothing was told to me'. Emma Minnie had, in her desire for a religious education for her grandchildren, volunteered to pay the school fees. The decision to switch schools was certainly influenced by finances, but perhaps Doris and Merric also decided the environment was unsuitable. Lucy, despite a sharp mind and competitive wit, had been unhappy at St Peter's. Given Arthur's lack of verbal defence his introductory year would have been more difficult than he could describe.

Snobbery was one thing you were sure to learn at St Peter's. Lucy felt sick about the prospect of going through its gates. After being called 'stupe' she determinedly rose to the head of the class. Yet she was always the brunt of jokes; she always felt despised. Years later, when Murrumbena schoolmates visited her house they sniggered at the fact there was no carpet on the bare floorboards. Lucy would have been unable to smooth the way for her brother, but at least at St. Peter's Arthur would have taken some small comfort in being able to hide behind the sameness of a uniform.

³⁵ "Exclusion ..." Arthur Boyd to John Read, producer, writer, narrator for the television documentary. *A Man of Two Worlds*, screened by BBC and ABC in 1978. An extensive interview, from which the sound track appears to be edited, can be sourced in the ABC archives, Sydney.

³⁶ "He is going to school ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker interview. Boyd to Chalker: "...I used to loathe this going to school ... I remember the agony of trying to keep up". These instances were confirmed by his sister, Lucy.

At Murrumbena State School the dress code was individual, but in the conformist society of this outer area of a Victorian city that was a contradiction. Arthur was dressed with care but not convention. For many, as the Depression years deepened, it was a case of make-do. Emma Minnie sewed at a steady rate, cutting down and re-styling hand-me-downs for her grandchildren. When shoe leather wore through, cardboard under-soles took its place. Doris, perhaps not as adept at needlework as her mother-in-law, would patch the children's socks with oddly matched pieces of fabric. All this attracted insults. But the *coup de grace* would have been Doris's artistic eye. It was his mother's use of colour (red trousers with blue socks) that would have been more than reason enough in that grey-minded world for her son to be relegated to the sidelines.

Among a playground full of sons of Anzacs with their close-cropped back-and-sides he was the boy with the long hair. Yet, even if Arthur could have looked the same or been the cleverest or the strongest, he would still have been ostracised.³⁷ He kept to himself; he was the one they called weirdo.³⁸ But in a sense the antipathy towards Arthur was second-hand. He came from "the family of mad artists, from the wrong side of the tracks".³⁹ His family was so different that they didn't mow the lawn or cultivate flowers. Instead, they let their garden run wild with trees and used the shovel not to turn the soil but to extract clay. The head of this family, the man who didn't have 'a real job', attracted attention. Arthur's father was the major figure of fun.⁴⁰

Merric, with flowing silver hair to his shoulders, dressed in dilapidated three-piece suits. His carriage was as dignified as his speech. His old-world manners reflected an upbringing from another time and place. His hat showed wear along its centre crease from the number of times he would raise it to those he met. His habit of stepping off the pavement to allow a woman space to pass was often met with the suspicion he was flirting.⁴¹ But a snail would receive the same courtesy. On his walks he would become entranced before a gum tree or a flower and sit on the curb and sketch it. Sometimes his journey would be cut short by an epileptic fit. Often the marks of the horror would be left behind; indentations on a grassy verge from his thrashing body, or holes in the dust by the side of the dirt road, caused by his drumming feet. When these attacks happened, word would reach Doris. Then Arthur would be dispatched, either by foot or bicycle, to find his father and bring him home.

Merric would have been appalled to have seen his son surrounded by a rowdy group outside the school gates on certain afternoons. After school, fights were arranged and

³⁷ Boyd, Arthur. John Read. Op cit.

³⁸ "He kept to himself ..." Bill Attwood, Murrumbena State School pupil, interview October, 2001.

³⁹ "He came from a family of mad artists ..." Arthur Boyd to John Read, op. cit

⁴⁰ "The head of the family ..." Without the generosity of researcher and writer, Colin Smith, this author would have been deprived of an understanding of Murrumbena and its residents from Arthur's era. For many years Colin Smith has tirelessly, through recorded interviews, captured a wealth of local history. At the time of publication Smith's forthcoming book *Merric Boyd in Murrumbena: The Life of an Artist in a Time and a Place* is in draft form. Quotes from these tapes will be referenced throughout as 'Smith tapes'.

⁴¹ "His habit of stepping off the pavement ..." Discussing this subject further Arthur Boyd told John Read (op cit.) 'He was a very gentle soul, but also very proper. He'd step aside off the pavement for women and they probably thought he was making a pass at them ... terrible embarrassment'.

Arthur was forced to take part. He could fight easily enough, but often he would find himself pitted against a boy he liked. No one barracked for Arthur. At that stage Arthur was one of the tallest and so he reasoned his schoolmates must have favoured his smaller opponents. No doubt Arthur's anxiety continued long after the bouts were over. He would have felt compelled to keep the distress of this wretched practice from his parents.

But sometimes there was little Arthur could do to help his father. Egged on by their parents' description of Merric as an 'odd bod' and the rumour that he had returned from World War I with a metal plate in his head, children would taunt him. When they discovered that his hatred of guns ran so deep as to forbid his own children even to point their fingers and say "Bang bang!", they ran after him, doing just that and calling out "What are you?" at the top of their voices.⁴² After a time, Merric would turn and, using the speed that had once won prizes at his elite private school, he would give chase. It became a horrible sport. These were the same children who shunned Arthur at school;⁴³ the same children who would giggle when the teacher either ignored or chastised him for not understanding; the same children who, noticing Arthur bewildered by a set exercise, would cover their exercise books with their arms to prevent him from seeing their work.⁴⁴

At home Arthur was allowed to do whatever he liked as long as he didn't hurt himself or others. His mother rarely told him what to do, believing her children would know how to behave. Learning came through observation, not by rote. Individuality was a given, and to follow your creative work was the purpose of life. Day after day he would hear his parents use the same words, "love governs". At school in the freezing winters, as the children shivered in their two-seater desks, a silent lesson came to him from the sight of the teachers standing resolutely in the corner of the room in front of the small fire, hands behind their back, absorbing all the warmth.⁴⁵

The schoolroom and the Brown Room were different places. The drawing room Merric had originally planned was never realised because of financial restraints. Instead, the large dining room became the living room. Every available shelf and surface was covered in pots and sculptures and paintings, finished and unfinished. Papers, drawing paper and sketches were piled randomly. Paint and clay were ground into the floors and the furniture. Children etched and painted the plaster walls, and were encouraged to do so. The unlined kitchen walls would fall down and be propped up with old paintings done on masonite. The air was heavy with the scent of paint and varnish. There were a few unselfconscious traces of a wealthy, gentrified past. In later years, a finely carved

⁴² "When they discovered that his hatred of guns ran so deep" Smith tapes.

⁴³ "They were the same children ..." Charlie Adams interview. Charlie Adams has been a valuable witness to Arthur's boyhood and adolescence. Two extended telephone interviews to New Zealand were conducted: the first October 2000, and the second, March 2002. Charlie Adams was accepted as 'one of the crowd' in the Murrumbidgee schoolyard and, no doubt as a consequence, didn't mix much with Arthur at school. But growing up as a constant next-door friend he learnt to admire the determination and strength that lay under Arthur's shy protective shell.

⁴⁴ "...would cover their exercise books ..." Gunn tapes.

⁴⁵ "At school in the freezing winters ..." Interview Bill Attwood, op. cit.

Spanish table, passed down through the generations, dominated the room. A large seascape in oil by Arthur Merric hung in an ornate frame. Grandfather Gough's ceremonial sword was relegated to life as a fire poker. A college prize, a silver-banded biscuit barrel, stood on the kitchen shelf as testament to Merric's athletic achievements. A leaning towards Arts & Crafts was apparent in the proportions of the fireplace and high mantel, and also in the carved high-backed chairs made as a wedding present for them by Martin's brother, Penleigh. These worldly touches were nominal and not prized. Open Country was an artists' camp that gave shelter to anyone who asked. It was a modest bungalow, grand with ideals.

Lesson 19. 1. Sam gave the grub to Alf. 2. Alf has his grub in a box. 3. One day this grub will be a moth. 4. Then it will have four big wings. 5. They will help the moth to fly. 6. It may fly to the lamp. 7. Moths like to do so, but that kills them. 8. I have seen them on the cloth by the lamp. Have you?

In later years Arthur Boyd's use of metamorphosis in his symbolic paintings would confound art historians. The seed may have been planted here. At the age of eight, these were words Arthur agonised over as he learnt how to read.⁴⁶ He often copied the coloured illustrations during lessons and was, on at least one occasion, sent to the headmaster's office to be caned for the offence. But the cane could not beat out this image, the moth would recur throughout Arthur Boyd's life's work.⁴⁷ The story of the moth and its possible fate would have disturbed him. By this time he had learnt that the world was indiscriminate in its cruelty. At home he saw the birth of malformed kittens and calves and it haunted him.⁴⁸ It was horrifying, like the sight of his father during an epileptic fit when he became twisted and changed from his normal form. When Merric felt a seizure about to occur, he would try desperately to dispel the fit with the

⁴⁶ "In later years Arthur's use of metamorphosis ..." The Victorian Department of Education had issued this first reader in 1928, the year Arthur began at Murrumbidgee State School.

⁴⁷ "But the cane could not beat out the image ..." In Grazia Gunn's 'Seven Persistent Images' exhibition catalogue, published by the Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1985, *Butterfly hunter*, painted in the forties, shows a creature with a sting to its tail. It resembles a hornet more than a butterfly.. In Barry Pearce's retrospective exhibition catalogue there is a South Melbourne work titled *Butterfly man*. This title becomes less clear when the drawing (almost identical and also illustrated in the catalogue) is titled *Figures with moths, outspread arms and leg*. Hornets, butterflies, or moths? When questioned by art historians on symbols and titles, Arthur would often defer to the experts' opinions, replying to Gunn's questioning of moth v butterfly, "you tell me".

Grazia Gunn, in April of 1981, and Barry Pearce early in 1993, began interviewing Arthur Boyd at Bundanon. Pearce in his role of Head Curator of Australian Art for AGNSW, and Gunn as art historian at NGA, produced illuminating results. The author is indebted to them. Quotes from these sources will be referenced as Gunn tapes and Pearce tapes. Gunn tapes can be sourced from NGA and Pearce from AGNSW archives. Several versions of the Gunn transcripts exist in the Bundanon archives, one a corrected and edited version by Yvonne Boyd.

⁴⁸ "At home he saw ..." "My father had small calves that were born ... kind of helpless things ... and cats ... my mother had about twenty cats and they were always producing something terrible ... malformed ... might have been the fact they never had enough to eat ..." Pearce tapes.

command: 'Out error'. Often his final words, after losing the struggle and succumbing, would be: 'I'm pegging out'. Arthur would see the moth and his father hover on a similar abyss.

As the eldest son, Arthur must have been desperate to give his mother the support he could see his father unable to give. Yet his confidence was being shattered at school. In his first year of school his records show close to one hundred percent attendance, but then he watched Lucy, after six months off school with diphtheria, still being put up a grade, while he stayed in 'the bubs'. Two years later he spent half of his school days at home. In an unusual move by the school, he was kept back in Grade Three for two-and-a-half years. Bill Attwood, two years younger than Arthur, remembers going through to the next class and Arthur being kept behind: "He was quiet and shy, more so than Guy and David ... a lonely kid ...sitting aside ... made fun of ...it upset him".⁴⁹ The strap, on the hand or the leg, was a regular punishment for those who weren't "paying attention".⁵⁰ Not paying attention and not keeping up would have been an easy confusion to over-burdened teachers. Perhaps it was around this time that Doris paid her memorable visit to the school.

Softly spoken, gentle and genteel Doris could, on rare occasions, change when her children were threatened. In those situations Arthur described her as "a tigress".⁵¹ No doubt that was how Mr. McIlroy, the headmaster, and Miss Grant, the form mistress, saw her when, finally snapping at the unhappiness of her son, she flew up to the school and delivered a scathing attack. Her eyes (blue eyes that when blazing could scorch cheeks crimson) would have pinned her prey fast as she lectured the hapless teachers, demanding to know how they could be so ignorant as not to realise that her son Arthur, the artist, was "a genius!"⁵²

After that things changed. Miss Grant's foghorn voice was quieted and Arthur's misery was alleviated. Arthur brought his teacher pieces of pottery thrown on the wheel his grandfather had given him and he became her pet. Mr McIlroy, newly educated by Doris to realise that learning to spell wasn't important if you had a "visual language", now viewed a painting by Arthur hanging on his office wall with a clearer eye.⁵³ Later an art teacher, Mr Bechevaise, singled Arthur out and took special interest in his progress. According to one classmate, it was only before Bechevaise's art class that Arthur showed any emotion: his usual defence when being taunted was to show no response at all.⁵⁴ He recalled how Arthur looked forward to the art lesson and how keen he was to get into the class and get on with it: "he wasn't keen on much else". On the walls of the art room Arthur saw, for the first time, prints of Gainsborough, Hals, Velazquez, Turner,

⁴⁹ "In an unusual move by the school ... " Bill Attwood interview. November 2001.

⁵⁰ "The strap, on the hand or the leg ..." *ibid.*

⁵¹ "In those situations Arthur described her ..." Lucy Beck interview.

⁵² "Her eyes, blue eyes that when blazing ..." *ibid.*

⁵³ "Mr. McIlroy, newly educated by Doris ..." *ibid.*

⁵⁴ "According to one classmate ..." Telephone Interview Ken Tulloch, Murrumbidgee, 2002.

Vermeer, Constable and the painter who would become his lodestar, Rembrandt.⁵⁵ And now Arthur could barter in the schoolroom, exchanging his botanical sketches, pastels of flowers and insects sophisticatedly smudged with light and shade, for help with his sums.⁵⁶ Every year, from 1931 to the year of his escape in 1934, Arthur won the 'First Award' for Art. The pupil who would be Murrumbeena State School's most famous student left, unnoticed. He slipped away, sooner than legally permitted, several months before his fourteenth birthday and a few steps ahead of the truant officer.⁵⁷

Often those who ignored Arthur at school could be found at Open Country. Most times of the year the children of Murrumbeena hung from the branches of the Boyds' mulberry tree like Christmas decorations. The tree was particularly crowded when empty jam pots were being dusted off, or old shoeboxes were being punctured and lined with mulberry leaves in preparation for the silkworms.

During term time they would come with their jam sandwiches during the lunch break or, after hurtling down the cul-de-sac on their billy-carts, use the Boyds' place as a pit stop. Why did they come? Perhaps it was to plunder the fruit trees (to which they were given carte blanche); or to find discarded treasure among the mound of broken pots; or to watch Merric at his wheel, or Doris painting. Maybe it was just a thrilling game, to disobey their parents and associate with the "queer Boyds".⁵⁸ Or perhaps it was simply that they felt free in the exciting, strange, overgrown garden where little was denied them and they were never turned away.

Some of those who didn't summon the courage to venture in threw stones. The day a stone gashed Lucy on the head was the day remembered by all as the one when Arthur lost his temper. Dr Hurley, the owner of the home that once belonged to Merric's parents, was a neighbour in situation only. This house, built on the rise of the slope, looked down on Open Country, as did the Hurleys. Although Hurley's garden sported a

⁵⁵ "On the walls of the art room Arthur saw ..." Arthur Boyd, Heatherington interview. "These were quite good big prints for those days and they were very memorable and I think that they might have had some sort of stimulation to get me to first take a serious interest, apart from being reasonably good at it". This was Arthur's reply to a list of questions he answered around early 1962 for John Hetherington. It was Arthur's first biographical interview, the results of which would be used as one of thirty-nine other essays in Hetherington's book titled, *Australian Painters: Forty Profiles* and published by F.W.Cheshire, in Victoria, 1963. Through the years it is not so much the content of the small Hetherington essay that has been quoted, but rather the material from which he worked: a list of questions and answers. Manuscript: AGNSW archives, Melbourne University archives (Philipp boxes) and Bundanon archives. Extracts not directly quoted from Heatherington's essay 'The Gentle Dynast' (pg 182) to be referenced as 'Hetherington notes'.

⁵⁶ "And now Arthur could barter ..." Bill Attwood.

⁵⁷ "He slipped away ..." It has been incorrectly reported that Arthur left school at fourteen. Whether pressure of school, or pressure to provide he reports in Chalker tapes: "I decided to leave [school] just before my 14th birthday, a few months before".

⁵⁸ "Maybe it was just a thrilling game ..." Smith tapes.

pony and a tennis court, only a select few were ever welcome to enjoy them. Dr Hurley's "buzz off" was the usual greeting. On the particular day when the Hurley children threw stones over the fence rather than the usual insults, Arthur stormed next door and ripped up the Hurleys' neat little flowerbed.⁵⁹ Perhaps this particular form of revenge had been fuelled by the ongoing taunt of "the Boyd jungle" by the majority of the district.

On the other side of the neighbouring fence lived Charlie Adams whose father had deserted his mother and she in turn had deserted Charlie. Although a newcomer and twelve years old, the same as Arthur, Charlie was put in a higher grade and accepted at school. Arthur, he recalls, "was shunned".⁶⁰ Charlie lived with his grandparents in Green Pastures, the duplex originally built by Granny Gough. About fifteen feet from the house a small footbridge spanned a three-foot wide canal built from bluestone, and then the land opened out. The stables to the right of Green Pastures and the dairy on the opposite rise had both closed down, but the odd cow and horse still grazed in long grass on the flat meadow leading to an embankment. A bridge, part of the remains of a defunct railway, the Outer Circle Line, swooped around in a semi-circle and buttercups grew in the remains of the old railway bed (the wooden sleepers were long gone, having been frugally recycled by Murrumbidgee residents for their gardens).

The canal spawned both frogs and children. Its water coursed into a large tunnel that in turn joined another series of tunnels. In the summer months it shrank down to a trickle, a drain. But when the rains came, it became deep and treacherous. David and Mary, on separate occasions, nearly drowned. Perhaps it gave an edge to the game of playing in the tunnels the boys called 'the darkies'. They would travel down them with their torches, playing Cowboys and Indians and Hide and Seek and screaming at the top of their lungs just to hear the replay spookily echoing down the mile or so of darkness. In their garden, Arthur had directed the excavation and building of a home-based underground tunnel. It eventually became so long, and so convoluted with caves, it became dangerous and had to be filled in. Headquarters was Arthur's pottery shed. With a megaphone, fashioned out of galvanised iron, they would sit on the roof of the shed and annoy the neighbours.

Guy and David, born so closely together, were constant playmates. Unlike Arthur and Lucy, they could be allowed the luxury of being children. Bea, Arthur's cousin, saw Arthur as "different" from the others: "Arthur was always full of fun but you couldn't rouse him... we were a force to be reckoned with and I think we frightened him off a bit."⁶¹ When Guy and David broke toys, tore books and unravelled knitting, they drove Lucy to rows and Arthur to evasive action. He managed to save his few precious things, among them a favourite book about a mouse called *Snips*, a log cabin and a Meccano

⁵⁹ "On the particular day ..." Lucy Beck interview. David Boyd's account of this incident differs to Lucy's in the fact he describes Arthur tearing up a paling fence. The author has opted for the less violent reaction and the older child's account of the story.

⁶⁰ "Arthur, he recalls, "was shunned". Charlie Adams interview, op cit.

⁶¹ "Arthur was always full of fun ..." Beatrice Bewley, nee Madder interview, Melbourne. December, 1999. November, 2001.

set, by asking permission to store them in the bottom drawer of a cabinet in his father's room.

That room was Merric's sanctuary. But the chaos couldn't always be circumnavigated. Although Merric was patient and gentle, to the extent he would halt his step to pick up an ant and put it out of harm's way, he was also contradictory and unpredictable. Charlie, more often in the Boyds' house than his own, would witness Merric "shouting and stamping up and down, roaring and screaming, 'I'm going to punish you'". More times than not he would inflict punishment on himself. Rolling up the leg of his trouser, he'd choose a suitable switch from a tree and beat his own limb, raising welts, if not blood, while he berated the offenders for causing his pain. Charlie remembers the scenes as "quite terrifying" but something he "got used to ..."⁶²

In the privileged early years of Merric's childhood the sound of a gentle tinkling bell, rung by a parlour-maid, would announce luncheon or dinner. At Open Country it was a cowbell. Its clanging called a halt to activities in the garden and produced faint sighs of relief from the residents of Wahroonga Crescent. But the bell didn't ring at a conventional hour and the dinner prepared would be eaten where the first clear space could be found. Meals were as sustaining as the budget would allow, with split pea soup a regular on the menu. Often Emma Minnie, the ongoing benefactress of household help, would come to the rescue by arranging for Woodlands, the local grocery, to send someone around to take an order. Everyone was always a little bit hungry⁶³ and perhaps Arthur more than most; he worried about his mother worrying about the younger ones and it would have been in character for him to stand back from the table.⁶⁴

Lucy had become a little mother. She helped with the chores, the cooking and the bathing of the boys, anxious like Arthur to help Doris who was now so thin that the children called the hollows in her neck "salt-cellars". Perhaps it was at mealtime that Lucy's catch-cry, "Go home, Charlie Adams", would be heard the loudest.⁶⁵ But to Charlie, Open Country, haphazard and strange as it appeared to some, felt like he thought home should feel. He never wanted to leave. He'd usually "slope off and come

⁶² "Charlie remembers the scenes ..." Charlie Adams interview. Guy Boyd, when recalling these events remembered "Arthur was horrified" but Guy thought it was "better for [my] father to hithimself than to hit me." *Guy Boyd*, Anne von Bertouch, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1976.

⁶³ "Everyone was always a little bit hungry ..." Ibid This has been denied in part by David Boyd, but supported by Guy and Lucy.

⁶⁴ "... it would have been in character for him to stand back from the table". Interview Yvonne Boyd. "I had the feeling that Arthur was self denying. He would have deferred to his mother". This early interview at Yvonne's London home was one of many - a number of which extended over several days. While the interviews are listed, the numerous telephone interviews and the notes, letters and tapes received from Yvonne are not.

2, 16, 24 February, 2000, Highgate. 2, 7 March, 2000, Highgate; March, Eaton Square; 27, 28, 29 March Suffolk. April, 2000, Highgate. 22, 23 August Highgate. November 2000 Gisborne, Melbourne. 20 March, 2001, Haywood Gallery; March 2001, Wimbledon; May 2001, Kenwood House; May 2001, Wimbledon; May 2001, July 2001, Highgate; July, 2001, Wimbledon; 21-25 March, 2003 Whale Beach; July 2004, 11-20 September 2006, Gisborne.

⁶⁵ "Perhaps it was at meal time ..." Lucy Beck interview.

back again".⁶⁶ He loved being around the family. He liked to observe Arthur building things, or helping his father turn the pottery wheel, or crushing the clay, or firing the kiln ... keeping it stoked with coal for sometimes as much as two days and two nights. And Charlie found a mother in Doris. They had long talks together and, no matter how busy she was, she found time to listen. Through Doris's interest and tutoring Charlie believed he gained "a touch of culture". Later in life he would fly the planes he wrote about in *The Chronicle*, a newspaper produced by the children in the garden shed.

As she did for her own children, Doris gave Charlie Adams that invaluable commodity, confidence. To anyone, particularly the sensitive and the needy, it was apparent that it was Doris who, under the branches of the mulberry tree, spun the cocoon that nourished all those within the protective borders of Open Country.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ "He'd usually 'slope off ..." Charlie Adams interview.

⁶⁷ "To anyone, particularly the sensitive and the needy ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd "...The upbringing was very confident ... he (Arthur) was given great confidence"

CHAPTER TWO

To the market square

"I have not sent any plan of building yet as I do not wish to go to that expense & trouble until I have your permission. As it is very possible that I will engage in another occupation I will then wish to carry on my pottery as a hobby ..."
From Merric Boyd to His Worship the Mayor, City of Caulfield. 4 December, 1926.⁶⁸

⁶⁸: "I have not sent any plan ..." National Library of Australia, Papers Guy & Phyllis Boyd.

Shortly after the kiln fire, on November 5 1926, a letter to the Caulfield Council from MacKinnon estates (a trust that owned many of the rented houses in Murrumbeena) urged them to ask for, and then reject, any plans made by Merric Boyd to rebuild the pottery at Open Country. It complained that the residents disliked the factory in their street and stated they believed it an opportune time to move Merric Boyd and his pottery into a shopping area. For years the neighbours railed about soot from pottery firings sullyng their washing. This was a source of embarrassment to Arthur as he was required to do a Paul Revere ride around the district on his bicycle warning that the kiln would be firing. Perhaps Merric's letter is contrived to outwit 'His Worship'; but it's far more likely that the penury and confusion expressed was very real. His shock showed in his recounting of the accident to the council: in Merric's eyes the pottery hadn't burnt down, it had been "*consumed* by fire". At the end of December Merric had permission to erect a brick studio with a restriction that no machine of any kind be installed and a Damoclesian proviso that the pottery be "discontinued whenever the Council so orders".⁶⁹

With the aid of a devoted collector, who arranged a public benefit, and a local builder-bricklayer, Mr Gilbert, who was a part-time potter himself, it took a year before the pottery was rebuilt on the opposite side of the garden.⁷⁰ Even this financial assistance was insufficient to completely finish the workspace: a constructed floor had been a luxury to forgo. Not only was the new pottery significantly smaller, but Merric was now bereft of the machines he had previously laboured long and hard to invent and build. Until the day he threw his last piece, Merric was forced to make do with far more primitive equipment.⁷¹

While the kiln was being rebuilt, Merric scrambled to make any kind of income. At one stage he designed illustrations for chocolate boxes for Griffiths Brothers, bringing home little money but always pocketsful of peppermint chocolates. In another effort to support the family, Merric taught pottery at the New England Girls' School at Armidale using the kiln that he had designed in 1925.⁷² Not all the neighbours shunned Merric. The go-between in this case had been Miss Green, the founder and first headmistress of the school, who had retired to Murrumbeena. In 1925 Merric had been so enamoured with the idea that Armidale would be the first school in NSW to offer pottery as a discipline, that he had simply asked for expenses to cover his labour and his travel. With his career then at its peak, this had been a gesture he could afford. But following the fire, it is likely Miss Green was once again the go-between. Teaching at Armidale was advantageous on two counts: it guaranteed a salary, and Merric could take advantage of his stay by using the school kiln to fire his own work.

⁶⁹ "At the end of December ..." Ibid

⁷⁰ "With the aid of a devoted collector ..." Smith tapes.

⁷¹ "Until the day he threw his last piece ..." Boyd, Arthur. "He [Merric] made marvelous machines with clay presses to bore mills to blungers ... there was a great shaft with pulleys on it and the belts going down to various machines so that all the power came off the one motor. "....My father star(ed) again with just a wheel ... the whole thing was done either with a hand wheel turned or a kick wheel". Chalker tapes.

⁷² "In another effort to support the family ..." Armidale & District Historical Society. Journal and Proceedings. No. 32, September, 1989.

Despite his efforts, money was so tight that lines of communication needed to be cut: the telephone was disconnected, the horse and phaeton sold, and life became harder still.⁷³ Family contact and outings were greatly reduced. Without the phaeton, Merric could no longer choose his clay and deliver it home himself. When there was enough pottery to sell in the city, a pair of large brown suitcases became the means of conveying it there. It was a struggle for Doris and Merric to carry such heavy loads. The arrival of Mr. Gray with his appropriately-coloured grey horse from the Murrumbeena railway station cab rank was quite an occasion; it would create a flurry of excitement among the children as mother and father set off on their expedition. And it was an expedition. After the train ride to the heart of Melbourne, another cab would be necessary from Flinders Street railway station to their first port of call. Their foray into the commercial world was always an ordeal. At the Primrose Pottery shop Doris would be forced to do the negotiating while Merric cooled his heels outside.

Merric believed he still had access to great reserves of wealth. He would describe his grave financial circumstances as simply "the problem with boodle".⁷⁴ When faced with the distasteful process of selling, Merric, in his nervous agitation, would ask the most ridiculously low prices for his pieces; it was left to Doris to mediate.⁷⁵ Inevitably, after calling around to the handful of shops interested in hand-thrown pottery, they would visit Mair & Lyne. If sales had been lean, they could depend on Mr. Lyne. He was a friend who would often buy the pottery without necessarily needing it.⁷⁶ Doris would call this a "personality sale".⁷⁷ When they returned in the evening Doris's sparkling eyes and little packets of boiled sweets distributed by Merric, signalled a successful trip.⁷⁸

It was a measure of Merric's otherworldliness that, despite the necessity for frugal behaviour, he gave much of his livelihood away. Often he would usher a passing itinerant 'swaggie' into the Brown Room for tea. The ensuing scene would resemble a farce. Merric with great flourish would offer his favourite chair: "My dear Sir ... would you do me the honour of ..." and the visitor would be offered tea from the best pottery and the best of whatever, if anything, the pantry had to offer: "Would you be so good as to accept ..." Finally, when conversation and appetite were satiated: "My good man, before you leave you must..." Then the visitor would be pressed to choose a piece of pottery. Generally the visitor's eye needed refining and Merric never failed to direct attention to the very best specimen. More often than not, the piece would be so special that, if sold, it might have fed the family for weeks. After firings Merric would have a 'kiln opening' and the beautiful, shiny pots would be arranged on the Brown Room

⁷³ "Despite his efforts, money was so tight ..." David Boyd, Smith tapes.

⁷⁴ "He would describe his grave financial situation ..." David Boyd, biographical notes.

⁷⁵ "When faced with the distasteful process of selling ..." Lucy Beck interview,

⁷⁶ "He was a friend ..." By September 1963, John Reed would record that Mr. Lyne had "some 200 pieces" of Merric's pottery in his collection.

⁷⁷ "Doris would call this a 'personality' sale". Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes. 'A lot of people supported and bought the pottery because they liked it ... they also bought it for the sake of my mother, I think...she became a very good salesperson.'

⁷⁸ "When they returned ..." David Boyd, Smith tapes.

table, fresh from firing, ready for sale. When a customer expressed interest and asked the price, Merric would enquire: "Well, how much can you afford?" If they hesitated for a minute Merric would reply, "Well, would you like it ... Would you like to have it?" Few turned the offer down. All this upset and angered Doris,⁷⁹ and she would berate Merric after the event, at times to the point where he would storm out, only to return, knocking formally at the door minutes later.

Others came to the rescue. Emma Minnie ran an account for Doris at the local grocery store and paid for domestic help. However, most of the cheques she wrote were to missionaries and various charities. This seemed strange to the family, especially at those times when the situation became so desperate that Doris would need to take the train over to Sandringham to ask Emma Minnie for just for a few shillings so they wouldn't go hungry.⁸⁰ This was always a last resort because Doris hated asking. She found it difficult asking her own mother too, preferring to approach Guysie or one of the other children for a loan from their savings (Granny Gough, perhaps aware of the circular nature of the money, would pay her grandchildren to water her garden). Sometimes Merric would rally and suddenly becoming aware of the empty pantry he would wander over to Mrs Woods, the neighbour directly across from Open Country, to ask for "sixpenneth worth of beets". Money was rarely produced but Merric never went away empty handed.⁸¹ Co-religionists from the Christian Scientist congregation offered assistance and with a barter system of pots for other necessities, such as dental care, the Boyds got by.

Doris's mainstay was her mother, Evelyn. She had been by her daughter's side from the beginning of the marriage. It was Evelyn who wedged the spoon between Merric's teeth during his epileptic attacks, she who was the pragmatic advisor who tempered Doris's belief in Christian Science and insisted that Lucy's life-threatening diphtheria be treated in hospital. When Emma Minnie and Arthur Merric retreated to a house by the sea in Sandringham after the tragedy of Penleigh's death, Evelyn advanced. Rather than being a paddock's length away, she became an arm's length away and built onto Open Country; her bedroom and sitting room led off from the Brown Room.

Evelyn's beliefs were individualistic but embracing. Her religion after leaving the Catholic Church was broad and guided by two rules: when faced with trouble and indifference "unsee it" and in response to "inharmony, temper, surliness" her answer was "love – love - love and love". Her faith was secured by the belief that "in God's Consciousness every individual that He has created is perfect".⁸² If this sounds frothy, reality had been hard. At the age of seventeen, she married Lieutenant Thomas Bunbury

⁷⁹ "All this upset and angered Doris ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁸⁰ "This all seemed strange to the family ..." Lucy Beck interview. Arthur Boyd interview with Julian Brophy, 15 December, 1993, ABC radio archives: "She [Emma Minnie] had quite a lot of money at one stage and she gave it to the lepers ... probably better to do that than give it to the family ... I don't know ... anyway ... but I hope the lepers got better."

⁸¹ "On occasion, Merric would rally ..." Phyllis Vaux (nee Woods) interview.

⁸² "Her faith was secured by the belief ..." Evelyn Gough to her daughter, Bea, 3 November, 1909. Gough Family Papers. See Brenda Niall

Gough. She was a teenager and he had just turned thirty. Throughout the marriage he would address his wife as “little girl”. After giving birth to six children, over a span of almost three decades, Evelyn watched her husband’s naval career flounder and their money disappear in the 1890’s Depression, to the extent that Gough was reduced to working as a commissioning agent. On the January 30 1905 their son, Guy, a young fireman employed on the Victorian railways, discovered his father, aged 63, hanging from the banisters of their west Melbourne home.⁸³ The circumstances were extraordinary: “pets about the house – cats, dogs, and birds – [had] recently disappeared mysteriously one by one, and one of them was found dead in the yard”.⁸⁴ The son was of the opinion that his father had been secretly poisoning them. A single sentence after this revelation suggests the possibility of years of misery within the family: “The old man’s peculiarity,” states the article, “was not such as to excite anxiety among the members of his household”. The trauma to the youngest child Doris, who had just turned eighteen, can only be imagined, for if she ever discussed this tragedy it has remained shrouded.⁸⁵

The eve of Christmas 1931 was a desperately unhappy occasion. After being ill for little over a week, Evelyn, at the age of seventy-seven, died in her bedroom at Open Country. She was buried on Boxing Day at Brighton cemetery. Her mainstay gone, Doris leaned on her other pillar of female support. Lucy was the academic star of the family, the only one to complete the intermediate certificate, and she was reluctant to leave school. Having gained entrance to Melbourne High School her Boyd grandparents paid the fees but, after almost two fulfilling years of study, circumstances conspired against Lucy. As the eldest child she had always instinctively known what needed to be done to help her mother around the house. However, when high school demanded more of her time, she happily immersed herself in her work. The day Doris was forced to interrupt her daughter’s homework to ask for help was the day Lucy never forgot; it brought a burn to her cheeks - it was a request that had never been necessary before. Lucy’s dilemma was settled by her grandmother: Emma Minnie announced, at the peak of the Depression, that she could no longer afford the school fees. At the same time she curtailed Doris and Merric’s financial support.

⁸³ “Tragically, Evelyn could not ...” *Argus*, 31 January, 1907, Pg 7. *Age*, 31 January 1905, p5.

⁸⁴ “The circumstances were extraordinary.” Ibid. The *Argus* titled the story: ‘Remarkable Suicide’ in contrast to the *Age* which announced, heartlessly and carelessly: “Whimsical Suicide, Man arrayed in Woman’s Clothes.” The *Argus* gave a more thorough report, revealing that Thomas Gough had been clad not simply in woman’s clothing but in “half the old clothing in the house: coats, trousers, petticoats, and rugs”. The article concluded: “In the kitchen the constable found a small basin, containing a colourless liquid with a powdery sediment at the bottom, and this he preserved, thinking that possibly it might contain poison”.

⁸⁵ “Doris, the youngest child ...” The circumstances of Lieutenant Thomas Bunbury Gough’s death was, in 2006, a revelation to Yvonne Boyd: no one in the family had discussed the details of his death with her. However, it was open knowledge within the immediate family that Gough had committed suicide and given the publicity generated at the time it is highly unlikely that some facts had not been known to the grandchildren. No doubt Evelyn chose to ‘unsee’ this terrible event, for other facts concerning Thomas Bunbury Gough appear clouded. Gough, who never rose from rank of Lieutenant, was promoted to ship’s ‘Commander’ by Guy Boyd during the time he was courting publicity in the hope of generating funds to raise the wreck of the *Cerberus*.

Lucy was required to stay home and look after the children while Doris and Merric entered into a business venture with two brothers, John and Bob Crow, friends of theirs who ran the Australian Porcelain Insulator Company at Yarraville. The company's products – high-tension wire insulators – required fine, white clay. The Crows, aware of the Boyds' financial straits, offered Merric the job of turning the leftover clay into pots and Doris the job as decorator. Because their clay was finer than Merric's home-dug clay and the temperature in their company's kiln (1350 degrees centigrade) was higher than in the kiln at Open Country, the pots produced had a smoother, slicker finish. Coupled with a paring down of Merric's organic design and a more even application of colour, the resulting 'Krefel Art Porcelain' was nearer to perfect, but closer to ordinary. The venture was short lived. At the start, Bob Crow would pick up Doris and Merric and take them to work. For some reason this became inconvenient for Crow and the journey by public transport demanded a far earlier start and later return. Perhaps Merric had an attack during their travels, or perhaps the added time away from the family became too much, but after a few months their brief foray into a nine-to-five world was over. Not that the exercise was brilliantly lucrative. With a weekly wage of four pounds and five shillings a week, Merric earned less in this entire time than he had from the sale of just one pot a decade earlier.

As Merric's frustration grew on the other side of the locked bedroom door, as finances forced him into manufacturing formulaic utilitarian pots, and as his debilitating epileptic seizures increased and his personality became more erratic, Doris witnessed Merric's change into "a totally different man to what he was when he was young".⁸⁶

Born just after the destruction of the old kiln, Mary never knew the vital man her father had been: the potter working night and day, creating his unique designs, both master of his craft and supporter of the household.⁸⁷ Instead, from a young age, Mary followed Arthur. To his brothers and sisters Arthur was a patriarchal figure, whose word was law.⁸⁸ To Mary, Arthur was a hero. She shadowed him, watching as he transformed hessian sacks with a maroon dye and turned them into curtains and covers for fireside chairs in the Brown Room; observing as he built himself a bedroom onto the veranda of the house. She learnt the function of joists and uprights, lessons which eventually allowed her make her own furniture. And she grew to learn that Arthur had inherited the perfectionism of his father. If he made something, it had to be perfect; if it didn't work, he scrapped it. Once, while working on top of a shed, Arthur fell, ripping his leg badly on the iron roof – so badly it took Doris months of care, constantly dressing the wound with Lysol and Iodex, and binding it with scorched rags before it healed. Shortly after this accident, Arthur tore the shed down - possibly because it had been the cause of extra work and concern for his mother, or perhaps to protect his younger brothers and sisters

⁸⁶ "As Merric's frustration grew ..." Lady Mary Nolan, nee Boyd interview. September, 2000. The Rodd, Prestigne, Wales.

⁸⁷ "Born just after the destruction of the old kiln ..." Ibid.

⁸⁸ "To his brothers and sister ..." David Boyd biographical notes.

from a similar incident. Mary continued to note this trait in Arthur throughout the years to come: "If there was harm, damage done, Arthur would think, 'get rid of it.'"⁸⁹

Merric was less of a builder and more an inventor. In his younger days, when shoe leather was abundant and life more frivolous, he had turned his hand to creating boot cleaners. When pottery became his passion, he invented a pugmill (a device to mix clay) suspended from the upper boughs of a sugar gum. He created plate presses, ball mills, and all kinds of throwing wheels and motorised shafts to drive these machines.⁹⁰ But it was from his grandfather, not his father, that Arthur learned his building skills - from his "marvellous companion", his Gramps.⁹¹ Arthur Merric gave Arthur the money for the timber and the tools to build a little studio. Every morning before he went to school, armed with a mug of hot milk from Granny Gough and instruction from his Grandfather, Arthur, at the age of nine, learnt to become a carpenter: It was something, he said, that he didn't have to put himself out to learn.

Pennies were the most Arthur could earn until he left school: a penny for watering Granny Gough's vegetable patch, sixpence from Granny Boyd for keeping his shoulders back and his back straight, sixpence for selling his pencil drawings of dogs door-to-door or, less aesthetically, sixpence for shovelling horse manure into hessian sugar bags.⁹² As a small boy, when required to do his party piece for one of the regular family concerts, he'd stand on the table in the Brown Room and recite A.A. Milne's 'Market Square':

*I had a penny/A bright new penny,
I took my penny/To the market square ...
So I went to the stall where they sold fine saucepans
("Walk up, walk up, sixpence for a saucepan!")*

It took a pocketful of sixpences to make those words come true for Arthur. None of the passengers on the city train returning to Murrumbidgee one evening could have imagined the excitement of the boy wearing short pants and cradling a large clanking parcel. He had a trophy to present to his mother. There had been times in his recent memory when, under the acquisitive gaze of customers, his mother had been forced to tip food out of the family's dinner bowls in order to make a necessary sale of pottery.⁹³ Now, earning thirteen shillings a week at his uncle's factory, Arthur could offer some compensation to his mother by bringing home a brand-new set of saucepans.

Families on both sides, from sisters and brothers to remote cousins, all seemed to live far more comfortable lives than Doris or Merric. It was an irony that despite the Boyds' financial difficulties if a car was heard in the crescent the better-off neighbours knew it would be a visitor for Open Country. It was yet another characteristic - a moneyed

⁸⁹ "Mary continued to note this trait in Arthur ..." Lady Mary Nolan, op cit

⁹⁰ "When pottery became his passion ..." Hammond, Victoria. 'Merric Boyd Studio Potter 1888-1959. National Gallery of Victoria. pg 47

⁹¹ "But it was from his grandfather ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes

⁹² "Pennies were the most ..." Lucy Beck interview. David Boyd, biographical notes.

⁹³ "There had been times ..." Lucy Beck interview.

background, but seemingly no regard for it – that set the Boyd family apart. Doris's sister, married to a successful businessman, who secured Arthur's first job. Lettie had no doubt badgered her husband, Ralph Madder, to find a job for Arthur at his paint factory. Arthur became a general roustabout working between a calcimine factory in the centre of North Melbourne and a farm machinery showroom in the city.

Arthur was janitor, mail boy and the gofer who fetched meat pies for lunch and provided sport for the roughly mannered men. When his Uncle first sent Arthur to work in the factory, the factory hands told him to go and look for sky hooks and striped paint and left-handed screwdrivers; his efforts were greeted with great shrieks of laughter from the shop assistants. Humiliation was coupled with fear when he was rough-housed and loaded into calcimine bins and pulverisers.⁹⁴ Arthur must have thought anything would be better than school but after the first week at his job and being treated "rather toughly" he must have wondered if he was destined to always be the underdog. Uncle Madder made things a little easier. He commissioned a painting of his factory and he bought other paintings from his nephew for five pounds each. Sometimes, when he'd sit and draw during his lunch break, the other workers would come over and look. Some would even pull some of his drawings out of the waste bin and say nice things.⁹⁵

The work was tedious and, to the gentle polite boy, daunting. But, desperate to help, Arthur was determined to do it right. Every morning the alarm clock rang high up in the rafters of the unlined timber bedroom Arthur had tacked onto the veranda at the side of the house. The placement of the clock had a strategy. Arthur knew that the scramble up to the roof was the only hope of rousing himself. It was an early morning call to accommodate the train and tram necessary to get to work by 7a.m. Self-sufficient, Arthur didn't rely on anyone in the crowded house to wake him; instead he found an original way to circumnavigate the problem. His trait of avoiding confrontation, and causing the least trouble to anyone, never altered - from the time he was a toddler, when he would run away from his sister's teasing games, to later, when he stored his toys safely without causing a fuss with his brothers. His way of dealing with problems would always remain solitary and circuitous.

For the next six months or so it was only Arthur who earned a steady salary, then Emma Minnie organised a job for his sister. Just before her eighteenth birthday in August of 1934 Lucy was sent to be a nanny and general help on a remote country property, Avenel, belonging to well-off a'Beckett relatives. With no friends of the same age and with her employer - her father's cousin, Frankie Brett - hardly speaking a word to her, her life must have been isolated and lonely. Lucy simply recollects it as "unusual" and for more than two years, during which she bought nothing for herself other than an overcoat, she faithfully sent her wages home.

⁹⁴ "Humiliation was coupled with fear ..." Hal Missingham interview, 22 September, 1965. NLA. Oral history. Arthur made a rare comment in this interview. In general when telling these stories he always made light of them. But with Missingham, for one brief minute he let his guard down, and in just a few words "In this factory they treated me, I thought, rather toughly ..." revealed the fear of a thirteen year old boy thrown into the deep end of a rough adult world.

⁹⁵ "Some would even pull some of his drawings ..." Bea Bewley interview.

By this time, when Arthur was walking to and from the railway station each day on his way to work, he would have been aware that Open Country now stood like an oasis in a desert of roof tiles. Building had boomed in Murrumbena and Open Country was one of the oldest houses in the district. Many of the new residents had lost high-paying jobs or their own businesses; for them a house in Murrumbena was a down-sizing. By now Arthur had been educated by the Depression to know how lucky he was to have a job. Many families in the district were unemployed and on government support; by the less kind the name 'susso' (short for Sustenance Payment) was flung at those on the dole. John Attwood, a boy from Arthur's class at school, remembers men coming around to his house looking for work. Attwood's father, raising a family of six on four pounds a week, had no money but once gave one hour of work cutting wood to an itinerant worker needing food - payment was a spoonful off every dinner plate.⁹⁶

Along with the charitable, the Depression produced hucksters and moonlight flits, and Arthur found himself a victim of the time. During his first year working at Uncle Madder's factory he had bought a "lovely wireless ... a big, stand-up affair" like the one his grandparents listened to at Sandringham. At night at Open Country everyone would gather around in the Brown Room and listen to Roy Rene or *Dad and Dave* or *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Arthur, being under age, had needed Doris to sign a form on his behalf allowing him to buy the set on time payment. After six months of paying out "all this blooming money", Arthur arrived home one evening to find the wireless gone.⁹⁷ Doris told her distraught son that a man had come to the house, told her the set needed an overhaul, and took it away. The following day the store was empty and the proprietor and his wares gone.

A little of Arthur's "blooming money" was spent in pursuit of a career. Like most of his friends, he loved the pictures on Saturday afternoons. If times were flush, he'd pay sixpence to watch Tom Mix and Tarzan. Movies became the great entertainment and in 1934 a man with a microphone and amplifier stood opposite Murrumbena station, outside the boot makers, advertising coming attractions. There was a choice of venue: the Murrumbena public hall - with its seats on skids, enabling it to double as a dance hall - or the more salubrious Hoyt's at the neighbouring suburb of Carnegie. From his early teens Arthur watched movies with an intense interest. He envisaged himself as a one man show, both behind and in front of the camera - lighting, directing, acting and producing.

Arthur's workmates at the factory would never have guessed that the large empty paint tins he was hauling home would be recycled as reflectors for film lights. Much of Arthur's money was sunk into globes and sockets. It was a poor investment - most of the film shot at night turned out black. Arthur's cousins - Penleigh's sons, Pat and Robin - shared and stimulated his interest in film. Pat was the first of the Boyds to own a movie camera, and then Arthur badgered his grandfather to buy a Pathe 9.5. When Guy and

⁹⁶ "Many families in the district ..." Bill Attwood interview.

⁹⁷ "Pat was the first of the Boyds ..." Arthur Boyd. *Testament of a Painter & Heatherington* notes.

David began work, they also invested in a camera and 'Open Country' became as busy on the weekends as a Hollywood lot. Special effects littered the garden. Granny Gough's old back veranda, propped with a ship's wheel, became the deck of *The Doris Gough* and an ancient bath, rigged up on bricks and levers, sent waves cascading over her deck. Archival celluloid still exists; it captures a rocking ship (courtesy of the camera tipping backwards and forwards) and Arthur, wrestling the wheel and shouting orders as the contents of the bath crash over him. He draws heavily on Charles Laughton's Captain Bligh; the torrent of water, rather than dousing him, energises his performance. Meanwhile, the grass sprouting at the edge of the deck lends a surreal effect. While his brothers opted for action movies, with shipwrecks and lynchings (the mulberry tree became the hanging tree), Arthur aimed for 'artistic' images: trees, free of dangling bodies, waving in the wind against big skies. If a breeze didn't blow, Arthur directed his cousins to wave branches in front of the camera at the point when the right sort of clouds floated by. The result: "It came out well" but "it wasn't enough to make me a film man".⁹⁸

While working at Uncle Madder's, Arthur searched for a future. He wanted to be a "tycoon", the word perhaps conjuring the kind of unimaginable money that would be the amount required to restore his family to its turn-of-the-century lifestyle.⁹⁹ Despite Uncle Madder's kind encouragement, he couldn't have imagined painting would fit this scheme. However, from an early age Arthur had a quest - the discovery of new landscapes. At one stage he built a traditional caravan in the garden of Open Country. Its roof was timbered, its floor tarred, and its joists and beams were dovetailed and mortised. Its thick wooden shafts were designed as harness supports and their red colour complimented the overall eucalyptus green. But, for all the craft and aesthetics, Arthur neglected to make proper allowance for weight. It would have taken a team of Clydesdales to haul his dream into reality.

Apart from holidays with his grandparents, it was difficult to escape Murrumbidgee and to access varied and wilder terrains. In his early years at weekends, Arthur would set out carrying a small suitcase stuffed with paints, brushes in his hand and a canvas or board tucked under his arm, and walk miles in search of a landscape. Later he would pedal out with his trailer full of equipment. In the years he was working for Uncle Madder, with a little money in his pocket, trains offered a weekend escape. Arriving in the country town of Bacchus Marsh on a dismal day Arthur, laden with painting equipment, took shelter from a rainstorm under the overhanging roof of a shop. Until the 1960s, long hair was anything that touched the ears and was considered anti-establishment, so when Arthur, never sartorially acceptable, was spotted by the two police officers they recognised him as a composite of a criminal type. "We know you", they pronounced, "we've seen you before". Before any further harm could come to Bacchus Marsh, Arthur was run out of

⁹⁸ "The result: "It came out well ..." Heatherington notes.

⁹⁹ "He wanted to be a 'tycoon'... Arthur Boyd, Heatherington notes." "An earlier ambition was to make money, to be a tycoon of some sort ... that was incidental in leaving school at an early age ... I thought tycoons were people who went out into the world and didn't stay at school".

town.¹⁰⁰ Within the decade Arthur's rendering of the Bacchus Marsh landscape would describe his reception there: inhospitable.

On another painting excursion he found a welcome. He had chosen Wilsons Promontory; a wild, green-decked piece of granite, forming the southernmost tip of the east coast of Victoria, 200kilometers from Melbourne, to set up camp. The unsullied views that lured him also drew other artists, among them Wilfred McCulloch. Coming across Wilfred's painting group, Arthur observed proceedings from behind a screen of bushes. McCulloch must have seemed supremely approachable for Arthur was prompted to shed his shyness. Emerging from his hide, he uncharacteristically offered an opinion: "You won't get the light with those colours".¹⁰¹ Wilfred McCulloch was twenty-four, with many years as a night student at the National Gallery under his belt; Arthur was fourteen.¹⁰²

Wilfred McCulloch had first thought he saw a "local yokel" scrambling about in the bushes. But, after receiving Arthur's criticism, he realised there was a surprising sophistication in the deceptive packaging. Impressed and charmed, he invited Arthur to meet his family at his home in Gardiner. His brother, Alan, older by two years, was working as a clerk in the Commonwealth Bank to provide support to his widowed mother and the struggling family of four. It didn't take Alan McCulloch long to realise that his brother had "annexed a genius", a born artist who "knew the difference between cobalt, ultramarine and viridian by the time he was five, and probably the way they tasted."¹⁰³ Both McCulloch brothers had attended the National Gallery School. Alan McCulloch, on his way to becoming an influential art critic, was contributing drawings to the press and, as a side job, creating drawings and captions for Henry Bucks, a men's clothing store. Wilfred McCulloch had found a way of supporting his painting with a day job as a full-time commercial artist. Sign writing, advertising graphics and illustrative work were how most young painters, if they were lucky, were surviving.

Arthur became a welcome and regular visitor to the McCullochs' house, where paint and ink splattered dustcoats hung in a small room off the hall which had been commandeered as a studio. Arthur was drawn to the brothers and also their mother, Annie. Her cry to Wilfred - "Be merciful on the butter!" - as her homemade bread disappeared under the Depression-precious commodity, had little to do with the generosity of her table or her insistence on second helpings. The delicious vegetable soup she produced and set before Arthur in large quantities became legendary in his memory.¹⁰⁴ Although art discussion was always on the menu it was never, as it often

¹⁰⁰ "Before any harm ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

¹⁰¹ "Emerging from his hide ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes

¹⁰² "Wilfred McCulloch was twenty-four ..." Alan McCulloch, 'Autobiographical short story', Manuscripts, State Library of Victoria.

¹⁰³ "It didn't take McCulloch long ..." Alan McCulloch, 'All those Wonderful Summers', Art Gallery of NSW archives.

¹⁰⁴ "The delicious vegetable soup ..." Even as late as the nineties Arthur waxed lyrical about Annie McCulloch's cooking, which lends weight to the assumption that Arthur must have always been a little hungry.

was at Open Country, to the detriment of meal-times. As time passed, Arthur became a regular fixture in the McCulloch household. He would tackle any odd jobs, from plumbing to carpentry to bricklaying, at one point moving in with the family after Annie McCulloch hired him to build a thirty-metre front fence.

When Annie first set eyes on Arthur she exclaimed, "Why he's a mere baby". Having listened to Wilfred's unstinting praise of Arthur's talent, she had expected someone a lot older. He must have seemed every inch the child prodigy, with big blue eyes and rounded baby face reducing his age even further. Wilfred saw Arthur as someone special who needed protection; he aspired to the part of big brother. Arthur, given the opportunity for the first time in his life to be free from the role of responsible party, no doubt acquiesced, or at least appeared to. Few detected the survivor's steel that supported Arthur's vulnerable appearance. Wilfred McCulloch possessed much that Arthur did not: he was tall and personable; with his confident style and dark-eyed looks, he was dashing. Arthur, however, may have viewed him less as a surrogate brother and more as a father figure. Arthur always felt that he had been disinherited in the looks department; he felt ugly in comparison to his brothers and called David "the pretty one". Wilfred McCulloch resembled Merric in some respects. Arthur thought McCulloch "an upright man ... he had such a straight bearing and it applied to every part of his character".¹⁰⁵ The fact that the "confusion" of Open Country "bewildered" Wilfred McCulloch suggests he was a man accustomed to stability and order, qualities that had eluded Arthur's childhood and that to some extent he must have craved.

When Arthur brought his friend home to Open Country, David, who was then ten years old, remembers Wilfred McCulloch as "heroic ... with such charisma any young boy would fall in love with him".¹⁰⁶ Add for final measure Arthur's opinion of the man - "gentle ... kindly ... humorous" - and there is little wonder this friendship was important to Arthur, who admitted he got a great deal from Wilfred's McCulloch's company and his art. It is highly likely that it was Wilfred's influence that swayed Arthur to sign up for the National Gallery School night classes in the year after they met, enrolling in the last term of 1935 and the first two terms of 1936.¹⁰⁷ Even though McCulloch was aware that Arthur hated it, he was of the opinion that he needed the discipline.¹⁰⁸

Among those Wilfred McCulloch impressed with his easy manner and generous nature was a sixteen year old who, within a decade, would stand in the front line of the group of painters known as 'Social Realists'. Noel Counihan was shy and lonely in his first year at the National Gallery School but Wilfred McCulloch, almost three years his senior and already established in the more advanced Antique Class, befriended and encouraged him. Counihan would become a fine painter and one of Australia's finest caricaturists

¹⁰⁵ Boyd, Arthur. Susan McCulloch, 'The Australian Magazine' 29-30 August, 1992.

¹⁰⁶ "When Arthur bought his friend home ..." David Boyd Interview

¹⁰⁷ "It is highly likely ..." In various interviews Arthur contradicts the time spent at the Gallery School. In Heatherington biographical notes, he estimates a couple to six months at NGV. By the seventies his recollection is closer to fact. In Grazia Gunn tapes, in reference to the Gallery School he says: 'I'd go nearly every night ... a couple of years ... quite a long time.'

¹⁰⁸ "Even though McCulloch was aware" Alan McCulloch, *All Those Wonderful Summers*

but in 1929, in a duel of the pencil with McCulloch, he was outdrawn. Both men attempted a caricature of Wilfred but Noel Counihan's work, by his own admission, was feeble in comparison.¹⁰⁹ This illustrates not only Wilfred McCulloch's skill but also his charm. He didn't take himself too seriously. The ironic detachment and self-effacement required for an acute self-portrait in caricature were traits that would have appealed to Arthur. But the antiquated National Gallery School night classes held very little attraction. At the age of fifteen, after his long work day, Arthur was as tired as the thinking that drove the school.

Arthur's journey to the school, rather than his participation in the class, inspired some of the strange hybrids and the haunting images found in his South Melbourne paintings of the mid-1940's. The Gallery School was situated at the end of McCoy Hall, a vast, galleried room with a high, vaulted ceiling, which housed a collection of natural history treasures. It was never lit. Arthur found it terrifying and spooky ... "quite a job to get through".¹¹⁰ Skeletons of dinosaurs and carnivores shimmered through the musty gloom. Lions, leopards, tigers and a multitude of foreign creatures perched overhead, from jutting rocks twenty-feet high. Giant hunting canoes threatened. Headhunters' masks and shrunken severed heads leered out from walls and jars at the nerve-racked teenager as he made his breathless progress through this seemingly endless room. After braving the journey Arthur was allowed to draw "leaves ... hands if you were advanced". He could find little inspiration in plaster casts: he was "frustrated", particularly after the free and enjoyable atmosphere of learning created by his parents and grandparents.¹¹¹

In direct contrast to the National Gallery School was an art facility measuring eight metres by six, slung with chaff-filled hessian bunks. Constructed out of timber from ships long since wrecked by the treacherous cross-currents of Bass Strait, it snuggled into a valley formed by sand hills. At this school the picked apples and cut sunflowers that faded under the dull electric lights of the Gallery School were replaced by objects that grew and gleamed in the salty shifting air. This was an artists' camp, pioneered by Harold Beatty, "an avid collector of painters and other eccentric friends",¹¹² at Cape Schanck at the tip of Western Port Bay. It was in its first year of existence in 1934, the same year the McCullochs had met Arthur, "the kid with an eye". Later, a tragedy, a drowning of one of the members, allowed Arthur to be included in the group. They would travel the eighty miles down south most Saturdays. Or, if Arthur was staying with his grandfather in Rosebud, they would collect him along the way. The car would be crammed to the brim with bodies wedged between all kinds of gear: an axe, a hammer, blankets, a large bundle of lamb chops, an eight gallon water container and, always, a stack of art supplies that had been picked up on the way from the art supply stores in Melbourne, Dean's or Norman's.

¹⁰⁹ "But in 1929, in a duel of the pencil ..." Smith, Bernard. 'Noel Counihan: Artist and Revolutionary' Oxford University Press, Melbourne, Australia, 1993.

¹¹⁰ "Arthur found it terrifying ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes. The memory of this dark musty hall and its gruesome fearful sights never left Arthur; throughout many interviews he makes reference to it.

¹¹¹ "He could find little inspiration in plaster casts ..." Ibid.

¹¹² "This was an artists' camp ..." Alan McCulloch *All Those Wonderful Summers*

Days were filled with painting, with carting flotsam from the beach to reinforce the shack, with sun-bathing and swimming in the dangerous waters of 'the killer coast'. In the evening, when the group gathered around the camp fire, Donald Town, a prize-winning student of the Gallery School, would cook dinner. Everyone had a party piece. Wilfred McCulloch would recite poetry. Harold Beatty, an accomplished astronomer, would explain the map of the sky. And Arthur would play tunes on his tin whistle to the base rhythm of the breaking waves. A portrait by Wilfred McCulloch allows us a glimpse of Arthur in his teens. He squints against the sun, sunburnt, slouch-shouldered, his thin torso bare to the waist. This portrait, together with a handful of black and white photographs, is among the few images of the group. Landscapes executed by the various artists give us a sense of the place, as do the words of Alan McCulloch, culled from his memoir:

'infinity of wet sand ... flat as a racecourse rockpools ... black octopi ... green crayfish ... butter fish ... parrot-fish ... thistle edged pastures ... rabbits ... sparrow hawk ... eagle ... foxes ... copperheads ... blue tongues ... spike encrusted lizards ... bees ... flowers ... white ...purple ... naked, copper hued bodies ... moon ... blood orange ... silver shadowed hills ... frogs, crickets, possums ... night noises ... sipping ...trilling ... bo, boc, boaking ...the stars ... Sirius ...fire glimmers... ' And, Wilfred: *'paintmaster, toastmaster ...painting the coloured night ... with a candle in his hat.'*

Who influenced whom? Arthur, despite the authority displayed by him at the first meeting on Wilsons Promontory, admitted that Wilfred McCulloch "knew more than I did then about painting".¹¹³ It is natural there would be similarity when depicting the same scene under the same light, particularly as both artists combined traditional landscape painting with a sense of movement and richness of texture inspired by the painter they mutually admired, van Gogh. On one occasion, after Arthur had taken up the palette knife, in the hope of emulating his hero, he wielded it furiously, kneeling in the sand with the stretched canvas before him, he yelled: "I'll get colour into it!"¹¹⁴ The yellow in van Gogh's *Sunflowers* became an obsession. When Annie McCulloch once pointed out to Arthur he had managed to splash red paint on his best shirt, Arthur responded with the fanaticism of a teenager: "I wish it was lemon yellow".¹¹⁵ Yet despite their age difference Wilfred never assumed "a superior air". In middle age Arthur would look back on painting trips with Wilfred, his "very close friend", as some of his "most pleasant memories"¹¹⁶ and some of his "happiest times".¹¹⁷ There was, according to Arthur, "no competition" between the two friends. It would be years before he realised this was "a rare thing ...between artists".¹¹⁸

¹¹³ "Arthur, despite the authority displayed by him at the first meeting ..." Susan McCulloch article to be sourced.

¹¹⁴ "On one occasion ..." Alan McCulloch, op cit

¹¹⁵ "When Annie McCulloch once pointed out ..." Ibid

¹¹⁶ "In middle age Arthur would look back ..." Hetherington interview

¹¹⁷ "...and some of his "happiest times." Letter from Arthur Boyd to Alan McCulloch, November 1959. Bundanon archives.

¹¹⁸ "There was, according to Arthur ..."

Melbourne, to anyone interested in the arts, was a small town: circles would interconnect and widen to accommodate the few. In Arthur's milieu, if anyone expressed the slightest interest in painting, such a novice would be gathered up and included in an expedition. Friedl Rathusky had been a friend of the Boyds since her father had answered an advertisement in a Melbourne paper during the war. Merric, in an unusual cast of mind, was seeking to generate an income by leasing Open Country while he was away in the army. His attempt at financial acumen didn't last long. As soon as Merric met Victor Rathusky, a cultured Austrian with a talent for photography and a degree in engineering, he offered him the house at less than other applicants had been prepared to pay. The two families, as they grew, grew close and in the same order: five children, all born in the same years -- the classically beautiful Friedl the same age as Arthur. Along with the Boyd cousins, the Rathuskys were regular visitors to Open Country.¹¹⁹ In their late teens, Arthur and Friedl (with a brother sent along as chaperone) would join up with Wilfred McCulloch on painting expeditions. Friedl remembered Arthur using his palette knife almost exclusively on these occasions, producing paintings of such vividness and beauty she was totally discouraged by her own efforts. Friedl's memory didn't stretch to Wilfred McCulloch's paintings. What Friedl clearly remembered was that she could have fallen in love with him.¹²⁰

Romance for Arthur was some way off. His shyness hadn't been relieved by the teasing girls who worked next to Uncle Madder's offices in the city. The girls would stand on chairs and peer over the partition that separated the underwear factory and taunt him.¹²¹ The things they said embarrassed Arthur. All he could manage to do was keep his head down and wish that his friends, Chas or Jackie or Keithie, were with him to give support. It was lucky his thick dark hair was long enough to allow cover to his flushed cheeks and his confused cornflower blue eyes. He would try to seem busy with his dogsbody duties - sorting the mail, sweeping the floor - but he was terrified and they knew it.

His cousin, Patricia, worked in the office too. They had always been close when they were younger, playing in and round the mulberry tree when her family came over on Sundays on the train from East Malvern with baskets full of cake and fruit, and sometimes a five pound note tucked in the corner for Doris from her sister, Lettie.¹²² Davey and the others teased him about Patricia, but Arthur was used to teasing. All his cousins had gone to private schools and stayed on until they were seventeen and they thought he was a bit of a dunce.¹²³ He'd try to laugh it off when they asked him to do

¹¹⁹ "The two families as they grew, grew close" Friedl Rathusky would later strengthen her connection to the Boyd family, when her daughter, Margot, married Robert Beck, son of Arthur's sister, Lucy.

¹²⁰ "Friedl remembered Arthur ..." Friedl Rathusky interview, Melbourne, November, 2001.

¹²¹ "The girls would stand ..." Patricia Boyd interview, September, 2002. Melbourne. In previous accounts the neighbouring factory to Madder's was reported to be a knitting factory. The fact it was an underwear factory would have added to Arthur's embarrassment. Ralph Madder's office was called The British Standard Machinery Company, and was situated at 664 Bourke Street, Melbourne.

¹²² "They had always been close ..." Bea Bewley interview.

¹²³ "Davey and the others teased him about Patricia ..." Ibid. Bea went onto say: "The other children ... thought [Arthur] a little bit of a dunce because you see he left school early ... we all went until seventeen ... my brother went to Melbourne Grammar, I went to Tintern, my older brother went to Malvern

sums that were beyond him. Now it must have felt a bit like that again when he needed to ask Patricia to check his lists of spare parts for the road machinery - she would always have to correct his spelling.¹²⁴ Whatever romantic feelings he may have been harbouring ended when Arthur invited his other cousin, Robin Boyd, along to the movies with Patricia. It ultimately led to Robin extending an invitation to her -- marriage.

Phyllis Woods, a pretty blonde and a couple of years younger than Arthur, lived across the street from Open Country and spent all her time with the Boyds. She loved being with them, "loved their camaraderie ... their understanding of each other".¹²⁵ Phyllis was treated as a sister: there were never any kisses at the end of Postman's Knock. Arthur only associated with girls within the protective borders of home. Alanna Coleman, a stunningly attractive fellow student at the Gallery School, would try to coax him to sit next to her on the tram after art classes. Her calls would travel over the seats to the reticent figure desperately trying to tuck himself quietly away. She refused to take no for an answer: 'Come on, come and sit here... Come over here and sit here.' Eventually she would lure the blushing young teenager to her side, but Arthur's upbringing had been so sheltered that the source of his great embarrassment was the fact that he had never sat beside a strange woman in his life before. He felt most at ease with his male friends. Keith Nichol and Arthur were a constant duo on painting trips. Keithie and Chookie, as they called each other, had been pupils in the same grade at Murrumbidgee State School and it was there Arthur became a fan of Keith's painting, particularly his "marvellous ... out of this world" gladioli.

There was also an irregular triumvirate formed by John ('Jackie') Collis, a local boy who stood tall against the "two short arses", Chas Adams and Chookie. The Collises were comfortable - Jackie's father was a civil engineer and during the Depression his orchard, chooks and cow helped put a little extra food on the Boyds' table. For all of that comfort, Jackie's mother had died when he was six. The trio would cycle out at weekends, sometimes as far as Rosebud, to spend summer days in boats and on the beach, often with Jackie and Chas fishing while Arthur painted. Later, when Jackie had a car, they would set off down the peninsula on camping trips. Jackie thought Arthur "quiet and shy",¹²⁶ which points to Chas knowing Arthur longer and better, as he had seen him be "explosive at times ... like Merric".¹²⁷ Chas believed that, although Arthur respected his father, his passion belonged to his mother and grandfather. From a very early age Arthur travelled on his own by train to Sandringham to stay with his grandparents. As he got older he would cycle down, and sometimes take Charlie Adams along, too. But in mid-September 1936 those outings came to an end when Emma Minnie died at the age of seventy-seven.

Grammar. [Arthur] spoke with a sort of funny aside ... we all loved him, but we did tease him a bit ... asked him to do some sums. .. he'd only laugh ... he was very easy going."

¹²⁴ "Now it must have felt a bit like that again ..." Patricia Boyd interview

¹²⁵ "She loved being with them ..." Phyllis Vaux nee Woods interview

¹²⁶ "Jackie thought Arthur "quiet and shy ..." Mrs Von Stargatt interview, widow of John Collis. August, 2003.

¹²⁷ "...he had seen him be "explosive ..." Charlie Adams interview.

Set apart by her religious obsession and strict rules, Emma Minnie would have seemed far less accessible to Arthur than his easy-going, affable grandfather. But the depth of her affection is easily read in a book she presented to Doris. The title, *Poems and Stories for Children by Emma Minnie Boyd*, was handwritten, as was the inscription, 'Doris Boyd with love from the Author. Dec. 1934'.¹²⁸ The collection, bound together inside a cardboard cover, was secured tight by her sewing needle. There are no illustrations but written words create nature's shape, texture and colour. Two poems, *The Blue Wren* speaks of private secret happiness to be found in nature and *The Streak of Gold* illustrates the hidden beauty to be found by those who look with a sensitive eye.¹²⁹ Could these be images that will influence the bluebird and the moth that appear throughout Arthur's works?

After his wife's death Arthur Merric retired to his simple cottage in the bayside town of Rosebud. Arthur suggested that he join him and keep him company. When his grandfather agreed, Arthur ignored criticism from some parts of the family that he would no longer be bringing home a salary. Arthur not only thought it would be "lovely" to be with the man he liked so much, but also saw it as an escape from Uncle Madders, "a way of getting out of the job". He knew, with cold calculation, he was "wasting ...time".¹³⁰ Just as he knew he was wasting time at the Gallery School. At Rosebud he would have the time to become his own teacher.

For a brief period Merric and his family moved into the Sandringham house. David, Guy and Mary were transferred from Murrumbena to a little local school with a sandy track leading up to its door. The setting of the house was idyllic, just two minutes from the sea, with a large garden. The luxury that the generous Victorian home afforded must have been a miraculous change, but it wasn't to last long. Emma Minnie's last will and testament had been unusual. Rather than leaving everything to her husband, she left it in trust. The estate, totalling over eleven thousand pounds, was to be sold and converted into money to pay an income to Arthur Merric. Upon Arthur Merric's death, or his remarriage, the capital was to be divided equally among Emma Minnie's children. A decision to 'dock' Merric for any monies he had received from his parents down through the years (finances for Open Country, the hundred pound loan to establish his new kiln after returning from the war, and ongoing support throughout the years) took the form of a codicil imposed in 1928, twenty-two years after the original made in 1906. This stated that any capital given to any of Emma Minnie's children in her lifetime "should be taken

¹²⁸ "The title, *Poems and Stories for Children* ..." Guy & Phyllis Boyd papers.

¹²⁹ "Two poems, *The Blue Wren* and *The Streak of Gold*...": Extract from *The Blue Wren* "...the jewelled blue/Radiant in light/The velvet black/Of wings and back/The sapphire hue/Of tail erect/Alert, intent/On forage bent/Minute insect/Leaflet or seed/For his small need/How sweet, how dear/How near, how near/Away he flew/And left me wondering/Could it be/That this was intended/Only for me." *The Streak of Gold*: "...The morning came for the nature class/When upon the ground where the children pass/With folded wings of a shabby grey/A common moth in the sunshine lay/She begged of each child that passed her by/Into the shade to help her fly/But 'I have no time' she was always told/'I have to look for a streak of gold.'/At last one child came hurrying by/Looked at the moth with a pitying eye/Waited to help the poor old thing/And in doing so lifted her upper wing/And so discovered, Oh joy untold/A beautiful, blazing streak of Gold! ..."

¹³⁰ "He knew, with cold calculation ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

into account as part of the share of such child at her death and each of her other children receive an amount of capital to place each on an equal basis". The shadow of the beneficiaries -- Helen and Martin -- falls heavily across this after-thought: both were always jealous of the extra attention, in time and in money, bestowed on Merric. Another provision of this codicil is clumsy in the extreme. In trying to avoid stating the obvious -- that Merric was not to be trusted with money -- this clause read: "And I also direct that the share of my sons, except my son Martin, shall be held by my Trustees upon trust during the life of each of my said sons other than my said son Martin ..." An unusual further provision from a woman who, like her own mother, had controlled the purse strings, was that when the time came for grandchildren to inherit, males would receive capital at the age of 21, but females not until marriage.

Although the will stipulated that the Sandringham house be sold, there was a vast loophole that might have allowed Merric the ongoing comfort of his parents' home. Emma Minnie had given the trustees the power to "postpone the sale and conversion of all or any part of my estate during such period as they shall think advisableto carry on occupy use manage improve work repair and make any alterations in or additions to all or any part of my estate ... to lease or concur in leasing all or any part of my estate ..." There is every reason to think that Helen, married and living in Sydney, and Martin, residing in England, must have urged the trust (composed of their father and Frank Brett, a relative and solicitor) to sell the house. Some members of the family blame it solely on Helen.¹³¹ All her life Helen had been alienated from her brother. Embarrassed by Merric's 'quixotic' nature, she had found him 'a thorn in her side'.¹³² Whatever the machinations, eventually Helen, having found a buyer (a personal friend), arrived one day to pack the family into her car and take them back to Murrumbidgee. Mary, ten years old at the time, would never forgive her aunt. She would always remember the crowded car, silent, except for the sound of weeping children and the tattoo of Helen's feet slamming -- down on the clutch, down on the brake -- determinedly beating out their retreat.¹³³ They were returned to a house where they could no longer even comfortably lay their heads: during their absence all the beds at Open Country had become so rife with lice that they required burning.

Arthur, in later years, would call Frankie Brett and his firm of solicitors, the "lawmen" but put the stipulations of Emma Minnie's Will down to "our lack of knowing how to save money".¹³⁴ But the lack of family sympathy must have astonished the young man. He certainly never forgot it: "They had a lump of money that was supposed to stop us from starving ... Well it didn't do that". Instead, Frankie Brett sent help in the form of a house painter. The painter, mistaking Merric's frieze running around the bedroom wall as nothing more than the discolouration of a potentially clean wall, painted it out. "My mother was very upset and so were we", Arthur recalled. He replaced his father's work

¹³¹ "Some members of the family ..." Interview Anne Boyd, December 2001. "Helen had been instrumental ... she was beastly to Grandpa and made him sell the house and the furniture." It was confirmed by Lucy Beck that Helen demanded most of the furniture.

¹³² "Embarrassed by Merric's 'quixotic' nature ..." Interview between Brenda Niall and Helen Read.

¹³³ "She would always remember the crowded car ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd. David Boyd interview.

¹³⁴ "The slight committed upon his father ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

with a frieze in the style of Franz Mark, having seen his work at the Herald Exhibition. It was “decorative ... red horses in local suburban landscape, very bright.”¹³⁵ It was around this time the influence of Christopher Wood could be seen in Arthur’s works; he was drawn to the humorous style of the English artist, which he described as being “both gloomy and cheerful”.¹³⁶

The struggle continued. Unlike the prosperous years before the fire, when Merric employed a man to turn the wheel for larger pieces, his sons now became assistants. It was heavy going for the boys, but any complaints were dismissed imperviously by their father with, “Keep going or you’ll ruin the pot”.¹³⁷ In the mid-1930s there were problems with the kiln and Merric with his health failing required more support. Desperate to get his work fired, Merric began taking it to Hatton Beck, a potter who greatly admired his work. Merric would then take the finished pots to town, sell them and return to pay Hatton. All worked well up to this point but usually, as early as the following day, Merric would reappear at Hatton’s door needing to borrow some of the money back.¹³⁸ Guy, at the age of fourteen, took a job at a jeweller’s shop in the city, basically to earn a wage but in some part to avoid working for his father. Despite his failing health Merric remained a perfectionist in his working habits: a dictatorial boss who insisted that there was one way to do things -- his way.¹³⁹ Hatton Beck, who knew enough about pottery to keep in step with Merric, rented a cottage nearby and, with the installation of a small electric kiln, pots were once again loaded into the brown suitcases and taken to town.¹⁴⁰ Hatton’s help was more than practical. With the wireless gone, his gift of a small upright piano brought music back to the Brown Room.

David, a naturally talented pianist, found it a boon. Doris longed for him to pursue his gift and to devote his time to practice, and David had hoped to continue his studies. But times were such that Doris scoured the ‘Positions Vacant’ columns until she found a job for her youngest son in a piano repairer’s workshop. It was the first of a string of situations David would take on, only to find a cast of Dickensian characters and work places that would force him from one job to another. Guy, determined to make money, kept a steady pace, always ready to move on to a more lucrative position. But, after train fares to the city, there was little left from either of the boys’ pay packets. Arthur’s time at Rosebud was off again, on again. “I’d go to Rosebud to get away from Uncle Ralph’s factory ... he’d always want me to come back, so I’d have to ... you owed him”.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ “My mother was very upset ...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

¹³⁶ “It was around this time ...” Arthur Boyd, Janet McKenzie, *Arthur Boyd: Art and Life* op.cit

¹³⁷ “It was heavy going for the boys ...” David Boyd, Smith tapes. David Boyd biographical notes.

¹³⁸ “All worked well ...” Interview Lucy Beck..

¹³⁹ “Despite his failing health ...” Interview David Boyd.

¹⁴⁰ “Hatton Beck, who knew enough ...” Letter from Arthur to Doris. Bundanon archives. Arthur writes from Rosebud commenting on the new electric kiln and “Mr. Beck” being “all excited about it”. He says: “I hope the big killen is a success and you sell all the pots for big money”. Then adds: “just paint enough”.

¹⁴¹ “Arthur’s time at Rosebud ...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

The fire that levelled the pottery levelled dreams. Yet, a decade after the fire and its disastrous consequences, the family was still held together in a tight and loving meld. Throughout these hard times Doris's children never forgot her instruction: "Stick to your creative work". Despite the difficult start, despite the obliteration of the a'Beckett fortune, they would all eventually make their way in the world as potters, sculptors and painters.

CHAPTER THREE

'Sky blue trades in lamb white days'

– 'Fern Hill', Dylan Thomas, 1946

Rosebud: *"It was the most joyful time"* Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

"Some of the best painting being done in Australia ...only Nolan would have equalled it ... doesn't strike a wrong note anywhere, so accomplished, so confident."
Richard Haese interview

From the weather (usually in respect of painting or sailing) to the food (often mussels collected fresh from the sea) Arthur's letters written as a young teenager from Rosebud provide a wealth of detail. Through them it is possible to hear Arthur with his guard down. Much of what he loves is qualified by the word "little": it seems to define the precious; the people and things he wishes to hold, protect. He has an inordinate fondness for family nicknames and all the "cosy" emotional and domestic harmony they represent. In later life he would describe these letters written straight from the heart as "those terrible letters ... I sent back to my mother ... embarrassing baby letters".

All but a few are addressed to, and address, Doris: his mother is the principal and his brothers, sister, and father are 'the others'. With Merric off stage, Arthur has been forced into the role of his mother's protector. He worries about her: "I hope Mrs. Thornton [the cleaner] is up to the mark". He misses her: "I suppose you have written but I know how hard it must be to find time". He has a horror of causing his mother any extra burden: sending canvases ... the state of gramps ... his own welfare. He is constantly reassuring. Like an offering, a gift, he lists his achievements to his mother in every letter, describing the content and size and number of paintings he produces.

For all the joy that Rosebud brings, the estrangement from his mother is hard: 'I am looking forward to seeing you Mummum's, terribly much terribly much indeed I am Mummum's. Look-in forward to seeing you'. He sends her "all the love you can bear ..." Kisses stretch across the bottom of the pages. The recipient, Doris, must have preserved these letters with great care, just as Arthur protected the everlasting flowers his mother sent him. They have survived, as David Hockney once commented about the fragile drawings saved from the ravages of World War 11, "because somebody loved them".

The salt breeze from the bay, the breeze that was so welcome on warm summer nights, now carried rain that bounced off his blanket and splattered his face.¹⁴² It was beginning to come down heavily on the tin roof, the notes changing from treble to base. He would have to move his bed off the old wooden veranda soon. It sounded a little like the drumming at Monday morning assembly in the concrete playground at school.

How he had loathed that place, but he had turned the memory of marching into school into something else. He'd copied the sound of the base drum with the knuckles of his left hand on the three-ply walls of the Brown Room, beating out imitations of Fats Waller and Satchmo. His brothers and sisters had loved that, and he had loved their praise. He had tacked aluminium disks to his shoes so he could tap-dance like Fred Astaire and do funny dances – “do the faun dance, Chookie” – and prance around holding an imaginary flute to his puckered lips and make everybody laugh.

It seemed ages since his mother had taken him down to St. Kilda to see F.T. Thring. She had said some embarrassing thing like, “My little boy wants to make the whole world laugh”.¹⁴³ He knew he could make people laugh. He'd liked it when he'd dressed up in women's clothes for the Boy Scout play in Murrumbeena Hall. As soon as he'd walked on the stage everyone was in fits of laughter, even before he'd said his line, “You're the man I was looking for.”¹⁴⁴ Anyhow, nothing came from the visit to Thring's film studio. He was only thirteen and he would have worked for nothing, sweeping floors just to be there, but the family wouldn't have been able to afford the tram and train fares. It was George Wallace he admired: he was like Charlie Chaplin, but he was Australian. It made him think he might be able to be a comic too, a comedian. He liked the idea of doing things that made people laugh, but still being able to get away with being yourself, inside.

The days were happy now that he was living here and trying to make sure Gramps wasn't missing Granny too much. On days when it wasn't wet he could paint landscapes and he didn't have to worry about the cost of the paint because Gramps let him put it on his account at Norman Brothers and Deans art supply stores in the city. Painting was a job where you couldn't make a mistake. If you didn't get the atmosphere right, you'd just scrape the paint off into the grass and start again. He worried a bit that the lead might poison the cows.

With nice, quiet Gramps he didn't have to worry about words much, except when he wrote the letters home. Just a single page took hours. He found the letters easier if there was music. He'd tell Lucie Lucie what he was listening to: “Lar Boh Hame”; and to Mummums: “I'm listening to Humaresk, you know how it goes, tum te tum te tum te tum, tum. And so on, very nice too”. He worried about his darling Mummums, so much more than he worried about the sentences and the spelling and squeezing out the words

¹⁴² Apart from details in the Rosebud letters found in the Bundanon archives, where not noted in this chapter, other sources include interviews conducted by the author with Lucy Beck and David Boyd and David Boyd's biographical notes, also Pearce and Chalker tapes

¹⁴³ “My little boy wants ...” Arthur Boyd, Hetherington notes.

¹⁴⁴ “As soon as he walked on the stage ...” Lady Mary Nolan interview.

to fill up all the white space. He made himself write because he knew when she got his letters she clasped them to her and danced with them around the Brown Room.¹⁴⁵ He made the letters look fatter by enclosing sketches of his paintings. Now that he couldn't bring home his canvases after a day out painting and prop them up in the Brown Room like trophies he sent thumbnail sketches instead. His nib dipped in and out of the black ink with speed, reflecting with complete clarity the canvases he had composed that day. Describing these images his pen knew exactly what to say.

At the end of his letters, he would try to remember Scouty. His real name was Max Nicholson, but most people who spent time at Open Country were given a nickname. He had knocked on the door years before asking if any boys wanted to enrol in the cubs. After cubs came scouts and by then Max was a family friend and everyone called him Scouty. Scouty had brought Peter, the black spaniel. Peter stayed and Scouty would have liked to. Scouty brought Mummums flowers when he visited and read out aloud from the books he was studying at university. All kinds of books: Kierkegaard, Rimbaud, Beckett, Dickinson, Kafka, Joyce, Pirandello, Eliot and Dostoevsky. He had listened hard when Scouty read the book by Dostoevsky, the one written about an epileptic. Dostoevsky had been an epileptic himself and it helped him understand what Daddads felt and what he had felt, watching those awful fits.¹⁴⁶ He liked the description of intense feelings.¹⁴⁷ And it was comforting to know that these things happened to other people, in other countries, and although they were made to feel different and strange it didn't stop them getting on with things. His family didn't read much: Guysie and Davey had been allowed to draw on the books. It seemed like a long time since he had lain on Daddads' bed and listened to him read *Treasure Island* and *Black Beauty*. Scouty sometimes read until 3pm. It had made Monday mornings very hard, getting up so early to go and work for Uncle Madder, but it was worth it because Scouty kept the interest up for his mother. She would treat Scouty's visits as outings and do her hair up in a bun and wear pretty scarves; she was glued to all that stuff in the books, all those words.¹⁴⁸

With the rain coming down so hard he would have to move his bed into the room where his mother usually slept when she stayed at Rosebud. That would be cosy. It was getting very sad without her, his darling Mummums, such a funny little thing. The flowers she'd gathered on her last visit sat in a little pot on the old mahogany Spanish dining table that Gramps had bought down from Sandringham. It was like the paintings his grandparents had done in places like Switzerland and Italy and the photographs of the big stone

¹⁴⁵ "He made himself write ..." Lucy Beck interview.

¹⁴⁶ He liked the description ..."Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes. 'One of the interests in Dostoevsky was my father being epileptic. Arthur found Dostoevsky's description of an epileptic attacks "very powerful and searingly told.' It read:

"It was an epileptic fit ...It is well known that epileptic fits come on quite suddenly. At the moment the face is horribly distorted, especially the eyes. The whole body and the features of the face work with convulsive jerks and contortions." Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Idiot*. Wordsworth Classics, Hertfordshire, U.K., 1996.

¹⁴⁷ "He liked the description of intense feelings." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹⁴⁸ "She would treat Scouty's visits ..." Arthur Boyd to Julian Brophy, 15 December, 1993, ABC Radio Archives. "This contact was a great thing for her (Doris) and me ... for something like ten years he'd (Max) would come and read."

mansion his father had lived in as a boy, in Wiltshire, in England: it was all so different, it made him feel different ... maybe a bit left out. He often wondered if he'd ever see the paintings that his father had seen.¹⁴⁹ It felt far away, like the fine capes and floaty dresses in his mother's wardrobe that she never wore. Mummums one day discovered a bundle of her pretty things hidden by the front gate. Mrs. Thornton, the woman who helped about their house, had taken them; but his mother pretended not to notice, even when she visited the house of Mrs. Thornton, who answered the door wearing one of the dresses.

His mother had worn those lovely things when she went to balls and parties at the Gallery School with Uncle Penleigh when she was engaged to him, and then with Daddads. Sometimes, when he was younger, she would dress up when Dr Springthorpe's son, Guy, would invite his parents to the pictures in town, or to a grand dinner, or to Christmas lunch at his father's house, the house they called Joyous Guard.

Since her last visit, his mother had written to tell him she had arrived home safely and that Daddads had been at the station to meet her. He could imagine his father standing there, waiting for the train: quiet and watchful and patient. It made him think of Peter the little black dog, a faithful little thing too.¹⁵⁰ But his father was becoming more of a worry than ever and he hoped that Guysie and Dayford were working hard at their jobs and his sisters helping Mummums make the new straw mattresses now they'd doused all the old ones with kerosene and burned them because of bed bugs (his father had been upset about killing the bugs). Poor little Mummums, trying to cook in the unlined kitchen with those great big black spiders, enormous things, all over the kitchen ceiling and walls, because his father wouldn't let them be touched. It was the same with the flies. His father didn't agree with fly paper. It had to be a fly drive: Daddads up one end of the kitchen, swishing a cloth around, sweeping the flies towards the screen door, then banging it shut. The thing was they came back the next day. They say his father got into trouble at St. John's Theological College because of a fly drive. The principal had spotted Daddads trying to coax a fly out of the school window and instructed his father that all vermin should be exterminated. When Daddads heard this he flew into a rage (when he roars you up, it's frightening) and he said that the blowfly was the work of God and that it was the Principal himself who was vermin.¹⁵¹ You never knew with Daddads. Poor old Mrs. Thornton, his mother's household help, wasn't always up to the mark but his father would make everyone smile with his daily comment on her food:

¹⁴⁹ "He often wondered if he'd ever see the paintings ..." Springthorpe papers, manuscripts, State Library of Victoria. Volume 9 MS 9898. The diary entry of Springthorpe Senior, dated February 5, 1918 details a meeting with Merric. The "clock", given the rendezvous, is likely to have either been 'Big Ben' or the clock-tower of St. Martin's in the Fields. Merric was delivering a letter from Guy, Springthorpe's son. The two men visit the National Gallery and then travel onto Bond Street where Springthorpe wished to "show M Parisian ceramics, 12th century - five hundred pounds and one hundred - M fascinated".

¹⁵⁰ "It made him think of Peter ..." In one letter Arthur discusses his father with his mother almost as if he is discussing their child: "Daddad's is a good pussy the way he waits at stations and things...Petter [the family dog] is a faithful little thing too..."

¹⁵¹ "When Daddads heard this ..." David Boyd, biographical notes.

“Up to your usual standard, Mrs. Thornton.”¹⁵² It was hard to know what was worse, her food or discovering she washed the dishes in the water from the copper that had washed the dirty clothes.

At least Hatton was nearby and helping out in the pottery. With the new electric kiln operating and Mummums decorating and selling pots in town again, sometimes for nearly five pounds, it was all a great lift. His mother’s letters made him feel less guilty about leaving the job at Uncle Madder’s. He would try as hard as he could to make money from his paintings, like he had long before he left school, when he’d sold his portraits of dogs to the neighbours in Murrumbena for sixpence. In those days he’d waited by their front gates while Guysie had done the talking for him.¹⁵³

He was beginning to feel like a real artist now. When Gramps gave him a pipe, he tried to be like those artist chaps who smoke while they paint (like Wilfred McCulloch, with his cherrywood always gripped between his strong, even teeth) but he wasn’t too successful: it kept going out all the time and in the end he just blew bubbles with it. But the red sweater he had asked his mother to knit and send down had done the trick. It made him feel grown up, just like Michael in his red sweater - the Michael in Uncle Martin’s newest book, *The Lemon Farm*.¹⁵⁴ Uncle Martin was always in his thoughts at Christmas when he would send one pound sterling for all the children (it was worth twenty-five Australian shillings). Now he paid attention to Uncle Martin’s regular letters home to Gramps, and he tried to copy some of his uncle’s words in those letters. He found, “there is no other news much,” came in very handy.

He felt even more like Michael now that he’d convinced his grandfather to help him rig a little sailboat. He felt a bit guilty saying it was for painting expeditions and not mentioning the other part of the idea - fun. Gramps probably knew because Gramps used to sail a big boat he built himself called the *Killala*. It had to do with Ireland. Gramp’s father had been born in County Kerry in a place called Tralee. He had joined the army at nineteen and had become second in command of a ship carrying three hundred convicts

¹⁵²“Poor old Mrs. Thornton ...” Lucy Beck interview. Once again David Boyd and Lucy Boyd’s versions differ.

¹⁵³ “In those days he’d waited ...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

¹⁵⁴ “It made him feel grown up ...” Janet McKenzie in her work *Arthur Boyd: Art & Life* published by Thames & Hudson, U.K., 2000, reports that Arthur makes reference to his Uncle Martin’s novel *The Lemon Farm*: “In ... ‘The Lemon Farm’ there was a character who rides around or sails a boat out in [Port Phillip] bay. I didn’t have a boat at that time, not a proper one, so I tried to get into his shoes. I managed to get a red jumper and then I made a boat, a punt type boat to ride up and down the tidal creeks at Rosebud. The tidal creeks had lots of rushes and it was very hard to push through them. I managed to persuade my grandfather to allow me to make some alterations to the punt and turn it into a boat by putting a rudder or keel and putting a point on it and a sail. I was able to go in fairly shallow water along the shore and that way my identification was complete, and I gave up worrying about it anymore...” Through all the years Arthur never forgot his fascination for this early hero, easily bringing his name “Michael” to mind in his interview with McKenzie.

His preoccupation with the book can be seen in an early work titled ‘Still life with orange, onion and book’, The title of the book is visible and reads, *The Lemon Farm*.

from England's prisons and those big hulks on the river, all the way to Van Diemen's Land.

Gramps had sailed his boat for pleasure only. He had had all the time in the world because he didn't need a regular job once he married Granny. Daddads had sailed in Tasmania with his father when he was young (they had to put it on a bigger boat to get it there). Gramps had loved that yacht so much. This new boat was just a little punt - a raft with a keel, with bent boards around it going to a slight point. It looked a bit like a shark, but it could get in and out of the reeds on the creek beds really well.

The little tidal creeks running all along the coast from McCrae right up to Rye were marvellous to explore. But to get out in the wider water he needed a sail and so Gramps had helped with the rigging. It was a lovely feeling, sailing out into the bay and over to the lighthouse, then coming back with the wind behind him. The Michael in his uncle's book seemed to understand how it felt to be alone and out on the water: "... he had a queer sense of union with it, that he and the boat and the island and the sea were one thing, complete and alive in some mutual satisfaction." It was uncanny, the way Michael's words fitted. At the beginning of the book, he said: "... he was sure that somehow from now on his life was going to be different. The period of stagnation was over."

Yes. That was it. That was how he felt, being able to come down to Rosebud and live with lovely Gramps and to have peace and quiet and the time to paint. He felt like a dog on a chain that had been let loose.¹⁵⁵ So he could cycle out with all his equipment he'd built a plywood tray about five-foot square, painted it red, and sat it on two wheels. A half-inch water pipe covered the top of the back wheel and the whole contraption was bolted underneath the seat. He could get quite a lot in it - two or three canvases. Most mornings he would hitch up the trailer to his bike and set off around the peninsula in search of light on a hill, or a tree, or the reflections in a stretch of sand. Other times he'd climb the hill called Arthur's Seat, to find the colours in the vast dome of air streaming over farms and fields and sea, all the way to Mt Martha and on towards Melbourne. Every day he felt a bit like a shrimp with its feelers out searching for its prey. When he found his quarry he would paint it, completely in a daze.¹⁵⁶

Now, instead of the big noisy audience of the Brown Room, it was his grandfather's lone voice that acknowledged his labour at the end of the day. Gramps knew so much about painting: works by both him and Granny Boyd had hung in the British Royal Academy.¹⁵⁷ The paintings he brought home weren't in his grandfather's style but Gramps would inspect them closely, seriously. He'd form a circle with his fingers and thumb and making a little hole, a contained picture area, he'd put his hand up to one eye

¹⁵⁵ "He felt he had been let loose ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

¹⁵⁶ "Every day he felt a bit like a shrimp ..." Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Gramps knew so much about painting ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

and go over every part of the painting, saying, "I like that bit" or, "That's very good". Gramps never criticised, never said, "Oh, I wouldn't do that".¹⁵⁸

His grandparents' paintings always read from left to right. Their landscapes always looked finely rendered - even and controlled. He didn't want to paint in the style of his grandparents.¹⁵⁹ He wanted his pictures to be moody and atmospheric, but not like Uncle Penleigh's, who had painted as if he had film over his eye, as though he were looking through a kind of glass.¹⁶⁰ He wanted to paint with an eye that was really open; to describe what he saw, but quickly, in the light that he saw it in. And not the perfect scene, but the way things sometimes were: lonely (space), threatening (weather), misshapen (trees), falling down (fences). His grandfather would never tell him what to do, but was encouraging and interested; it made a great change from his father, who hardly ever commented on his work.¹⁶¹ Sometimes when he looked at Gramps he saw his own blue eyes looking back at him; under the moustache and the six decades separating them, he recognised the same softly rounded Irish features of his own face. There was a studio photograph taken of him as a little boy, about five, and one of Gramps around the same age. They were the same boy wearing different clothes. Appearances confirmed their feelings, they were happy living in each other's reflection.

As he sat behind the easy chair, out of his grandfather's line of vision, doing a pen and ink sketch of Gramps in his dressing gown, reading, he could have been Michael at the beginning of the second chapter of *The Lemon Farm* - "It gave him pleasure to watch people who did not know they were being observed". The evenings were very quiet, apart from those times when Gramps approved him going to the local cinema at the bottom of Rosebud Parade. The cottage was at the top of the hill, back from the road, and sat solitary, surrounded by trees and bracken. Most nights the silence would be broken only by the tap of Gramps' pipe against his boot, or his wrestling with the crinkly pages of the *Argus*, or the wireless crackling away along with the fire.

In that other village by a colder sea, Michael loved listening to his wireless too. When Arthur read *The Lemon Farm* he would wonder at how he could live in such a similar universe to Michael's (the red jumper always helped). The words hit home. When Michael said -- "...it was marvellous that the air was full of voices and that he could tap them in ... that the unseen air was full of life", this could have been describing the way Daddads always said the evening prayers and spoke to God and never forgot to mention his brother, Martin.¹⁶² Now he wondered just what his father remembered. Poor old Daddads, sitting in the Brown Room in the evenings, in his rickety, favourite old chair propped up on bricks, reading the Bible to himself in the evening, often falling asleep with it upside down.

¹⁵⁸ "He'd form a circle with his fingers ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

¹⁵⁹ "He didn't want to paint in the style of his grandparents ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC archives. Date of broadcast September, 1978.

¹⁶⁰ "He wanted his pictures to be moody ..." Arthur Boyd, ibid

¹⁶¹ "...it made a great change from his father ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

¹⁶² "When Michael said ..." Interview Lucy Beck.

His grandparents' Edwardian house in Sandringham had always seemed very different from Open Country – much bigger, much grander, and full of pretty things. When he was small he would go to stay maybe four or five times a year. But after his brothers and sister came along, they would take turns visiting. Aunt Lallie (Helen) was still living at home then, so that's probably why Granny usually only took one child at a time.

His grandparents had taught him lots of things, especially about painting, although Gramps was no slouch at drawing either. Whenever he had stayed at Sandringham his grandparents would take him out on painting excursions, to work *en plein air*. They rode in style (they drove a Dort then) down Beach Road, where the horse tram trundled along a couple of times a day. When they travelled to Half Moon Bay he would see the old wreck of the Victorian warship, the *Cerberus*¹⁶³. It was the ship that his mother's father, Grandfather Gough, the grandfather he had never known, had once sailed on. Now it rose up out of the sea, its concrete-filled hull acting as a shore-break. But what had Granny Boyd been thinking about when she looked at the sea and the beaches, and the pink and white prickly flowering scrubs and the cliffs covered with red tea-trees – all the scenes that her son, Penleigh, had painted? Emma Minnie had become very religious after her first son had died. After her second son was killed, she had talked and written about God all the time in stories and poems.

Granny Gough had written poems and made up stories, too. A lot of those had frightened him. They were about being hunted in Maori wars when she was a girl living in New Zealand and about an aviator named Hinkler, a hero who died in a plane crash. But Granny Boyd had really scared him with the stories she had read to him from her giant Bible right up until he was twelve. He would sit next to her as she turned the huge pages, resting the book on the table because it was too big for her lap. The marvellous tinted engravings were grotesque, gruesome. He never forgot the terrible things happening in these pictures:¹⁶⁴

Granny Gough had once had a house in Rosebud, way back when his father was courting his mother. Daddads would ride his horse all the way down from St Kilda to see her. Now he probably couldn't even ride a bike.¹⁶⁵ They say Daddads was cruel to his horse: riding it hard, down and back in a day. Martin had written that the horse died, because he was ridden into the ground, which sounded strange because his father didn't believe in hurting a fly. You never knew with Daddads. Like the day he asked a dog to kiss him, in the same embarrassing way he asked people to kiss him: "Give me one on the eyebrow." When the dog snapped at him, nearly taking off his nose, his father kicked the dog, hard in its middle and called it, "a filthy little beast".¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ "They rode in style ..." The HMS *Cerberus*, built in 1868, was the first armoured warship built for Australia. Designed never to leave Port Phillip it was scuttled as a breakwater in 1926.

¹⁶⁴ "He never forgot ..." Arthur Boyd.: *The Australian Magazine* 'Arthur Boyd Family Fame and Fear of Flying.' 24-25 August, 1991.

¹⁶⁵ "Now he couldn't even ride a bike ..." Yvonne Boyd interview. In 1942, Yvonne Lennie first met Merric. "By the time I met him he couldn't have ridden a bicycle."

¹⁶⁶ "When the dog snapped ..." David Boyd, biographical notes.

Daddads wasn't a happy man, or one with much of a sense of humour.¹⁶⁷ He remembered (or maybe he had been told) of a time after they had rented a cottage in Rosebud and were travelling on the paddle-steamer called the *Hygeia*. His father wasn't coming but had driven his mother, Lucy, and himself down in the phaeton to pick up the boat at Dromana. There was a piano on board and his father, always drawn to pianos, played it. When the call came to disembark, he kept playing. When the boat was about to pull anchor and all the visitors had left, he was still banging away. Mummums kept pleading with him to get off, but it wasn't until the boat was pulling away that Daddads swooped across the prow and made a great leap for the wharf. Even though he was only about four years old at the time, his father worried him: he cried and cried.¹⁶⁸ Lucy said it took ages to calm him down.

He had never felt so free before. Here he was behind the wheel of Gramps's six-cylinder Dodge, sporting a tan he'd been working on, and driving into the city. It had been easy to get his licence down in the country and dear old Gramps had been happy for him to drive the car even before he took the driving test. Gramps was getting a big dodderly lately (sometimes he drove down the median strip thinking it was the road).

He wasn't going to Sedon's Gallery in Elizabeth Street today. He was fed up with Mr Sedon asking him to cut up his canvases. They were about two foot by two foot. But Mr Sedon who didn't like the big broad skies would say, "Cut all that off, all the outside of the picture, and leave about a six-inch square". All that would be left would be a little house or a sheep. He knew he was ruining good pictures just for Mr. Sedon to prop up in his gallery. It was a terrible thing to do. And besides, the exhibition he'd given him had been disastrous.

Probably Mr Fitzgerald, his framer, hated seeing his paintings cut up too and that was why he'd offered to put his paintings in the window of his shop and around the walls.¹⁶⁹ So he'd given Mr Fitzgerald his next batch and they'd started to sell at five, or six, even eight pounds a time - more than the weekly salary of a milkman or a labourer. Now, with the car and some money, he wouldn't have to worry his mother about buying calico from Paynes Bon Marche in town and sending it down. Previously Gramps had always given him a cheque and then he would write home and ask for the cheapest calico the money could buy. But Mummums had probably known he really wanted the better quality, even though he would never ask. He loved doing big pictures, so width was a

¹⁶⁷ "Daddads never seemed like a happy man ..." "He was a morose sort of man" Arthur Boyd added to the description of his father to the same interviewer. Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹⁶⁸ "Even though he was only about four years old ..." In a comment to Margaret Chalker, Arthur makes reference to his father by saying 'the war ...damaged (Merric's) health no end.' Given that Merric never saw active service, and he actually gained experience he enjoyed during his overseas service, this descriptive of Arthur's supports the argument that Merric's seizures may have occurred before the kiln fire of 1926.

¹⁶⁹ "Probably Mr. Fitzgerald ..."The Westminster Gallery in Little Collins Street.

big consideration. He had been using the fire-screen as a stretcher but either Gramps hadn't noticed, or he didn't mind.

The paintings he was taking to Mr Fitzgerald were done with a palette knife, done the way his cousin Pat had taught him. Pat had showed him how you could get the paint terrifically accurate with a knife, mix it up and still control it better than you could with a brush. He'd seen a van Gogh postcard at Pat's house once and now the paintings he'd done looked a bit like that, especially the ones with the haystacks. He had lots of friends like Keithie and the McCulloch brothers who would come down to Rosebud and go on painting expeditions. But when Pat came down with Robin and they climbed up Arthur's Seat to paint, he liked to compare himself to his older cousin. Pat was a very good painter who had gone to the Gallery School. Pat had taught him a lot. And he had learnt by looking at his father sculpting and his mother controlling her paint, and he always remembered how her teacher and friend, Fred McCubbin had told her to, 'keep it fuzzy, Goughie'.¹⁷⁰

He tried not to feel a bit left out of things. But if you thought about it, how Granny and Gramps and Penleigh and Mummums, even Daddads for awhile, and now Pat ... they all went to good schools and then to the Gallery School full-time. It all made him feel a bit embarrassed.¹⁷¹ When Uncle Penleigh was only twenty-one he had his painting *Spring Morning, St. Ives, Cornwall*, hanging at the Royal Academy in London, just like Gramps and Grannie had when their paintings were accepted by the Academy when Uncle Penleigh was a baby.¹⁷² It seemed hard that he had to go to a state school and then had to settle for a night course at the Gallery School. After working all day for Uncle Madder those classes were tiring. You were left drawing hands or something for the allotted number of weeks; individual progress didn't count. Still, last time Aunt Edith had come down with his cousins and they'd gone out painting he'd thought his picture was the better ... not by much ... but better. He hoped to do better ones.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ "...keep it fuzzy, Goughie ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC production, *Testament of a Painter*, directed by Don Bennetts..

¹⁷¹ "It all made him feel slightly embarrassed". Bea Bewley interview. Anne Boyd interview.

¹⁷² "When Uncle Penleigh ..." Arthur Merric Boyd, *Victoria Coast, Australia*, 1891: Mr. A.M (Emma M.) *To the Workhouse*. 1891.

¹⁷³ "He hoped to do better ones ..." Arthur to Doris. Rosebud letters, Bundanon archives.

CHAPTER 4

Worlds away from Rosebud

“To be a painter ... would be ... another way of... being not utterly on the outside”.
Arthur Boyd interview, Grazia Gunn.

Things changed for Arthur Boyd one day in the late 1930s when a Jewish refugee from Warsaw walked past Mr Fitzgerald's window, saw Arthur's work, and ventured inside to enquire about the painter. Born in Vienna in 1920, Vladimir Yossif Bergner was a compassionate, passionate, rambunctious young man, with an acute antenna for humbug and an overriding need to paint. He went by the name of Yosl.

Yosl Bergner's father believed a name could set the scene. His given name was Zacharia Chana Bergner, but he had become Melech (Hebrew for King) Ravitch, rating it a more suitable name for a poet.¹⁷⁴ When Ravitch visited Germany after Hitler's rise to power he had returned, imploring every Polish Jew who would listen to get out of Europe. A year later, in 1934, as a member of the Steinberg Group, Ravitch had left for Australia. His aim was twofold: to raise funds and, at the same time, look for a territory for a Jewish settlement. The Australian authorities offered him large tracts of land in the Kimberleys. Kitted out with a panama hat and an expedition party of two (an Australian truck driver and a young Aboriginal boy), Ravitch explored this possibility. It wasn't the remote location of the north-west corner of Western Australia, or the relentless rainy season, or the searing summer that he ultimately rejected - he simply couldn't imagine a new Zion with so many flies. In 1937 his son sailed for Australia. His mother would follow in 1939, with just three months to spare, before the outbreak of war.

Ravitch had offered his son two ways of escape – fast boat or slow. On his six-month journey he had stood in front of the masters at the Louvre (longer in front of Daumier), seen Gauguin's Tahiti, and turned seventeen-years old before landing in Sydney. Waiting on the dock for two hours Bergner became a figure of fun in his Polish calf-length breeches: "The people in the street looked at me and laughed and I'm standing, standing, standing".¹⁷⁵ He quickly learnt words of rebuke. Soon they would be directed towards Arthur Boyd.

"Rubbish ... rubbish ... rubbish ... rubbish".¹⁷⁶ This was Yosl Bergner's response as Arthur scrambled under his bed in his studio at Open Country, hauling out one after another of his Rosebud landscapes to present to Yosl for his opinion. There was hill with tree, hill with sheep, hill with sky -- all the paintings Arthur thought "quite nice and straightforward and simple ... lovely modern paintings." By the eve of the millennium Yosl Bergner would complete a volte-face and rate Arthur's landscapes among his

¹⁷⁴ "His given name was ..." Like T.S. Eliot, Yosl's father originally worked in a bank. It was a good job and he was predicted a brilliant future. But then he left this job behind, permanently, and his wife and two small children temporarily, and set off for Warsaw to support the Yiddish reviva. He translated Kafka into Yiddish, founded a periodical, *Literarische Bleter* and mixed with the brothers, Isaiah and Isaac Bashevis Singer. Even when Melech eventually brought his family to Warsaw, Yosl saw little of his father, who was constantly travelling: lecturing in surrounding towns and villages on a myriad subjects, including Impressionism and Expressionism, or, equipped with letters of reference from Albert Einstein and Lord Rothschild, off trawling the world for funds to support Polish educational organisations.

¹⁷⁵ Bergner, Yosl. *What I Meant to Say: Stories and travels as told to Ruth Bondy*. Hed Arzi Book Publishing, 1997, Israel. Many references are made to this memoir throughout this chapter.

¹⁷⁶ "Rubbish ... rubbish ... rubbish ... rubbish ..." Arthur Boyd to John Read, *A Man of Two Worlds*. Arthur often repeated this story but in this interview he attributed at least one extra "rubbish" to Yosl's admonishment.

favourite works¹⁷⁷. But in the late thirties, the fact that Bergner was a refugee (the first Arthur had met), a good painter (entirely different from any other good painter Arthur had met) and someone who had experienced Expressionism and the French Realists first hand, meant that Bergner's response was a blow. He had never had anyone tell him his pictures were rubbish before, and it hurt.¹⁷⁸ Yet Arthur's reaction was passive. In later years Yosl came to realise: "My face you could see, Arthur's you could never see".¹⁷⁹ Arthur recalled his response to Bergner, and likened it to "some dogs who like to be hit and they become friendly with their master".¹⁸⁰

At Rosebud Arthur had been free from the censorious and belittling attitude of so many of his Murrumbidgee neighbours and workmates at Uncle Madder's factory. More importantly, he had escaped the day-to-day worry and care of his family and had time, at last, to be a teenager instead of the surrogate head of a struggling and troubled family. During those long Rosebud days Arthur pedalled around the peninsula seeing "nearly everything through a Streeton's eyes or Robert's ... airy, atmospheric ..." -- the Victorian based painters of the previous generation known as the Heidelberg School.¹⁸¹ The influence of Streeton's *Fire's On* and *The Purple Noon's Transparent Might* would never leave Arthur. Blazing off the canvas, billowing with romance, they were big paintings, both in size and heart. The softer mornings and evenings brought a different comparison to Arthur's mind, that of the Sydney-based painter Conrad Martens and his Turner-esque misty style. Around these influences wound van Gogh. Painting *en plein air*, fast and loose, suited the excited teenager: "it was a great release".¹⁸²

Indelible evidence of Arthur's broad rendering can be seen on one particular work: the imprint made by leaves of grass on a wet canvas. It had fallen as Arthur's brush was attempting to outrace an approaching storm. In these simple, uncluttered compositions there is a sense of Arthur breathing deeply, stretching wide and experiencing the meaning of his Uncle Martin's prose -- the feeling that the Australian countryside "has known the morning of the world".¹⁸³ During this time in Rosebud, in the security of his grandfather's calming presence, Arthur had felt like a dog "let off the chain".¹⁸⁴ Now, facing criticism from a peer who directed him to look inward -- towards the urban, towards the psychologically troubled, towards the excluded -- he felt the chain fastening back on.

From Bergner, Arthur learnt about a Europe that bore no resemblance to the genteel stories and sentimental paintings brought home by his father and grandparents and uncles, who had lived in and toured Europe in grand style and before the rise of fascism.

¹⁷⁷ "By the eve of the millennium ..." Interview Yosl Bergner, Tel Aviv, Israel, March 2000. All subsequent quotes sourced from this interview or Bergner's memoirs, op cit.

¹⁷⁸ "He had never had anyone tell him ..." Arthur Boyd to John Read, op cit

¹⁷⁹ "My face you could see ..." Yosl Bergner interview.

¹⁸⁰ "Arthur recalled his response ..." Arthur Boyd to John Read, op cit

¹⁸¹ "During those long Rosebud days ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

¹⁸² "The softer mornings and evenings brought ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

¹⁸³ "In these simple, uncluttered compositions ..." Martin Boyd. *The Cardboard Crown*

¹⁸⁴ "During this time in Rosebud ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

Bergner described all the vicious consequences of living where racial prejudice was encouraged to thrive. The day before Bergner left Warsaw he saw a Jewish woman selling bagels. There was snow on the ground and no customers. A policeman demanded her licence. She had none. His response to her plea in bad Polish - "My husband. Sick. Have mercy!" - was a heavy-booted kick. Walking through quiet and well-ordered Melbourne streets, Bergner filled Arthur with stories of the chaos he had left behind. He predicted war.

Yosl Bergner brought the horror home. He pointed out the racial discrimination flourishing on the streets of Melbourne.. Both his father's photographs and Bergner's paintings described images of the displaced and abused, people not far removed from those in the Warsaw ghetto. Aborigines were banned from entering pubs, but that was a mere slight compared to their being totally dispossessed, with no right to vote. Bergner depicted these forsaken people, and also white Australians who, like the Polish Jews, struggled against neglect and ostracism.

Like the people Bergner painted, he too scavenged for discarded fruit and vegetables, thrown onto the street from market stalls in the Victoria Market. His hunger extended to ideas, and Bergner had no compunction in scrounging for company on a Melbourne street. Max Nicholson (by now almost a member of the Boyd family), carrying a copy of Dostoyevsky under his arm, appeared a likely candidate and Yosl lost no time in introducing himself. His instincts were good: they would become lifetime friends. Nicholson - as much, if not more, a talker than Bergner - quickly learnt of Bergner's visit to Fitzgerald's gallery and his knowledge of Arthur. Soon after, Bergner was a guest at Open Country.¹⁸⁵

Yosl Bergner would be the first of Arthur's adult friends with a "voracious personality": Arthur thought Bergner "a very forward bloke" who "wouldn't pull his punches on asking people questions". It was an openness which went some way to loosening Arthur's armour. Arthur had never had contact with anyone like Bergner.¹⁸⁶ Yet, despite coming from, as Arthur saw it, "exotic Europe" Bergner settled into Open Country without any trouble. Arthur enjoyed the fact that he was "immediately involved".¹⁸⁷ This was no mean feat for Bergner who, in his own words, was "a Jew with a complex" who experienced "anti-Semitism all around him".¹⁸⁸ But at Murrumbidgee Bergner felt at ease. He thought Arthur's family lived "very naturally" and allowed nothing to deter the creative process.¹⁸⁹ David Boyd, by now a serious piano student, practised on an upright

¹⁸⁵ There is no firm date for the meeting of Boyd and Bergner. In the Gunn interviews Arthur says he invited Yosl back to his studio to see his paintings. This would position their meeting somewhere in late 1938 after the studio was erected. Other reports say Yosl came under his own steam to 'Open Country'. A close friend of both men, Peter Herbst, says he was brought by Max Nicholson. Bernard Smith in *Noel Counihan: Artist and Revolutionary* states that Bergner and Boyd met at Boyd's first exhibition at Westminster Gallery but gives no source.

¹⁸⁶ "It was an openness ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹⁸⁷ "Yet despite coming from, as Arthur saw it, 'exotic Europe' ... Ibid

¹⁸⁸ "This was no mean feat for Bergner ... Yosl Bergner interview.

¹⁸⁹ "He thought Arthur's family lived 'very naturally' Ibid.

with missing keys and compensated for the absentee notes by singing them.¹⁹⁰ Arthur relaxed around Bergner. He saw that Bergner “wasn’t put off by any poverty ... he wasn’t embarrassed at all”,¹⁹¹ unlike other visitors who had commented on the bare floorboards and lack of a dining room, and called the house a slum.¹⁹² None of this was of any consequence to Bergner, but the spirit of the commune at Open Country was, and the young refugee found it comforting. Arthur would never forget hungry Bergner attacking the food set before him in the Brown Room, eating it “like he’d never had a meal in his life ... scooping it up voraciously”.¹⁹³ Yosl Bergner ate food liked he lived life: he devoured it, with not a moment wasted on polite pretence.

Looking back on this friendship Arthur believed there was “a very strong bond”¹⁹⁴ and that Bergner wielded “quite a big influence”.¹⁹⁵ Despite the differences in their upbringing, the two teenagers, seemingly complete opposites, shared a great deal. They understood how it felt living within a group separate from the larger community. From an early age, they experienced the consequences of a changing fortune. Like the a’Becketts, Bergner’s grandparents had once been wealthy, yet both Yosl and Arthur were forced to wear cut-down clothes to school. Each knew the pain of being a figure of fun because of a lack of money, yet neither pursued a career guaranteed to amass any fortune. Like Merric, Bergner’s father devoted his life to his art and, like Merric, Bergner’s father was erratic, eccentric and an unreliable provider. Both men were dreamers. Bashevis Singer could have been describing Merric instead of Ravitch when he said he was a man “convinced that the world of justice would arrive tomorrow or the day after and sooner or later all mankind would be brothers and also vegetarians.” While both men stood apart from conventional behaviour, their sons, as they were growing up, longed for it. They both remembered being embarrassed to walk in public next to their fathers: otherworldly idiosyncratic Merric and Ravitch, the naturalist and vegetarian who wore wooden shoes instead of leather. Minor memories linked the two young artists: a mulberry tree, pea soup, straw mattresses. Arthur, who had originally seen Bergner as “a visitor from another planet”,¹⁹⁶ by travelling through the eyes of his friend, found the other side of the world less foreign. Bergner would always find the Australian landscape “like the moon”, but he had found a family who made him feel at home.¹⁹⁷

After Bergner traded in his bicycle for three tubes of paint, he joined Arthur on a painting trip in the Dodge. Yosl only went once. He didn’t like the bush. After that expedition they had little to show: the masonite boards, laden with fresh oil and rattling around in the back of the car, had glued together on the way back. On other occasions Arthur would captain Bergner’s moonlight flits. His grandfather’s great old jalopy, with

¹⁹⁰ “David Boyd, by now a serious piano student ...” Ibid

¹⁹¹ “He saw that Bergner “wasn’t put off by any poverty ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

¹⁹² “unlike other visitors ...” Lucy Beck interview.

¹⁹³ “None of this was of any consequence ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

¹⁹⁴ “Looking back on this friendship ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

¹⁹⁵ “...and that Bergner wielded ...” Arthur Boyd, Heatherington biographical tapes.

¹⁹⁶ “Arthur, who had originally seen ...” Hal Missingham interview. 22 September, 1965. NLA. Oral History.

¹⁹⁷ “Bergner would always find the Australian landscape...” Bergner interview.

its fold-down canvas top, lumbering through the night-gloomy backstreets of the poor, inner-city suburbs of Carlton and Fitzroy, easily accommodated all of Yosl's furniture and paintings. But whatever destination the Dodge steered towards, there was never any doubt the new address would be as chaotic as the last. Apart from avoiding the rent collector, Bergner was never the perfect tenant. Perhaps it was his memory of a voyeur's blue eye, pressed against a peep hole that had been bored through the wall of a Warsaw latrine that created Yosl's reluctance to negotiate night visits to the outhouse. Instead, empty linseed oil bottles were called into duty. In need of warmth, Yosl would push the boundaries - literally: palings from back fences disappeared into his hearth. He threw rubbish under his bed until it was piled so high it made the mattress uncomfortable. He had, as a young boy, developed the voyeuristic eye of the artist. While he kept silent about the maid's trysts she allowed him to follow her amorous adventures by peeking through the keyhole of her bedroom.¹⁹⁸ Later, in Melbourne, at one of Bergner's various accommodations, he attended life classes by climbing up a ladder leading to an attic bedroom and secretly observing couples making love¹⁹⁹

Arthur viewed Yosl as his first contact with the outside world of Bohemia: until this time Arthur felt he had led a closed, very private existence. Unlike the majority of people in provincial Melbourne at the time, Bergner spoke his mind, uncensored. It is unlikely Yosl neglected to regale Arthur with his visit to Melbourne's street of prostitutes, where trade was plied behind the cover of cigarette shops. Bergner's story (he believes good stories "cost" and this one proves it) was that he found himself in one of these particular shops. However, to his dismay, the woman behind the counter was old. Disguising his disappointment, he requested the very thing he had never entertained purchasing -- cigarettes. The proprietor then explained her terms of trade, "first pay, then fuck, then buy cigarettes". Bergner complied, believing that "prostitutes have their professional pride and self-respect and you don't have to hurt their feelings".²⁰⁰ Yosl's adventures, although never lacking humour or humanity, would have shocked many. He would have been an anathema to the burghers of Melbourne. Arthur found Yosl Bergner "extraordinary and sensitive".²⁰¹

Apart from family commitments, or the times Uncle Madder requested his help for short stints at the paint factory, Arthur spent every minute he could at Rosebud. By his eighteenth birthday he had gained his licence and was travelling regularly up to town to sell his paintings. His grandfather, now beginning to show signs of dementia, would often accompany Arthur on these visits. Sleeping quarters at Open Country were at a premium, but Merric, without word or hesitation, would give up his bedroom for his father and move into Arthur's lean-to. Built by Arthur some years before, it now looked like "something out of the Ark", its walls slouching on a small wooden platform that teetered on very long, thin stumps.²⁰² Arthur needed a place to work and his grandfather came to the rescue, extending a helping hand, not simply to the adored Arthur but to a

¹⁹⁸ After Bergner traded in his bicycle ... "Yosl Bergner, *What I meant to Say*. op cit

¹⁹⁹ "At one of his various venues ..." Yosl Bergner interview.

²⁰⁰ "The proprietress then explained ..." Yosl Bergner, *What I Meant to Say*. op cit

²⁰¹ "He would have been an anathema ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

²⁰² "Built by Arthur some years before ..." Chalker tapes.

brace of creative grandsons. In 1938 Robin Boyd,²⁰³ a student of architecture (destined to be a lauded writer/critic and doyen of his profession) designed his first building -- a studio for Arthur on a block of land beside the house. Just as had happened a decade before when Arthur built his pottery shed, Arthur Merric was financier and Arthur the builder. Although Arthur would in later life boast "I built the studio with my own hands",²⁰⁴ according to David both he and Guy laboured alongside Arthur; both finding their older brother something of a taskmaster.

Arthur would look back on the building of this house as one of the landmarks of his development. Perhaps because this was the first time he had forced an issue, stood his ground against authority, and won. Gaining permission from the local council was hard and humiliating. If Merric had previously found the council difficult and unaccommodating, Arthur felt he was treated like dirt. When permission was finally granted, the building rose in a style unknown to suburban Murrumbidgee - International Style. The studio was white, geometric and radical. Built from a new building material, asbestos-sheeting, its cube shape was spliced on one side by a mullioned studio window set at an oblique angle. Stilts raised it slightly above ground. To the astonished residents of Murrumbidgee it would have appeared to hover like a UFO, uncontainable, despite the high paling fence. Arthur's shouted instructions to his brothers, and the noise of sawing and hammering, could not drown out the collective tut-tuttings of the local residents.

During Arthur's absences from Rosebud, Arthur Merric was under the sole care of Mrs Driscoll, an exhausted mother of five young children who worked nights at the local cinema. While Arthur was at the house it would be full of her children, who would drop by to chat, or sail, or help Arthur haul his boat onto the bicycle trailer, so he could cycle down the hill to the bay. Gordon Driscoll viewed Arthur as "a little different ... the odd man out" and there was little rapport between housekeeper and employer: Mrs Driscoll found Arthur Merric distant and removed.²⁰⁵ The housekeeper's presence would have seemed barren compared to the image of his daughter-in-law, Doris, whose gentle ways and broad outlook suited Arthur Merric's mind and temperament so well. Thoughts of busy Open Country would have served to deepen the quiet days and nights without Arthur's company. After the death of Emma Minnie, Arthur Merric had refused the offer of a home in Sydney with his daughter, Helen. One day he unexpectedly wandered around the side path of Open Country, found Doris and proclaimed, "I've come to stay". Arthur Merric had announced where his heart lay.

Between Arthur's nineteenth and twentieth year he and his grandfather lived fulltime at 'Open Country'. By now Arthur Merric had become quite confused, making night visits to the neighbouring house in his shimmy and imagining Emma Minnie was alive.²⁰⁶ The

²⁰³ "In 1938 Robin Boyd ..." Robin Boyd was inspired by, wrote about, and personally knew Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright. He was an architect and writer of originality and distinction. Among his many books, *The Australian Ugliness* was a patriotic rally cry to recognize, preserve, and encourage the aesthetics of Australian architecture and planning.

²⁰⁴ Although Arthur would in later life boast ..." *Testament of a Painter* op cit

²⁰⁵ "Gordon Driscoll viewed ..." Interview Gordon Driscoll, Melbourne, July 2003.

²⁰⁶ "One day he unexpectedly wandered around ..." David Boyd and Lucy Beck interviews.

cry would often be heard: "Grandpa's out" and a search of the streets would ensue. As Arthur Merric slipped further into senility, Arthur, without word or fuss, performed the most basic duties of a hospital orderly. Charlie Adams once chanced upon Arthur cleaning up after his grandfather and he remembered it as an act of the greatest affection, performed with silent selflessness. Arthur never spoke of it then, or years later when his own father suffered the same indignity.

In 1939, in the midst of this difficult time, and in September when Yosl Bergner's prophecy of war became a reality, the Brown Room was festive and garlanded with boughs from the garden's fruit trees heavy with spring blossom, for a very special occasion. Henry Hatton Beck, the potter, was fifteen years older than Lucy. She had been in her early teens when they first met. Once, showing off her brother's building skills to Hatton Beck, Lucy had described Arthur as "wonderful".²⁰⁷ Hatton Beck wanted this gentle, intelligent girl to hold him in the same regard. When Lucy returned from her job in the country, she had been away two years and was in her twenty-first year. Beck had waited for her return, only to almost lose her again. Her relatives at 'Avenel', unable to find anybody to replace Lucy on the wages they paid, offered her the job back at a five shilling rise. Knowing Beck didn't want her to go, Lucy refused. For well over a year Lucy observed how Beck gave invaluable support to her increasingly frail father and, when he proposed, Lucy accepted. There was a huge age difference and Guy and David, adoring and protective of the sister who had been their second mother, objected to the match. However Merric, who wouldn't have a beastly thing said about 'Hattybacks', approved. The wedding proved to be chaotic - Guy and David played up, and Merric sent the Minister, whom he had mistaken for a salesman, away from the door with the advice that he had no need of his services.²⁰⁸

Accommodation was the by-word at Open Country. Arthur lived in his studio; Merric slept in Arthur's room; Arthur Merric resided in Merric's room; Guy and David shared Granny Gough's old bedroom; and Merric, to allow Lucy and Hatton to move into his pottery, now used Granny Gough's sitting room as a studio. The pottery, rechristened the bungalow, was hardly spacious but Hatton insisted on moving in his grand piano. Somehow, as always, space was found. Compared to the relaxed freedom of Rosebud the cramped conditions couldn't have been easy but, amid the clash of personalities, nothing could have been more difficult for Arthur than witnessing his grandfather's decline.

1939, a year that would find half the world at war, had been heralded by natural disasters of Shakespearean foreboding. In January a highly damaging drought still prevailed. When the drought broke, floods followed. In February terrible bushfires swept across Victoria and seventy people perished. An earthquake shook Chile killing thousands. In February, the Prime Minister, Mr Lyons, announced the intention of raising the militia

²⁰⁷ "Once, showing off her brother's building ..." Lucy Beck interview.

²⁰⁸ "The wedding proved to be chaotic ..." Robert Beck interview. Both Rob and his wife Margot Beck have given many extended interviews all conducted in Melbourne: November 1999, November 2000, October & November 2001, October, 2003.

force to a strength of 70,000. Meanwhile, war raged in Spain and China; and, while the Irish Republican Army was bombing Britain, the future of Palestine was being discussed around a British boardroom table. By March, Germany was invading Czechoslovakia and reports of savage acts against the Jews were filtering through. In September the new Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies, declared Australia was at war. By December, as Germany relentlessly pushed across French borders, Melbourne's Bourke Street resounded to military bands and footfalls of battalions of young men shouldering their new rifles. Rosebud now seemed like another world entirely. Arthur felt the loss: his "gentle, placid beautiful bay landscapes" had been overtaken by a "terrible ... reality".

Arthur hadn't reckoned that anything like Yosl Bergner's horror stories ... could happen". He had been almost cynical about his friend's predictions. After Bergner had denounced Arthur's landscapes he had invited him up to his studio. There Arthur saw paintings of "terrible looking sorts of characters ... green heads ... and people looking really emaciated ... very gloomy self-portraits."²⁰⁹ Bergner, like Dostoevsky, painted disturbing pictures of people. Arthur, wanting to "jerk" himself into "a different way of looking at what was real ..." took notes from these two Europeans who exposed what the majority ignored, avoided, or failed to see. Arthur would, in later life, admit to only a handful of people who altered his quiet, determined way, but he would always credit Yosl Bergner, as being "a very, very strong influence".²¹⁰

Arthur's earliest self-portraits, although boldly rendered, finely captured his subjects. In 1934 he recorded a slightly strained boy with determined blue eyes. The look is so unequivocal there is a sense that he is facing up to himself, forcing himself to find the artist he may become. The likeness and the intensity of expression are so well achieved that there is not a second's hesitation in finding the thirteen-year old Arthur Boyd from the multi-tiered rows of children in his last annual school photograph. Given the compelling face that separates him from the ranks of his classmates, it is difficult to appreciate why Arthur, throughout his life, was constantly self-deprecating about his looks. Perhaps the pecking order of height -- Guy 6'1", Merric 5' 11", David 5'10" -- had something to do with it. Arthur at 5'6", with sloped shoulders and eyes constantly cast downwards, did not cut a visual dash. But within the dimensions of the canvas Arthur's height becomes irrelevant. With a brush in his hand, he uncurls: his head is raised, shoulders are back, eyes forward and level. Lost in his work, he is at a full and commanding stretch.

²⁰⁹ "There Arthur saw paintings ..." Arthur Boyd, Missingham interview, London. 22 September, 1965.

²¹⁰ "Arthur would, in later life, admit ..." Hal Missingham interview, op cit. Arthur's full quote began a request from Yosl Bergner: "You come up to my studio", and I went up to his studio and he brought out these green heads and people looking really emaciated and terrible looking sort of characters, I thought, and he was a very very strong influence on a lot of people in Melbourne and particularly, I think, on me at that stage, and I did a lot of pictures then that I called sort of Karamozov heads..." Franz Philipp understates the influence of Bergner on Boyd when he says that the meeting between the two young artists 'must not be over dramatized.' Many of those close to Arthur around this time -- David Boyd, Peter Herbst -- cite Bergner as a major influence. Perhaps Philipp neglected to consider the pressure on the eldest son at that time to earn money: landscapes, particularly those done after Rosebud, between 1939 and 1941, although generally not paintings that Arthur looked back on with any sense of achievement, went some way to guaranteeing an income

Just as his self-portraits suggest, he was all business behind the easel. He constantly upbraided his brother David for moving an inch. Betty Driscoll, the young daughter of his grandfather's housekeeper, was apparently fidgety beyond his control. "Sit still child, sit still" he would instruct as she posed in her school uniform, waiting for her mother to finish work. When she didn't take instruction, rather than getting cross, Arthur would say: "That'll do, we'll try again another day".²¹¹ She was recalled for several sittings. This was unusual: Arthur's lifelong trait was achieving a portrait in one sitting, and usually within half a day. Despite this speed Arthur's portraits never failed to achieve a recognition that carried through the decades. Arthur painted Mary in her early teens, haloed by golden hair. Seventy years later, Mary's face, framed by silver hair, was still as her brother's brush strokes revealed her. This talent may owe something to genetics. Merric's sculptures of Arthur - one done at three months, the other at three years - proved to be entirely accurate prophecies of the face of the man to come.

Under the influence of Dostoevsky, Bergner, and Rouault²¹², Arthur sought to find feeling behind the form. The radical change can be seen in *The Brothers Karamazov*, a portrait of the three Boyd brothers executed in thick, forceful and abandoned brushstrokes. They are still recognisable from the earlier, more traditional portraits, but now the background disappears. As Arthur attempted to visualise the interior life, the heads of the sitters fill and almost force themselves out of the frame. Each brother takes on a radically different persona: David, even in those years the wordsmith and the most flamboyant and outspoken of the three,²¹³ has nothing to say or see; his mouth is passive and his eyes are lowered. Guy observes, but not as directly as his pragmatic and sensible character would suggest, his view is out of frame. Arthur, to the world the quiet, shy, peaceable, somewhat bumbling brother, rather than positioned quietly on the sidelines where he would usually be found, is here the centrifugal force. His shoulders press forward in front of his brothers; his mouth twists ironically and his eyes, blazing, confrontationally stare the viewer down. Arthur admired the "intense atmosphere" in Dostoevsky and his "cynical view" that is "disguised ... completely covered up".²¹⁴ It is impossible to know if the characters of Alyosha, Dimitri and Ivan Karamazov have a bearing on this portrait, whether it is all fiction or all fact, or a blurring of the two but the juxtaposing of personalities is arresting and full of tension.

The great achievement of this period is the *Portrait of Barbara Hockey*, a friend of

²¹¹"When she didn't take instruction ..." Betty Driscoll interview, July, 2003. Note: There would appear to be several portraits of the Driscoll children. Arthur's memory of the family was vague. In a 1993 interview with McKenzie and Fischer he recalled, "there was a family of them, two brothers, and I did quite a lot of other portraits."

²¹²"Under the influence of Dostoevsky ..." Arthur Boyd. Richard Haese interview, December 1974. "After doing rather quiet landscapes of the Rosebud countryside, I turned to these rather Rouaulty heads which were probably influenced by Bergner ..."

²¹³"Each brother takes on a radically different persona": "David was always an exhibitionist ... Guy quiet and industrious ... Arthur was a fairly quiet sort." Charlie Adams interview.

²¹⁴"Arthur admired the "intense atmosphere" ... Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

Arthur's of the same age, who was reading German and French for an Honours degree at Melbourne University, and also reading psychology. A letter from Barbara to Arthur, written from Adelaide around a year later, describes the effect of her illness on what may have been a blossoming but thwarted romance between artist and sitter:

*'I wish for me that you were here with me. In Melbourne I could never be very happy with you because there was always me there too, feeling sick, like a strong-minded hag, always pushing herself between me and my friends and saying in a very loud voice how sick she feels so that we couldn't hear what we were thinking.'*²¹⁵

Arthur heard what she was thinking. His portrait captures all the fear, turmoil and exhaustion of this young girl fighting tuberculosis. He called it her haunted look. You can see the props, the downward pull of the heavy impasto brushstrokes and the tangle of nightmarish colours: drear, chilled and fevered. But, like a master magician, there is no way of telling how Arthur's hand shadows Barbara Hockey's face with the psychological effect of this illness. It is as if he had taken an X-ray of her emotional state.

Arthur had met Barbara through Denison Deasey, an English student of Max Nicolson's at Melbourne University. Just six months younger than Arthur, Deasey was the son of a distinguished Melbourne family. Blue of eye, black of hair, he was tall and strikingly handsome, but physically frail. Arthur captured his image in a work titled *Man Kneeling*. Arthur's recollection of the portrait: "it was pretty quick sketch done at night by an outdoor fire ... coarsely with quite a biggish brush ... so crude that it's almost wilful". Although Arthur thought Deasey "very good looking", he admitted "there was not much evidence of it in the portrait".²¹⁶

Deasey's upbringing had been entrenched in convention but, for all the difference in the lifestyles of Open Country and the rectory of Christ Church, Geelong, there were similarities. Denison's father, the Reverend Denis Deasey, with his Protestant upbringing, Irish bloodlines, skill as a schoolboy athlete and a lifetime devotion to the Holy Scriptures, had much in common with Merric Boyd. Like the Boyd/a'Beckett clan, Deasey family traits see-sawed. Denison Deasey found that "sternness and fighting, music and the theatre (but the latter two repressed by the sternness) seem to reappear in the family like red hair".²¹⁷

With his sensitive nature, aesthetic tastes and unconventional behaviour, Deasey had much in common with Arthur. He was anti-authoritarian from the time he ran away from

²¹⁵ "I wish for me that you were here with me". Barbara Hockey to Arthur Boyd. Bundanon archives

²¹⁶ "Although Arthur thought Deasey "very good looking ..." Arthur Boyd to Tim Fischer, June 1993, Canberra. Tim Fischer interview, Canberra, 1999.

²¹⁷ "Denison's upbringing ..." Quotes and references from an obituary on Denison Deasey by Sir Robert Southey in 'The Corian' (Geelong Grammar School), August, 1985 & diary entries and correspondence in Denison Deasey boxes, La Trobe Library, Melbourne. Interview Michael Collins Persse, Geelong Grammar School. February 2005.

Junior House. Throughout his school years he deliberately bucked the transplanted English Public School system. He bridled at the Irish schoolmaids being called “bids” – biddies, short for Brigids. In the 1940s, when Australian history was Anglo-Saxon and art and literature thousands of miles away, Deasey introduced Henry Lawson and Tom Roberts to his fellow student boarders. He read Yeats and Synge and all the history he could find on Ireland. The Flight of the Earls filled him with despair.

In 1943, while pursuing an art degree at Melbourne University, Deasey’s diary records “white and dappled gum trunks, with muscled knotted arms and pink green smooth bark, jungles of bracken, tiny star-shaped flimsy blue-red wildflowers, flying possums, black snakes with white underbellies, wombats, frogs, red and green parrots, scarlet-chested robins, deer, kookaburras.” Deasey was describing an area he and Arthur visited regularly, the countryside of Warburton. The “cursory little landscapes” Arthur did in oil on these trips in 1939-1940, would resurface in his landscapes of the mid-forties.²¹⁸

When the more marketable of Arthur’s landscapes weren’t selling, Uncle Madder’s factory was a constant fallback. And Arthur’s friends would rally around, occasionally finding him work. Out of guilt, gratitude and need, Arthur accepted. A fence he built for the McCulloch family was so impressive that a local builder left a calling card saying “tell that boy of yours if he ever needs a job to come and see me”.²¹⁹ Picking up a brush instead of a pick or shovel, or mixing paint instead of concrete, didn’t look like real work; in those tough times it was frowned on by those outside the family circle. But, longing to get on with his painting, Arthur took a stand and declined: he would not be an entrepreneur, a film-maker, a comedian, actor, nor a builder.

Since 1938, buoyed by the security of Rosebud, Arthur knew he would be a painter. The self-portrait done in that year, wearing the red shirt that flags his independence, is as direct, determined and unflinching as the self-portrait three years previously. The essential difference is that it contains an ingredient, easy to read on any face: a confident certainty. Arthur saw Rosebud as “the first serious stage into trying to make [painting] into a proper job...”²²⁰ After Rosebud, Arthur considered painting “an automatic business trying to make a living” and “communicating”.²²¹

Yosl Bergner had been the cornerstone of change and, when his dire forecasts were proved true, Arthur was forced to face “terrible reality”. As the war deepened and Rosebud faded, other terrible realities occurred. Arthur would face up to them through his work, but he would do little more than glimpse the public scenes Bergner painted. Instead, his form of social realism would be private. His personal experiences would echo a world at war.

²¹⁸ “The cursory little landscapes ...” Arthur Boyd to Richard Haese. December 1974.

²¹⁹ “A fence he built for the McCulloch family ...” Alan McCulloch, *Dreamers and Makers: Arthur Boyd – A Personal Recollection*, AGNSW archives

²²⁰ “Arthur saw Rosebud as ...” Arthur Boyd, Jenny Brockie interview June, 1994. ABC Archives.

²²¹ “After Rosebud, ...” Arthur Boyd. Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

Death, Love, War

Part One

Less than a week had passed since Arthur had celebrated his twentieth birthday with his grandfather in attendance. And now Arthur Merric's mouth, gaping, seemed to be admitting a long abysmal scream. His feet, protruding naked below the blanket, were like marble tombstones.²²² He didn't hear his six-week-old great-grandson, Lawrence, crying among the murmuring voices next door in the Brown Room. Perhaps there were flowers placed in a vase by the bed, or on the coverlet. Perhaps, from the angle Arthur was standing, the flowers seemed to spring up from his grandfather's ear or stomach. Perhaps, the ubiquitous house fly, a creature that arrives often within minutes of death, had landed on Arthur Merric. Arthur Merric's eyes, frozen on some far distance, could not discern it. His arms, stiff by his side, could no longer move to brush the intruder away.

Arthur gazed on the desperate symmetry of his beloved grandfather. Arthur Merric's mouth, his feet, would become an abiding memory of death to Arthur, compounded perhaps by the similarity to his father's stiffened legs and feet when his body was in the throes of an epileptic fit, or to the still-born kittens and calves. These images - along with the flowers springing in Arthur's imagination out of cadavers, and the moth and beetle (creatures associated with the human corpse) attached to bodies or metamorphosing from man to insect - will later appear in paintings expressing a negative beauty: hauntingly powerful images of death, transfixed despair, and dubious redemption. Perhaps the poetry Arthur was reading²²³ prompted chimeras of the grave, their words illuminating this traumatic event. For instance, T.S.Eliot: 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden, Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?'²²⁴ Or, Emily Dickinson: 'I heard a fly buzz when I died. The stillness round my form/ Was like the stillness in the air/ Between the heavens of storm'.²²⁵

This experience prefigured the paintings and drawings. These primary components of Arthur's visual syntax (the staring, defeated eyes, the frozen, isolated physicality, the bodies trapped, boxed in) appear years after his grandfather's death, each time triggered by loss.²²⁶ Again, in the 1950s these images transfigure to illustrate further pain, further

²²² "His feet, protruding naked ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd. "Arthur saw his grandfather dead, lying in his bedroom. It profoundly disturbed him. He particularly remembered his grandfather's feet, naked below the blanket."

²²³ "Perhaps the poetry Arthur was reading ..." Arthur Boyd, *Australian Eye Series*. Oral History. NLA. Arthur. Eliot and Dickinson are the names Arthur cites as being read by Max Nicholson in the Brown Room on Sundays. "[Max Nicholson] ... got together a terrific collection from Emily Dickerson on ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

²²⁴ T.S. Eliot. *The Waste Land*. 1. *The Burial of the Dead*

²²⁵ Emily Dickinson. 465. 'There are recurring themessometimes just straight illustration ... either a bible story or poem or novel.' Arthur Boyd. *Australian Eye Series*. Op Cit.

²²⁶ Franz Philipp cites the years 1943-44 as years of "seminal importance in which (Boyd) created a range of images to which he would return at many stages of his development". Much points to some of these images merging and forming in 1940. Philipp mistakenly places the death of Arthur Merric in 1941, the year Arthur is conscripted.

grief, and continue to form a pictorial autobiography that reaches even into the decade of Arthur's own death.

On the night his grandfather died, Arthur ran away. He left the mourners, the crying neighbours who had gathered,²²⁷ abandoned his mother and father, and fled the house. Despite his turmoil, he made an excuse before disappearing. Recalling his feelings at that time Arthur admitted he "tried to cover it up". Then he adds two very revealing words: "of course".²²⁸ This is Arthur's *modus operandi*: he will not reveal himself. He took shelter at the familiar Rathausky home, amid their flock of daughters and their son. He didn't want to go back home: he wanted "to get away from death for awhile".²²⁹

The doctor had visited on 30 July and that evening, when David returned home from work, it would be the first time he heard his father use the word 'died'.²³⁰ Death was not discussed in a Christian Science household. The sight of a doctor would have been shock enough but, later, the appearance of Mr Monkhouse, the undertaker who had buried Emma Minnie four years previously, would have been a ghostly vision in black, a horrible finality from which Arthur would have wanted to run. Despite his father's bible readings, he found no comfort there, substantiating Arthur's assertion in later years that he had no belief in God.²³¹ There had been warning before Emma Minnie's death - two weeks struggling with a weak heart against pneumonia. But Arthur Merric's decline had been undramatic: his mind and his body slowly shuffling towards exhaustion during the year of 1940. Arthur had refused to admit it; he convinced himself that his grandfather, his touchstone, wasn't so "terribly ancient".²³²

Perhaps it was the final piece of news that drove Arthur away. Although it was alien to his son and daughter-in-law, Arthur Merric, like his wife before him, was to be cremated. A time was set at the Fawkner Crematorium for the very next day. The parallel for Arthur between kiln and crematorium furnace would have been nightmarish. He would have tried to 'hide it, of course', because to discuss it was impossible. To enunciate this elemental confusion of heat and cold and destruction, he would need pen and brush. In a matter of years he would describe the shape of the kiln and a crematorium as one: bodies would drift towards red hot furnaces and rise as ghostly cadavers in a haze of smoke from chimneys.

²²⁷ "On the night his grandfather died ..." Phyllis Vaux nee Woods, the young friend of Arthur's from the house opposite Open Country, recalls Arthur Merric's death: "I remember Gramps dying and I cried and cried and cried ... he was a lovely man".

²²⁸ "Then he adds two very revealing words: "of course." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

²²⁹ "He didn't want to go back home ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

²³⁰ "The doctor had visited ..." David Boyd interview.

²³¹ "Despite his father's bible readings ..." Arthur Boyd. ." Peter Fuller interview, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 1990. There does not appear to be much basis to past assumptions that Arthur was raised in a devotedly religious household. He tells Fuller: "I can't remember ever having a belief in God. I didn't think it was necessary; it just didn't crop up".

²³² "Arthur had refused to admit it ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes. Arthur Merric died at the age of 80 but in the seventies when talking with Grazia Gunn Arthur believed him to have died at "a respectable age of 76".

Around the time of Arthur Merric's death, Britain was fighting for survival. Enemy aliens within Britain, whether refugees or not, were seen as potential fifth columnists. Churchill then cast about, looking to deport twenty thousand internees to places where they could do least damage. Australia agreed to accept six thousand internees, temporarily. The first transport, the *Dunera*, carrying two thousand seven hundred and thirty two refugees and guard and crew of one hundred and forty one, after a catalogue of mistreatment,²³³ docked on Australian soil in September.²³⁴ A headline in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on September 6 1940 was hardly welcoming, introducing the internees as, 'Enemy Prisoners here from Abroad.'

Until the appearance of Yosl Bergner, there had been little awareness in Arthur's life of the Jewish culture. While working for Uncle Madder, Arthur had heard derogatory banter among his workmates regarding the kosher bakery situated close to the North Melbourne factory. At first he thought it was because the bread was different, but then realised it was because the baker was different. On the other hand, most seemed to rejoice in Australia's favourite comedian of the time, Roy Rene, known as 'Mo'. His accent was typically 'Aussie', as rasping as a chainsaw, and his banter was that of the underdog, the battler. He was anti-establishment, anti-authoritarian, one of the mob, good naturedly but perpetually cocking a snook. With a Lucille Ball genius for suggestion and a Jack Benny talent for timing, a long held look from Rene could cause his audience to ache with laughter. His original name was Hyam Van der Sluys and his father, a Jewish cigar manufacturer, had migrated from Holland in the 1890s. 'Mo' made much of his Jewishness; his appearance, accent, origins, forging an understanding with his audience and marginalising the intolerant with a laugh. Arthur took note: this was the perfect form of peaceable self-defence, it was "an easy way to deal with the world". It was a skill he admired, needed, and wished to perfect himself.²³⁵

Many of the 'Dunera Boys' would become scientists, doctors, professors, teachers, lawyers, judges, economists, linguists, engineers, architects and artists and over the generations they would help to broaden insular Australians and teach them the worth of diversity. Within a year the majority of the 'aliens' were reclassified 'friendly aliens' and, when Australia was threatened by Japan and internees were offered the opportunity to join the Army in a non-combatant labour role, their enlistment was high. After serving

²³³ "...after a catalogue of mistreatment ..." Razors or blades were not permitted. In the heat and unhygienic conditions, all were forced to grow beards. Suitcases were stolen or ripped open and then thrown overboard by the guards and most internees, left only with what they stood in, were forced to go naked if they wished to wash their clothes. There were too few latrines, floors became awash and despite best efforts to clean them, remained in a disgusting state. Dysentery broke out and when a refugee, in desperation, attempted to use the crew's facilities he was bayoneted in the stomach. Ultimately there were three British court-martials. Relevant files remained protected by the British Home Office in London under a one hundred year ban.

²³⁴ 'The Dunera Affair. A Documentary Resource Book' Edited by Paul R. Bartrop with Gabrielle Eisen. Schwartz & Wilkinson, The Jewish Museum of Australia.

²³⁵ "It was a skill he admired ... "[being a comedian ... was a very easy way to deal with the world... I ... found out if you were able to make people laugh, or were a clown, you could either say or do things and get away with being yourself inside ... without being damaged in some way, where ... if you were trying to tell people seriously what you thought or what they should think ..." Boyd, Arthur. Gunn tapes

duty they were offered permanent residency. Part of Australia's good fortune rubbed off on Arthur. Three men who found their way from the *Dunera* to Open Country, Gerd Buchdahl, Franz Philipp and Peter Herbst, would each have a supporting role to play in his life.

Gerd Buchdahl was an engineer who would buy a number of Arthur Boyd's finest early works. Franz Philipp arrived with a doctorate in art history acquired in his home city of Vienna and became a lecturer in art history at Melbourne University. He was one of Arthur's most influential admirers, bringing his work to the attention of academic circles. After twenty years of observing his subject Philipp produced, arguably, the finest work attempted by any art historian on any Australian artist.²³⁶ Peter Herbst would become a professor of philosophy at ANU (Australian National University) and a close and caring friend of Arthur and the family. He would be a key figure in establishing the Arthur Merric Boyd pottery. He, too, throughout his life contributed towards further literature on the appreciation of Arthur's work.

Yosl Bergner first spied Peter Herbst sitting on a roll of barbed wire, taking a break from his army duties in the country town of Tocumwal. When Bergner, in his direct way, asked Peter what he did, Peter declined to give his job description as he truly saw it as 'military char woman'. Instead, looking down from his perch he replied with an exaggerated enunciation of all four syllables: '*phil-os-o-pher*'.²³⁷ While Bergner, with all his chutzpah, tried to glamorise Yiddish, Herbst felt removed from his Jewish heritage - despite, or perhaps because of, experiencing Hitler's accession in 1933 first hand. Herbst had been born in the university town of Heidelberg, in 1919, but his vowels had been so royally rounded by a secondary education in England that his accent had prompted doffed caps and salutations of 'guvnor' back in London.

When Peter arrived in the city, early in 1942, Buchdahl was his only contact. Peter Herbst would find lifetime friends through the University of Melbourne. As soon as he could manage, he enrolled as a part-time student of philosophy. In order to study he rented a private room in the neighbouring suburb of Carlton. By closely observing the movements of the military police he managed to go AWOL every night. With the alarm waking him at 3am, he would rise, prepare strong coffee in his army pannikin, and read and write essays until it was time to slip quietly back to camp. His efforts would gain him a degree and, later in 1950, a travelling scholarship from Melbourne University to Oxford where he tutored under the guidance and friendship of Iris Murdoch, stayed for five years, and met Ludwig Wittgenstein.

During Herbst's early years in Australia he laboured and studied, with the exception of weekends or when issued with leave. Then he would be found at Murrumbidgee. Herbst had met Max 'Scouty' Nicholson, under a huge old fig tree in the grounds of the

²³⁶ "After twenty years of observing his subject Philipp produced ... Boyd, Arthur. Chalker Interview. When commenting on various publications concerning his work Arthur says of Franz Philipp: "... that's the first publication, and the best".

²³⁷ "Instead, looking down from his perch ..." Interview Yosl Bergner.

university, and had later been introduced to Arthur at a Melbourne University Psychology and Philosophy Society meeting. Herbst was charmed and delighted with the Boyd family. Delighted to have found the urbane within the constraints of suburbia, and charmed by the gentleness rather than “the stridency he had detected in those more characteristically Australian”.²³⁸ He felt at home when he walked in. He enjoyed the freedom of expression and the ease with which material obstacles were overcome, admiring a lifestyle entirely based on the idea of creativity.²³⁹

It was a family into which Peter Herbst “wished to be adopted” having, through time and distance, lost his own. Doris obliged, just as she had done with Charlie Adams, by immediately taking over the role in Herbst’s life as “a sort of mother”.²⁴⁰ Herbst saw Doris “at the very core and centre of that household”, the lynchpin that held the family together.²⁴¹ Although he could never have doubted Doris’s inner strength, his pet name for his petite and gentle surrogate mother was ‘Pussy’. Herbst and Nicholson - the university students who took the train out to Murrumbidgee religiously on Sundays, carrying books and flowers and new ideas - were Doris’s acolytes.

To Peter Herbst’s 23-year-old eyes Merric was old, enormously old, a gaunt figure, completely white haired, who didn’t register that a war was going on. His conversations were directed to himself and his past and they played on a continuous loop. He didn’t read newspapers and required the bible to be read to him. Herbst observed that Merric had become subject to a harmless, but nevertheless boring, form of religious mania. However, if Merric’s thrashing convulsions were as terrifying to experience as they were to witness, his belief in another world would have been something to which Merric would understandably cling, with a fiercer and fiercer grasp. The family went along with his obsession, taking turns to read him chapters out loud from the bible. David, to relieve the chore, would skip every second or third line. If Merric noticed he made no objection.

Merric, removed from the world, had little appetite for Max Nicholson and his readings or indeed for any writer, such as Kafka or Beckett, who might add further confusion to his waning grip on reality. Herbst saw him as a King Lear in mid-career. If Merric joined the others in the Brown Room he would sit apart, sometimes sketching, in his chair by the fire. The group that gathered would change and widen but, up to 1941, the main audience was the immediate family. In the years between *Rosebud* and the army Arthur initiated himself into philosophy, driving himself and his brothers up to town to listen to Cameron Jackson, a lecturer at Melbourne University who later, as a friend of the family, would be known as ‘Camo’. Although years had passed since Arthur had been ostracised at school and run out of Bacchus Marsh, his appearance still incited deep suspicion. Once at the entrance gate to Melbourne University, driving to a lecture, he was stopped by a policeman demanding to see his licence. Arthur, covered in shyness,

²³⁸ “Delighted to have found” Peter Herbst, Oral History, NLA

²³⁹ “He enjoyed the freedom of expression ...” Interview Peter Herbst.

²⁴⁰ “Doris obliged ...” Ibid.

²⁴¹ “Herbst’s mother ...” Peter Herbst, Oral History, NLA

said nothing. When one of his brothers demanded to know why he was being interrogated, the reply was prompt: Arthur looked like “the criminal type”.²⁴²

Philosophy must have been a curative to the limited world outside the green fortress of Open Country. When Peter Herbst arrived, Arthur welcomed him. He got “quite a lot of stimulation ... not by arguing but asking questions”. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was on the menu and Arthur found Herbst “very patient in discussing academic things and concepts”.²⁴³ No doubt bells rang when Arthur learned of Wittgenstein’s early propositions on the limitations of language; his notion that the most conventional discourse was literally meaningless, and that “what we cannot speak about we must be silent about”. Beginning with Nicholson and expanding with Herbst, Jackson, Bergner, Buchdahl and Philipp and many others, the Brown Room became the primary source of Arthur’s higher education.

Peter Herbst, “more interested in politics than art”,²⁴⁴ kept the family abreast of the earliest intelligence gleaned through his *Dunera* circle, university and Communist Party contacts.²⁴⁵ By the end of 1942 the world knew of the Warsaw Ghetto, yet the horror rolled on. While some news filtered through, it would not be until 1945 that the extent of the evil was revealed: the six million Jewish men, women and children who had been slaughtered by the Nazis. In 1945 this was only one and a third million short of Australia’s entire population.²⁴⁶

Nicholson brought messages from other times. Herbst thought Nicholson a great reader; one who could memorise lines of poetry at first sight, with all the right intonations, all the right stresses, all the drama.” Nicholson read from books and poems and plays which not only addressed the chaos of war and the collapse of morally moribund societies but which drew comparison to those states through the most intimate, yet the most universal of human experiences. In a household that never acknowledged the negative, except with the command ‘out error’, it would have been liberating to have certain unmentionable subjects, particularly sexual repression and the condition of epilepsy, addressed out loud.

Max Nicholson knew about censure and rejected it. He was a homosexual. Mary dubbed him, out of his hearing, a “hot scone”, playing with the first letters of ‘homo’ and ‘sexual’, and illustrating that even the young of the time didn’t address the subject directly.²⁴⁷ But Nicholson hid nothing: he was unabashed and undaunted. Arthur, Bergner and Herbst weren’t exempt from his advances, but Nicholson took their firm

²⁴² “Although years had passed ...” Interview David Boyd, Sydney, November 2000.

²⁴³ The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

²⁴⁴ “Peter Herbst more interested in politics than art ...”, Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Boyd, Arthur. Pearce tapes. “Peter Herbst was aware something pretty rotten was going on... [he had a lot of connections and he came out with stories about the holocaust. Peter Herbst was a political animal and he would have known more and given a detailed account”. Ibid

²⁴⁶ The population of 7,391,692 was recorded 30 June, 1945 according to ‘Australian Demographic Trends’ Cat. No. 3102.0

²⁴⁷ “Mary dubbed him ...” Lucy Beck interview.

rejections in the spirit he made his proposals, good naturedly. Herbst regarded Nicholson as someone who operated entirely outside institutional structures, "the free intellectual par excellence".²⁴⁸ Through Herbst's summation of Nicholson we see a clearer picture of the woman Max Nicholson most adored, Doris. For over two decades Doris had been almost exclusively restricted to the duties of carer in an overcrowded house in a small-minded community, yet she was receptive to the most modern of ideas and she was the favoured companion of the most diverse and interesting people. However, while Doris appeared to accept all, there was stricture.

She turned a blind eye to circumstances where the body betrayed and love did not govern. While she was happy to join in the discussions on the intimacies of Mr. Bloom's epic day and experience the convulsions and spasms of Prince Myshkin's 'falling sickness', these were matters which, if they should happen in real time before her eyes, like her mother and Mary Baker Eddy she would choose to 'unsee'.

With this exception, few places could be found where individuality could range more freely. Life at Open Country simply evolved. Peter Herbst recalled many instances in the Brown Room with people chatting, and then someone saying: "I'd like a cup of tea." The kettle would be put on and promptly forgotten. Then, a smell of burning. . . an exclamation of "Oh Christ!" . . . and the conversation would go on almost as if nothing had happened, without the slightest recrimination about who had let the kettle run dry.

The day Arthur's call-up papers arrived signalled a complete reversal of his life. There could not have been a greater contrast to Doris's household than the tedium and rules and regimentation of army life. Arthur would feel "incarcerated" in his army barracks, be treated like an outcast by his fellow soldiers, and unceasingly long for the unquestioning embrace of home.

For eight hundred and seventy one days, the army never really knew what to do with Sapper Arthur Merric Boyd.²⁴⁹ For the first few months they shuffled him between one company and another. When presented with his call-up papers, Arthur had contemplated going bush but thought it would be "an awful lot of palaver" particularly because, if he got caught, it would be a jailable offence.

The painter, George Lambert, may have influenced Arthur's choice of the Cavalry Division. Arthur would have felt an immediate affinity with the landscape in Lambert's

²⁴⁸ "Herbst regarded Nicholson as ..." Interview Peter Herbst.

²⁴⁹ "For eight hundred and seventy one days ..." Arthur registered in the Australian Military Forces (AMF) not the Citizens' Military Forces (CMF), on 12 May, 1941. The AMF was essentially the standing army in Australia. It should also be distinguished from the (Second) Australian Imperial Force (AIF) which was specifically raised for overseas service. Arthur never transferred to the AIF. According to his record of service, the first unit in which he served was 2 Cavalry Division Signals. He was taken on the strength of this unit at Ballarat on 12 August, 1941. On 6 November, 1941 Arthur was called up for full time duty and was simultaneously transferred to 4 Division Signals at Balcombe. This unit was then beginning to mobilize for war, but unfortunately the unit's War Diary for the brief period in which Arthur was a member has not survived.

1920 portrait, *A Sergeant of The Light Horse in Palestine*. It has all the high key blues and creams of Rosebud. The sergeant gently affects all the qualities of the Australian hero. Authority, in the form of his sergeant's stripes, literally takes a back seat with his army jacket slung over the rung of his chair. There is no stony military glare. His capacity to do the job shows in the detail of his rolled-up sleeves exposing the strength of his wiry arm and in the corded tendons of his hand that casually hold his feathered hat. Arthur could not recall any other reason for enlisting in the Cavalry Division except for the opportunity to wear that plumed hat.

Shortly after Arthur joined, the company disbanded. Arthur was then transferred to Division Signals, where any images he may have had of galloping over open fields with wind streaking through his ostrich feathers were totally erased. Instead, he was strapped to a machine gunner's seat and buried inside a steel box that afforded a very good chance of becoming a permanent coffin. His army instructor was fond of sadistically stressing that the average life of a machine gunner in action was estimated not in weeks, nor days, but mere minutes. Arthur could never quite recall the exact time span but remained adamant that it was too short. The camp at Ballarat was freezing at night but when Arthur's unit began mobilising for war it was fear that chilled him to the bone.²⁵⁰

In his first week in Ballarat, on August 17, 1941, Arthur wrote Denison Deasey the first of a series of letters: "This place is pretty sad people go round playing mouth organs all the time some of the time any way. of corse I never went to scholl".²⁵¹ It is apparent in the uncharacteristic way Arthur reveals himself that Denison had become a close friend. Like Max Nicholson, Deasey had taken an interest in the family and offered encouragement and support by paying for David's piano lessons. It is to Deasey that Arthur writes and not to their mutual friend Max Nicholson (in each letter he makes a reference to Max, promising to make contact). He misses gentle company: "these people here do little else but swear ... I think letter's from people in any sort of camp are most depressing ... I feel sort of sorry for my self very wrong I know but I can't help it (cried on the first night you know)".

He writes about Deasey's girlfriend, Pat Grey, "most beautiful creature", and Barbara Hockey, "beautiful soul the face haunts me perhaps it is because I painted it like I did". He informs Deasey he has tried to paint, but with no success. He is desperately homesick. Perhaps the Ballarat camp prompted memories of the forest camp at Noojee and the time he'd spent in the company of Nicholson and Deasey and other tutors and students from Melbourne University at the beginning of the year.²⁵² Among that crowd,

²⁵⁰ "The camp at Ballarat was freezing ..." Smith tapes. David Boyd recalls Arthur saying the unit was "enough to frighten the wits out of him".

²⁵¹ "In his first week in Ballarat ..." Arthur Boyd to Denison Deasey. One of a number of letters written during this crucial time in Arthur's life. Manuscripts, Deasy papers. National Library of Victoria.

²⁵² "Perhaps the Ballarat camp prompted memories of ..." A photograph, with the words inscribed on the back, 'Max Nicholson Denison Deasey, University and Public School Forestry Camp, Noojee 1940' and a photograph with the words inscribed on the back, 'Arthur M. Boyd 1940-41 Noojee wears coat made of Hessian' suggests this was one and the same trip. Manuscripts, SLV Deasey's diary records: "25

shy Arthur with home-cut hair and shrouded in a voluminous hessian shirt he had made himself in the style of van Gogh's smock in his self-portrait, at last fitted in. But happiness was now past tense: "Sometimes I do something I smell something it brings back all sorts of wonderful thoughts of places I've been and things I've done all of them pleasant".

"My name here is 'Wimpy'". Arthur reveals his epithet in a letter sent to Alan McCulloch in these early months, adding, disingenuously, "I think it very good". Arthur's fellow soldiers could see that he was "the worst person on earth to become a machine gunner".²⁵³ No doubt Arthur was proud of his pacifism but once again he was being made the brunt of the jokes and he must have felt he was back at school, back at Uncle Madder's factory, being singled out and sidelined. Arthur asked McCulloch to forward a letter he had written to Wilfred McCulloch. Alan McCulloch had been rejected as unfit but Wilfred McCulloch, both an ardent patriot and a staunch pacifist, after unsuccessfully attempting to enlist as a war artist, joined the AIF 9th Division to serve as stretcher bearer. Arthur's letter concluded with a request to pass on his 'love' to McCulloch's mother, Annie.

Arthur's letters home to his own mother expressed the same concerns he had when away at Rosebud: he hopes she isn't doing too much; that the others are helping and pulling their weight. His smallest sister 'Medgie' (Mary) writes to 'Dear Chook Chooks' to say how he must be feeling lonely and cold, urging him to get leave, and to let him know he wasn't 'forgotten' despite his brothers not writing. Old friends rallied. Chas, a member of the Air Force, acted as a go-between, visiting Arthur and returning to 'Open Country' with news for Doris. And Keith Nichol, spurred on by Arthur's acute anxiety about his reduced life expectancy, suggested he join his unit as a draughtsman.

Whatever fuss he made, whatever connections he activated, Arthur's efforts must have been focused. He escaped duty by applying for sick leave and headed for Melbourne and an interview at Cartographic Headquarters. Keith Nichol aided Arthur with his exam, helping him draw the map necessary for his admission. In just under three weeks Arthur procured a transfer back to the heart of Melbourne, behind a draughtsman's table at the Land Headquarters Cartographic Company in Swanston Street. It was as perfect as any army posting for Arthur could be: 9 to 5 and living at home. This move, a month before Christmas of 1941, may have saved Arthur's life; it certainly changed it. Across the street was the State Library, where he would make acquaintance with Bosch, Brueghel and Blake. A couple of blocks away was a studio where he would meet the woman he would marry. And, before the month was out, he would work alongside a new colleague: a talented, engaging, handsome recruit with a limp.

December, 1940. On Friday week I go on a camp with Max Nicholson, an English lecturer, a few philosophers and some boys. Work, control, and I hope, mental stillness as a result of both."

²⁵³ "Arthur's fellow soldiers ..." Interview Jack Yarra, Melbourne. Yarra was a former sapper in AHQ Cartographic Company and friend of Wilfred McCulloch.

Part Two

Illustrate Arthur's painting of Sheoak and under Yvonne's descriptive.
Sheoak, Arthur Boyd, 1937.

"Luminous blue ...light ... dusty olive...She Oak ...full shining gleaming hills ... hills of busheswistful silver trees ... swayed swept swung in the wind ... like the dress of a mournful girl...a hurtful silver cloud above ...a floor of tight drawn carpet...shapes of emerald and colourless gold ..."

Extract from the diary of Yvonne Lennie: description of Mornington Peninsula, 1937.

Arthur Boyd and Yvonne Lennie were born in the same year, just months apart, but would not meet until they reached their twenty-second year. They grew up in households that could not have been more different yet, at the age of seventeen, they were both attempting to define themselves within the wider home they shared.

Around the same time that Arthur was down at Rosebud reading his Uncle Martin's romantic novel, *Lemon Farm*, and imagining himself in the shoes of the lover/protagonist, Michael, Yvonne Lennie was envisioning herself as her heroine, Greta Garbo.²⁵⁴ She would quickly grow into her wish: her pale complexion and classically hewn bones made her a more than adequate stand-in for the role. To draw another film comparison, Yvonne Lennie would have satisfied Alfred Hitchcock's predilection for 'ice blondes'. Her beauty rarely went unnoticed. But Yvonne Lennie's high-noon blue eyes sharply assessed those who gazed. She was aware that, in this fiercely male-orientated society, talent and intelligence were secondary to a woman's looks and by being 'a looker' she would rarely be taken seriously. This was the era in which girls marked time until their wedding and Yvonne, despite her talent in drawing and writing and her excellent academic capability, was encouraged to take a typing and shorthand course so as to have, as parents would chant to their daughters, 'something to fall back on'.

Yvonne had grown up wanting to experience something less solid and safe than the life her parents strove to attain. Her father, an emigrant from the tough city of Glasgow and a Gallipoli veteran with a permanent war injury to his leg that altered his gait, no doubt found little to complain about his job as a bank manager for the Commonwealth Bank that comfortably allowed him raise a family of three. Her mother, brought up as a

²⁵⁴ "Around the same time" The early diaries of Yvonne Lennie: Bundanon archives. Many of the personal details, not footnoted, have been extracted from this source.

country girl in a struggling Irish immigrant family, encouraged her daughter in all the pursuits denied her.²⁵⁵ Yvonne played golf, tennis, canoed, ice-skated, took dance classes and attended Tintern, one of Melbourne's better private girls' schools. She was analytical, imaginative and won prizes. When she left school, her social engagements became less sporty. Cream teas, drives in the country, parties, ballet, films and dancing at the Moritz and Embassy ballroom filled her calendar. All signs pointed to her marrying someone like her first beau, who was tall, looked a little like Spencer Tracey, had worthy prospects and drove a sports car.

In 1939, on any given workday, the wide pavements of Collins Street were bursting with the grey- and black-suited. The figure cutting a swath through the crowd - tall, blonde and elegant, wearing a hat, a tailored pink jacket, accessorised with a camellia in the lapel, and black gloves (protecting fire-engine red nails) - was Yvonne Lennie on her way to work as a clerk, in her third year of employment, at the Commonwealth Bank. She dreaded the place. She was pleasing her father, and waiting. Waiting for someone to love, or for many; for children or a single life; for a white house, or for freedom. She knew she could be a painter. She wanted to be a writer. She was longing for something but she just wasn't sure what.

From an early age Yvonne read, wrote and sketched avidly, filling endless diaries given to her at Christmas by her "tender-hearted" father and out-of-date diaries from the bank. The margins and sometimes whole pages were decorated with her drawings. These sketches disappeared when her need to draw and paint was accommodated by courses and canvases. Yvonne enrolled at the National Gallery School as a night student and at the end of her second year she carried off first prize for anatomical drawing. With the prize money she invested in an expensive art book on van Gogh. Books were a passion. Shaw, Joyce, Mansfield and Coward were mentioned in her diary, with notational instructions: "...must read Emerson ...read Walter Scott, as a tonic ...read all Shakespeare plays first and then his poems I must do this."

Her schoolgirl diaries are models of their type, seeking self-improvement but ultimately dedicated to the grief or elation experienced by the sighting of an object of affection on the tram or the train, or by the ringing of the telephone. Yet rarely, even in these earliest writings, does wit, style and an enquiring mind elude the entries. At fourteen she felt her "blooming writing blossoming forth". At fifteen, told by her prospective bank employer that "artists die penniless in the gutter", she resigned herself to "dip[ping] deeply into the innumerable mysteries of typing and shorthand". At sixteen she discovered "a disturbing habit still of falling violently in love with everyone". At eighteen her "anxieties about never having been kissed" were put to rest. At twenty she felt "tied-down" by her 'major' boyfriend, Murray. By twenty-one she broke with him because he saw her as the "right type" and she had no wish to be typed.

²⁵⁵ "Her mother ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd. "Mum's people were humble. My father was always worried about security".

In 1941, as life at the bank grew increasingly stifling, it became a centrepiece of forlorn alliteration: "war...work...worries". Alongside everyday trivia, Yvonne recorded wild fluctuations of feeling and delved into deep analysis of her actions and reactions. After leaving home the chronicling continued, revealing a young woman who grows increasingly adventurous but unsure, confident but self-doubting. Under a reserved and at times a seemingly detached veneer (stripped away by few) was a complicated woman full of paradoxes, searching for a life other than the secure and acceptable.

Many threw in the towel at the Gallery School. Yosl Bergner, fed up with the stiff and formal approach to life drawing walked out protesting to his grey-suited teacher: "Mr Wheeler...your nude, she stand up, she crack ..." Another student, Sidney Nolan, was inspired to do little more than a charcoal drawing of a misshapen classical foot. It stood, languishing for months on his easel, as disembodied as the artist himself from the lifeless classes.

Yvonne stuck it out. When she won the art prize (the enormous sum at the time of ten pounds) in her second year at the Gallery School for her charcoal life drawing, it may have been an irritant to some. The young revolutionary, Noel Counihan, attended the night Gallery School briefly and described the women students as seeming to "come from a higher social bracket".²⁵⁶ For Counihan, who chose to live from hand to mouth, such heights were not difficult to attain. However, contrary to his opinion Yvonne viewed her fellow students as "mainly working class lads and girls".²⁵⁷ Counihan, who dropped out of the course in his first year, dismissed the institution as "providing a kind of finishing school for those [women] romantically inclined".

On Saturday afternoons Yvonne began painting at Nutter Buzacott's studio in the Dudley Buildings in the same street as her bank on Saturday afternoons. Around five easels were occupied. Noel Counihan, pink in the cheeks, still convalescing from tuberculosis, would work there, sometimes napping in a little curtained-off cubby-hole when he grew tired. Once, when Yvonne was experimenting with greens and purples in her portraits, Counihan felt obliged to proffer: "Hmm, that's a rather unpleasant colour".²⁵⁸ It was a curious comment because Yosl Bergner was using similar hues and Counihan was a big fan of Bergner's painting. While Noel Counihan was devoutly communist, in regard to women he was spokesman for the ruling class: the art world was a man's world.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ "Noel Counihan had attended ..." Throughout this chapter Noel Counihan quotes are obtained from two sources: Bernard Smith's biography: *Noel Counihan: Artist and Revolutionary* and the Blackman/Counihan's interview, Oral History Section, NLA.

²⁵⁷ "However, contrary to his opinion ..." Yvonne Boyd, letter to author.

²⁵⁸ "Once, when Yvonne was experimenting ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

²⁵⁹ "Noel Counihan's politics ..." In an interview in May 1986 with Barbara Blackman, Counihan's memory of Yvonne comes in three parts, and in the following order: wife of Arthur Boyd, daughter of a bank manager 'out Preston way,' and, when prompted to recall her prize for anatomical drawing, replied with a laugh that he had no memory of that but "she was a pretty young blonde." Blackman interview, Oral History, NLA.

In the early forties Yvonne had not yet discovered bohemia but new friends, Joy Hester and Albert Tucker, had begun mapping her way. At the beginning of 1942 Yvonne was still living with her parents above her father's 'shop', the Commonwealth Bank. Yvonne had met Albert Tucker through her association with Buzacott some time in 1941.

Although Tucker with his conventional clothes, clean shirt and polished shoes didn't look the part, he was by then a participant in several CAS exhibitions, a young artist of some status and promise. By his own account he was a "monomaniac"²⁶⁰ about art, who liked to "argue and think and talk" and perhaps in that order. Few who knew him would deny he was stubborn, opinionated, driven. Tucker was of the belief that people like himself who were "... born out of balance, out of kilter ... have to find an activity that restores balance".²⁶¹

Tucker's self-hewn talent, and the informed confidence that came with a six-years age difference, impressed a young art student, Joy Hester. Joy was the girl Yvonne had "enviously" observed spending her days, as she herself yearned to do, at the Gallery day school. She felt the full-time students ignored the night students yet, while Yvonne suffered the feelings of an outsider during those Gallery years, according to Tucker, so did Joy. The ebullient Joy, given to impromptu cartwheels, seemed to be aptly named, but according to Tucker, in his company Joy felt "inferior", believing she had "no sophistication at all".²⁶² If so, Joy wasn't subdued long. Brave, boisterous and a quick student she was soon entering into artistic, literary and political debates with gusto. By the time Yvonne met her, with Bert's wedding ring gleaming on her finger, peroxide flashing through her hair and enough red on her lips to flag a bull, Joy defined that forties descriptive, 'sass'.

Joy was to Yvonne as Yosl was to Arthur, exotic. Although Joy came from the beach-side suburb of Elwood, her ways were foreign and vivid. Her history, while still a schoolgirl, included abortions (when she'd masked the smell of chloroform from her mother by sprinkling her clothes with dry-cleaning fluid), running away from home (leaving a controlling mother and a favoured younger brother; her bank-manager father having died when she was twelve, two years after being sacked for alcoholism), living with an older man, the near-penniless artist Albert Tucker, and an illegal under-age marriage (her mother responded by having the vicar sacked).²⁶³

At the 1939 Herald Exhibition of French and British Art at the Melbourne Town Hall, Bert, in the company of Joy, may have been hoping to make a good impression on Melbourne's patrons of modern art, Sunday and John Reed. John Reed, a Cambridge-educated lawyer, was the son of an important Tasmanian family. Sunday's surname,

²⁶⁰ "Although Tucker ..." Interview with Albert Tucker by Andrew Olle, 1990 Australian Broadcasting Commission, ABC radio archives. Sydney.

²⁶¹ "Few who knew him ..." Ibid.

²⁶² "In his company ... Albert Tucker, op cit.

²⁶³ "Her history, while still a schoolgirl ..." Janine Burke's numerous works on Sunday Reed and Joy Hester have proved invaluable sources, but most particularly her biography of Albert Tucker, titled: *Australian Gothic: A Life of Albert Tucker*, Knopf, Sydney, 2002. Acknowledgement and thanks also is due to her generous advice in the early stages of this work.

'Baillieu', flagged a long-held family fortune. Raised amidst privilege and art, Sunday had been presented at court, and Arthur Streeton, a family friend, had painted her portrait dancing in the moonlight at her holiday home in Sorrento. But these images were only part of her story. Sunday had suffered a lonely childhood, an unhappy marriage in which she contracted gonorrhoea rendering her infertile, and finally a divorce. Then she met John Reed. He was artistic and political, she was wilful and poetic. Although they had much in common they differed in one particularly disruptive way: Sunday was sexual and John was not. After Sunday proposed and John accepted, they developed a lifestyle that provided an outlet for their aesthetic ideals, great energy and Sunday's longing for a family. It was Sunday who plotted the course and John who facilitated it. The majority of those welcomed into their lives were far younger than themselves. Some would become lovers and most would be treated as needy children. Joy Hester would become a surrogate daughter and supply them with an adopted son. But at this first meeting Joy, seated next to Sunday at the exhibition's opening night dinner, put her captive audience through a diatribe on the sanctity of the left and the immorality of wealth. Tucker was embarrassed and John Reed taken aback but Sunday, having experienced the heat of Joy's wild intensity, was hooked. Yvonne came to believe she was "an antidote to Sunday's aestheticism".

In 1935 the Reeds had been married three years when they found the home in which they would live and in which, in another 46 years, they would choose to die.²⁶⁴ It was a train journey of thirty minutes from town and then a short car ride down a rough country road to a weatherboard house set within orchards of apple and peach trees. Under Sunday's stylish eye the old farm house was transformed with brimming bookcases, real linen on the beds, deep armchairs and sofas, and a few nods to a past life lived in grander rooms, like the English porcelain figurines perched on the simple wooden mantel.

Among the collection of art and artists the Reeds would gather into Heide, the first 'artists-in-residence' were the modernist painter, Sam Atyeo, and Neil Douglas, gardener and painter. But in 1936 Atyeo left Sunday's arms and the Reeds' patronage and headed for Paris. At the end of 1941 Tucker and Hester arrived at Heide. By now the Reeds were paying Tucker a stipend and also buying his paintings. Sidney Nolan, their most adored protégé, arrived around the same time. Nolan, having left his wife and newly born daughter, at the age of 24, was beginning a ménage-a-trois with the Reeds. To accommodate Nolan, Sunday had asked Neil Douglas to vacate his room and move into a boarding house. Bert and Joy were billeted across from Heide, in a tin shed that had once housed cattle. In the dark the cattle would create night music by scratching

²⁶⁴ "In 1935 the Reeds ..." Neil Douglas interview.. "Sunday gave John the pill. Barry [Reid] gave Sunday the pill. Sunday said to Neil shortly before this took place: "Johnny and I are going to Heaven." Sunday died ten days after John. Barrett Reid, who remained with Sunday during this time, discreetly reported to Alannah Coleman 12 January, 1982, "After ten disciplined days ... she died gently in her sleep ... there was simply no way she could have gone on without John." The plan of the Reeds to commit suicide was confirmed by Jean Langley. Note: several interviews with Neil Douglas were conducted on the telephone in 2001, and one extended interview in Nhill, October 2001.

their horns against the outside walls, while across Melbourne Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* played on gramophones, edgy and melancholic, reflecting the times.

Through Joy Hester and Bert Tucker, Yvonne was introduced to the Reeds. Yvonne found John Reed "refined, pleasant ... never snaky or snippety like Sunday". Many believed, and Hester confirmed, that on occasions Sunday used her deafness to her advantage, ignoring questions, she would admit, she "couldn't be bothered" to answer.²⁶⁵ On one occasion in the Heide sitting room, when Sunday appeared removed from the conversation, Joy Hester ventured "get your trumpet, Sun". This statement encouraged a visitor to exclaim, "I didn't know you played, Sunday".

Yvonne recalls feeling timid in the presence of the Reeds, inhibited and slightly ignored: "I was working at a bank ... nothing could have been more petit bourgeois than that". Yvonne's middle-class background felt more of a burden when it was discovered that not only did she *work at* a bank, but *lived above* one (her father's posting was in the suburb of Thornbury). It was a modern, cream-faced, slightly outwardly leaning, brick suburban building. On one occasion Yvonne found herself driving past it with the Reeds. When she pointed out her home, much to her embarrassment, the Reeds laughed. "They were quite right", said Yvonne, "it was awful".

Although the Reeds were far older than Yvonne and her friends, few couples of any age could have seemed so avant-garde, so self-assured and worldly as John and Sunday. Sunday was the provocatrix of the conventional: from jam-making to love-making to art-making. John was the provocateur of the established art world and already a prince-maker of young artists in his art and literary journal, *Angry Penguins*, established with Max Harris in 1941. By the time Yvonne arrived at Heide, John Reed was poised, together with Nolan and Tucker, to assume control of the Melbourne branch of the Contemporary Art Society.²⁶⁶ John Reed was comfortable in the role of critic. Never unsure of his opinion, he teased Nolan after seeing Yosl Bergner's work: "better pull up your socks; there's another painter in town".²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ "Many believed, and Hester confirmed ..." Letter from Joy Hester to Bert Tucker, Tucker boxes, SLV. Blackman/Pugh interview, Oral History, NLA.

²⁶⁶ In response to the tyranny of the Australian Academy of Art and those, like Robert Menzies, who pushed their restrictive and imperialistic thinking, the CAS had been founded in 1938; the established teacher, post-impressionist artist and commentator, George Bell, spearheaded the new group. Reed had been responsible for drafting much of its constitution.

The Contemporary Art Society were a disparate lot - pioneering modernists, such as Arnold Shore and William Frater, and social realists with left-wing political leanings were tossed together with a reporter, solicitors, a psychiatrist and a dentist. From the very first this unusual mix of the lay and the professional did not work for Bell. He thought the subject of art should be addressed solely by artists. He was opposed to lay people making comments on art, particularly when psychiatrists were invited to lecture the society on 'Surrealism and Psychoanalysis' - subjects not close to his heart. Bell wanted a society peopled solely by artists (preferably not Surrealists or Social Realists) and without political leanings (specifically not the leftist movement, which was strong within the society). Bell walked out in 1940 with a large contingent of members and Reed, the most articulate critic of Bell and advocate of 'liberal engagement', became secretary of the Society.

²⁶⁷ "Never unsure of his opinion" Yosl Bergner interview.

It wasn't long before Bergner, a potential candidate for Reed's support, was invited out to Heide. Through his eyes of dispossession Bergner saw Heide as "a huge mansion" and the garden as "a beautiful park". No detail was ever ignored by his hosts, down to the gingerbread-men shaped scones served on the lawn at 'arvo' tea.²⁶⁸ When dinner was served, Bergner fell on his food, just as he had done at Murrumbeena. The difference was that at Heide he was instructed to clean up a splash he had made on the table. After returning to Melbourne that night, he received a visit from Reed the following morning. Reed could not find a ten-shilling note he had left on the piano the night before and Bergner, prime suspect because of his poverty, became the focus of Reed's questioning. This suspiciousness reduced Bergner to tears and he never set foot inside the door of Heide again.²⁶⁹

David Boyd would later come to dub the place 'Heide-Ho' and describe the Reeds as "a couple of gurus sitting out there: if you were in you were in, if you were out you were out". When Guy Boyd expressed his early ambition to sculpt, Sunday Reed commissioned a sculpture of a cat. On presentation of his completed work, Guy was roundly dismissed by Sunday: "Oh, no, Guy ... that won't do ... that's not a *Heide* cat".²⁷⁰

Although Yvonne found the atmosphere at the Reeds' "difficult, like a finishing school", visiting was always an occasion. Around the table there were people in those early years whom Yvonne found "very impressive". She can still recall the presence of the journalist Michael Keon; the music critic John Sinclair, who, Yvonne noticed "was treated a bit as a servant by John and Sunday ... he was so willing to do the chores"; and Sid Nolan, "who was treated fairly royally". Even though the Reeds were great promoters and offered encouragement to the chosen, Yvonne felt that when John and Sunday looked at the work being produced, "it was a bit like ... 'Oh look what those aboriginals can do'". Although Yvonne describes the Reeds as "tolerant", her follow-on sentence morphes that into patronising: "They regarded us as ragamuffins ... we didn't count.... we had no place in society."²⁷¹ At Open Country Yvonne would experience a completely different kind of table.

There is every chance that Arthur and Yvonne saw each other years before they met. In the summer of 1927, they played in the sand on the beach at Rosebud. As teenagers, during holidays spent at various bay towns on the Mornington Peninsula, they swam in the same sea. They may have stepped into each other's line of vision when, in 1939, at the Herald Exhibition, sponsored by Sir Keith Murdoch and arranged by his colleague, the art critic, Basil Burdet, they gazed on Cezanne, Gauguin, Matisse, Seurat, Van Gogh,

²⁶⁸ "No detail was ignored" Interview Lawrence Hope, London, November, 2004.

²⁶⁹ "This suspiciousness reduced Bergner ..." Blackman/Counihan interview, Oral History, NLA

²⁷⁰ "On presentation of his completed work ..." Interview David Boyd and interview Robert Langley (as related to him by Arthur).

²⁷¹ "Although she describes the Reeds as "tolerant" ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd.

Bonnard, Vuillard, Modigliani, Gris, Leger, Derain, Vlaminck, Dali and Ernst. Raised on a restricted diet of postcard and catalogue reproductions they feasted, revisiting the exhibition countless times, never to forget how “exhilarated” they had felt about seeing “the real thing”; the actual materials of the sculptures and the colours of the paintings and the direct impression of the artists’ hands, free and liberated from the restrictions of the printing process.²⁷²

A year later they were in the Lower Town Hall, both supporting a Red Cross fundraiser: Yvonne in the audience, Arthur on stage. Dressed as ballerinas, Arthur, Wilfred and Alan McCulloch frantically threw themselves about in wild antic movements, impersonating the members of the Ballets Russes in a parody of ‘Le Spectre de la Rose’.²⁷³ Arthur may have heard patter from his friends about the beautiful student at night school. Yvonne had heard about the young Murrumbeena artist from the head of her small department at the bank, the burgeoning art critic, Alan McCulloch.

It was late January or early February of 1942 when Arthur was on his way to meet Yvonne at last. One Saturday, in the company of a fellow soldier at the Cartographic Unit, John Perceval, Arthur set out with his two-shilling-and-sixpence entrance fee to take part in a life class run by the Commercial Artists Association in Nutter Buzacott’s old studio. The two soldiers who emerged from the beehive of Flinders Street station were of similar stature. But John Perceval’s facial bones were diamond-cut, his features perfectly aligned and proportioned. Blonde hair flopped appealingly over eyes that were big, bold and direct. His mouth was the centre of attention; disarming when widened into a wonderful smile but possessed of a hair-trigger that if sprung could deliver scorn and criticism with a withering snap. In defiance of a year spent in a hospital bed at the age of fourteen recovering from polio, John Perceval’s shoulders were broad and his arms and back muscular. His 5’4” frame was all angularity and power -- a Rudolf Nureyev with a limp. Although three years younger than his companion, he took a swaggering lead, positively inviting attention and often encouraging fights with enlisted soldiers, which more than once resulted in a beating, both for him and Arthur.

Though strong and lithe and two inches taller than John, Arthur diffidently huddled through the crowd as inconspicuously as his companion’s showy progress would allow.²⁷⁴ Like that peaceable and self-protecting Australian original, the echidna, Arthur’s body curled in on itself. On those rare occasions when he raised his head to focus on the point of his attention, there would be a shock of intense, penetrating blue. His mouth was gentle and sensitive and far less active than that of his companion. His commentary arose mostly from his eyes. Perceval wore an army uniform, Arthur’s army uniform wore him. Yvonne’s first memory of Arthur is of his army slouch hat. He had

²⁷² “Raised on a restricted diet ...” According to Alan McCulloch in ‘Dreamers and Makers: Arthur Boyd – A Personal Recollection, McCulloch, his brother Wilfred and Arthur attended Basil Burdett’s *Herald*-sponsored exhibition together. AGNSW archives.

²⁷³ ‘Spectre de la Rose’ The Ballets Russes, the company, stranded in Melbourne, was the talk of the town.

²⁷⁴ “Though strong and lithe ...” Perceval’s swagger and Boyd’s reluctance in a description by John Reed in *Of Dark and Light*.

pulled it out of line, forcing the iconic leaf form of the diggers' hat into a mushroom shape which he wore dragged down over his ears, hiding his face. Yvonne first saw the hat and then the figure followed, shyly shambling up the stairs to the studio.

On Valentine's Day 1942 Yvonne mentioned Arthur's name for the first time in her diary. He joined a list of artists-cum-suitors. She wrote of John Brack, whom she had been "very keen on" and he on her; and John Perceval, who wanted her to go to see the movie 'Citizen Kane' but whom she "vaguely refused". Arthur was noted as "another nice boy". A month later she recorded, "John P and Arthur came today and Arthur went and I wanted him to stay". Yvonne had looked up from her drawing to find Arthur's eyes looking at her ...eyes that were "very blue ... very warm". Guy and Mary, who had been brought along by Arthur, weren't recorded. One evening, as they all tumbled out into the street and began mooching towards a tea house or coffee shop, Arthur headed off with the excuse: "I must get home to look after the baby". It caught Yvonne's attention and she was relieved to learn that the baby was Arthur's newborn nephew, Robert. Yet Yvonne was attracted to many. To those in the Gallery crowd, to the people who have "sensibilities who realize that I have too – not just attracted to my looks – I can tell the difference." But she "like(d) this Arthur a lot". He appears "vague" yet he had, she thought, a "wide grasp on things", a "wide philosophy". As for Arthur's feelings, perhaps Yvonne's eyes played large in his memory of their first meeting too. Perhaps they prompted a connection with the words of Michael in *The Lemon Farm*, "...he imagined a girl in her position would be more stuck-up...her eyes chiefly attracted him...they were set wide apart, and were very blue, with a sort of open fairness about them".

Around three months later, in the autumn of 1942, accompanied by John Perceval, Yvonne visited Murrumbidgee for the first time. When she had first met Perceval she had thought him "cocky ... playing the clown to Arthur's straight man".²⁷⁵ His limp may have earned him merit points stirring, as it must have, memories of her father and his irregular gait. As they walked from the railway station, down past the shopping centre, through a maze of streets named after Australian states with one suburban brick bungalow after another, Perceval briefed her on what to expect when they arrived. "The thing about the family," he informed her, "is that they accept anything and everything". With the hindsight of half a century, Yvonne would observe: "which of course was all very well for him later on". Yvonne was being presented to Arthur's parents as Arthur's girlfriend and conscious of the occasion she had taken care with her appearance. She suspected that Arthur, if not in uniform, would be likely to be decked out in something Chaplinesque: maybe the shapeless hessian shirt, or trousers a size too big and hoisted by braces and held by safety pins, way up past his waist.

John Perceval, though recently courting a girl called Mary, had refocused his flirtatious eyes on another by the same name: the beautiful, blue-eyed, flaxen-haired fifteen-year-old Mary Boyd. By now John knew the family well enough to know their nicknames. He knew that Doris had been christened 'GaGa' by Lucy's eldest son Laurence, in his

²⁷⁵ "When she first met Perceval..." Yvonne Boyd, letter to author, 2003.

attempt to say Grandma, and she often answered to the name 'Pussy'. His familiarity was such that he predicted that on their arrival "GaGa will make some dreadful scones". Yvonne remembered being taken aback by John's "rude" remark, more so when she found that was exactly what Doris did: "There was nothing else in the house but she could make scones, she had flour. She was so sweet ... welcoming to me ... because I looked quite nice, well dressed and respectable..."

Arthur proudly regaled his visitor about his uncle, the author, and his book *The Lemon Farm*. Arthur was not a reader but this book was a rare exception.²⁷⁶ No doubt hoping to impress this bookish girl, he lent her his copy. She thought it "romantic and sweet". Then, as he had been for Yosl, he was on his knees dragging out his paintings, curled and unframed, from under his studio bed, laying them out at her feet for her approval. No doubt she was impressed by the gesture. Arthur had held his first exhibition at the Westminster Gallery at the age of seventeen while still at Rosebud. His second exhibition was staged several months after his grandfather's death in November of 1940, when he and his school friend Keith Nichols had financed a joint full-scale exhibition at the Athenaeum Gallery. The third was held six months before meeting Yvonne, in August 1941, when his and Bergner's paintings were exhibited alongside drawings of Noel Counihan at the Rowden White Library at Melbourne University. Given that Counihan was seven years older than Arthur, Bert Tucker six, and Sidney Nolan three, in Yvonne's eyes Arthur would have stood in the front line of experienced artists.

Yvonne's invitation to Open Country extended to a Saturday night sleep-over. She was ushered by Arthur to his studio, where he wished his visitor a "goodnight" and left her alone in his bed. The next morning she found him asleep in a pile of old blankets in his father's dusty studio, surrounded by scores of discarded pots and an ancient throwing wheel. She asked a boy she hadn't met, someone who had been sleeping somewhere about the house, where she might find a towel. There was no towel and, apart from disturbing Doris, there was nowhere to wash except in the outside laundry. She knew "if it hadn't been for Arthur's actual strength of personality and deep sort of feelings" she would not have wanted to experience "just having a wash under the outside tap and asking a strange youth for a loan of his towel".

That Sunday Arthur and John captained two old bikes; with Mary seated in front of John, and Yvonne in front of Arthur, they headed out for the nearby hills. The slang term for this feat of male strength was 'dinking'. Apart from puffing and panting, not much was uttered by either of the soldiers as they pedalled. However, Arthur managed to pull off something unique and strangely erotic. From his standing position, as Yvonne's ponytail swung backwards and forwards in front of his face, he chewed her hair. Yvonne took a scientific approach to the proceedings. She said nothing, simply accepted it. She

²⁷⁶ "Arthur was not a reader ..." Interview Peter Herbst. Peter Herbst went so far as to suggest that Arthur had never read a book in his life. This is refuted by Arthur's admission that he had read *The Lemon Farm*. However, Arthur's reading habits would appear to be in stark contrast to Nolan and Tucker. It was said by John Reed that Nolan was never seen without a book under his arm and while Albert Tucker haunted the Public Library reading room, much of Arthur's literary education would be supplied by lectures at Melbourne University and readings in the Brown Room.

“knew it meant something”. She was “interested”, “intrigued”. They were both “smitten”.²⁷⁷

But the romance was to be interrupted. The ‘phoney war’ prophesied in 1939 to be ‘over by Christmas’, was by February 1942 on Australia’s doorstep. Darwin had been bombed, with the loss of two hundred and forty three lives, and Western Australia and the Northern Territory had endured air strikes. By mid-year Japanese submarines would slide into Sydney Harbour and fire shells on the city. Australia was almost defenceless until troops fighting with the British in the Middle East returned home.

It was clear that the battle of the Pacific would be long and hard. The American Commander General, Douglas MacArthur, urgently needed maps of the region and the Cartographic Company went into overdrive. After England’s Southampton had been bombed and many of Britain’s ordinance maps lost, it was considered imperative to find a secure site away from the city and any potential bombers. A town north of the Great Dividing Range was chosen and preparations to build a bigger and better mapping unit in a drier climate were begun.

In May Arthur was informed that in the following month the Cartographic Unit would be transferred to the country town of Bendigo, then a five-hour drive from Murrumbena, and therefore an away-from-home billet. John Perceval, who had already been demoted for inefficiency and been transferred to Caulfield for relocation a month earlier, negotiated to avoid this transfer. But Arthur would go. Until such time, for a little over a month, he reported to the local drill hall every morning and was sent out as part of a labouring team to various locations.

Perhaps it was the news of Arthur’s departure to Bendigo that prompted Yvonne’s long-held desire to leave the bank. She was exhausted by working overtime and giving so much blood that she felt weak. In July she set off to the dairy town of Narre Warren, to give energy rather than blood to the war effort, and to become a ‘land girl’, milking cows in return for her keep and a wage of twenty-five shillings a week (as opposed to John Perceval’s nine shillings a day).²⁷⁸

By the time Perceval, Arthur, Yvonne and Mary finally reunited at Open Country, their circumstances would be entirely different; they would be altered people. Things would look the same; nothing would appear to have shifted. The old Dodge, stored for the war, would be resting on bricks. Bags of clay would lie in the long grass alongside the rusted pug mill blunger and grinders, still languishing from the pottery fire. Merric’s chair would sit by the fire, and Arthur Merric’s easel would stand ready in Arthur’s studio. But, as the world edged towards peace, the invasion of Open Country would have only just begun.

²⁷⁷ “They were both smitten”. Yvonne Boyd interview.

²⁷⁸ “Perhaps it was the news of Arthur’s departure to Bendigo...” In a letter to Arthur sent from Narre Warren Yvonne alludes to her upping sticks because of Arthur’s departure: “Probably I wouldn’t have been here but for you – work that one out.” Bundanon archives

Part Three

The large Victorian town of Bendigo, founded on the slippery luck of gold, was rock solid. Greek-columned monolithic public buildings; Gothic monuments and churches; serious union and society edifices, devoted to Temperance and Total Abstinence, all seemed anxious to impress that the treasure found in the surrounding hills had not been squandered wantonly; that the citizenry were not opportunistic, bar-brawling, fortune-seekers but god-fearing bankers, librarians and devoted civic servants.

The Victorian mansion Fortuna was an example of this quid pro quo: converting gold into earth in the form of bricks. In 1851, at the peak of the gold rush, the entrepreneurial George Lansell had bought the original house, along with a minefield, for thirty thousand pounds. The harvest from the mine transformed the modest red brick house into fifty rooms. Over twenty years and under the design of four different architects, it sprouted turrets and towers, a ballroom, a music room, a billiards room, a gymnasium and a conservatory. When the mine tailings began to create a mountain out of the nearby hill, the addition to the opposite side of the house of a vast hall, grand staircase and a wide veranda reversed the siting of the entrance and offered a brand-new view. Within the fifteen-acre grounds, Lansell used the settling ponds of the mines to create four artificial lakes and an extensively landscaped garden replete with classical sculptures, including a fountain modelled on a Pompeian design and a swimming pool along the lines of a Roman bath.

In March 1942 the Commonwealth Government took possession of the house and grounds, requisitioning it as barracks and workplace for the Army Headquarters Cartographic Company. By June, the Roman bath, long the home of frogs, had become the platform for Arthur's tin-roofed workshop, and his sleeping quarters were among the four huts pitched in the remains of the old rose garden.²⁷⁹ One dry lake was used as a rubbish tip and the others filled in. The unit had more than doubled: from one hundred and two, to two hundred and seventy-three men. Soldiers swarmed over the grounds and through the mansion, installing tons of equipment for drafting, photo-litho and printing. It was a surreal posting. Beneath the murky sea of serge, canvas and ironmongery, like worn but deep gilding, the luxury of Fortuna still glimmered.

With Melbourne now housing the General Headquarters of General MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of all Allied forces of the South West Pacific, and host to a large chunk of the thirty thousand American soldiers, the quiet, gentle outpost of Fortuna was about as far away from the war as you could get. The tightest security was centred on protection from the enemy within. After lights-out, a night-watch stood duty in a tiny tool shed. Under the cover of darkness, rakes and shovels were deployed in surprise attacks on the one-and-a-half-acre vegetable garden. However, the greatest threat to

²⁷⁹ "By June the Roman bath ..." A publication titled *Australia's military Map-Makers*, Coulthard-Clark, C.D., Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1999. pg. 85, states: "The move by the unit's 150 personnel was completed by 11 June, and here it remained for the rest of the war. The unit steadily grew in size to more than 20 all ranks during the second half of 1942 and finally to 330 by the first half of 1945."

peace was a member of the camp who went by the name of Darkie. Darkie was a fierce black spaniel who controlled Sergeant Salvado who, in turn, controlled the orderly room and Arthur Boyd. Attempts were made to instil military discipline, the Routine Orders in the War Diary July 28 1942, read like instructions issued at Woodstock: "Cutting or picking of flowers or shrubs in grounds of 'Fortuna' is forbidden, unless permission is obtained".

Somehow, Arthur still managed to make most of his fellow soldiers look like members of an elite guard. Lieutenant Harry Raisbeck remembers Arthur as "absolutely hopeless ... sloppy ... the last gasp ... a sad sack ... a slob".²⁸⁰ Harold Trist, a first-class Warrant Officer, found Arthur "comical with his slouch hat, his babyish face".²⁸¹ On Wednesdays, there was a weekly parade. Arthur would never fail to beg the Sergeant Major's attention. Either his buttons were not done up or in the wrong holes, or his hat faced the wrong way, or his shirt was not tucked in. When men were issued with rifles, thick with grease, Arthur took one look at his and tossed it under his bed. Months later, when the orders at parade were to 'present arms', Arthur dragged it out and stood to attention with the gun untouched, dead moths, spider-webs and dust clinging to the old grease.²⁸² On another parade day requiring hardware, he turned up without it. When the whereabouts of the rifle were queried, Arthur reported: "I burnt the bloody thing".²⁸³

Holding a rifle brought back the horror. Throughout Arthur's life he never spoke, not even to those closest to him, about his experience as a young man of around seventeen. It had occurred on a camping trip with his friends from Murrumbeena, Jackie and Chas. Jackie had an old Austin and the three friends had motored down to Foster near Wilson's Promontory. They were staying on Jackie's brother's farm, and Chas and Jackie viewed the elimination of a few rabbits, as their way of helping out. Arthur was desperate not to take part but his friends were insistent. For the boy who had been banned from pointing his finger and saying "bang bang" the words of his father and mother would have echoed loudly through his head.²⁸⁴ But the voices of his friends cajoling him were louder still. Arthur's blood must have pounded as he finally shouldered the rifle, fixed his eyes on the target and squeezed the trigger.

Charlie Adams never forgot the scene after Arthur's shot rang out. The bullet had torn the rabbit's face half off. Jerking in its death throes, the animal took a long time to die. Arthur would have seen its pitiful St Vitus Dance before in the form of his father's seizures, but now the rabbit's convulsions resembled his own frantic movements as he

²⁸⁰ "Lieutenant Harry Raisbeck remembers ..." Major Harry Raisbeck Interview, June 2000. The then Lieutenant Raisbeck commanded a Cartographic Section AHQ.

²⁸¹ "Harold Trist, a first-class Warrant Officer ..." Harold Trist interview, November, 2001. Trist was a member of AHQ Cartographic.

²⁸² "Months later, when the orders at parade" Les Anderson interview, November 2001. Anderson was a member of AHQ Cartographic.

²⁸³ "On another parade day ..." Bert Hurren, a member of AHQ Cartographic.

²⁸⁴ "For the boy who had been banned ..." Arthur Boyd in conversation with Janet McKenzie and Tim Fisher, NGA, July 1993: "(My father) used to get very upset if you pointed your finger and said 'bang, bang' at your brother or sister or anyone else. He would get terribly cross, very cross indeed."

leapt about, almost demented ... yelling, screaming, crying (the contortions of this distracted figure are suggested in later paintings). Charlie and Jackie put the creature out of its pain, but nothing could be done for Arthur. Charlie remembered him throwing the gun away and being "terribly distressed ... really upset ... sad ... for a long time".²⁸⁵

Rabbits had reached plague proportions, they were vermin to the farmers, but even for the most seasoned of hunters this would have been an ordeal. For a young man raised with a belief in the indivisibility of life, with the Blakean notion that all that lives is holy, and the teachings of the gentle St Francis of Assisi,²⁸⁶ it was the most dreadful transgression. Arthur would see no action on a battlefield, but perhaps it was this spectre -- the mangled head of an agonised rabbit -- that would produce the terrifying violence in so many of his paintings. Throughout his life the pitiful depictions of rabbits, rendered in pen and paint, either dead or being tortured, could be seen as ongoing memorials to his victim.

By this stage Arthur would have learnt that Wilfred McCulloch had been posted as 'Missing in Malaya'. His mother, Annie, had been informed at the beginning of July, but it would be over two years before they would learn that Wilfred had been killed February 9, 1942, just two weeks after he saw action. Wilfred, as stretcher bearer in the AIF, had arrived in Singapore ten days before its fall and had died under Japanese shell fire on the north-east coast of Singapore Island. One of McCulloch's last letters, sent from the military college at Duntroon to his brother Alan just weeks before he was posted, contained words Arthur would dearly have loved to have heard; he would have then known that his much-admired and confident friend felt just as he did in the army: alienated and out of place:

I shall never be anything but an artist. When we march or embus to our various parades and exercises I am only really conscious of the play of colour and sunlight on our moving figures, sheep, and the beautiful Australian countryside. Up here the atmosphere is terrible cold, the sun shines and the sky is a brilliant transparent green and blue. Thousands of parrots and cockatoos of every conceivable shape and size flock round and settle almost under the noses of the soldiers. "Is that right McCulloch?" "Yes Sir"

*What was the question?" but McCulloch has been watching the landing of a flock of galahs on a haystack and all is lost. Already they say "That Bloody fool McCulloch, All he can do is paint."*²⁸⁷

For the unskilled the job of map-making was tedious, involving cutting out names of towns in celluloid letters, setting them in a frame, photographing them and pasting them onto the initial litho maps. At the Cartographic Unit in Swanston Street a fellow soldier recalled that Arthur "seemed to be on his own most of the time, not with his brother, or

²⁸⁵ "Charlie remembered him throwing the gun away ..." Charlie Adams interview.

²⁸⁶ "For a young man raised ..." Springthorpe diaries: manuscripts, NGV, makes mention of the Boyd's reading the life of St. Francis of Assisi.

²⁸⁷ "I shall never be anything but an artist". McCulloch archives.

Perceval".²⁸⁸ At Fortuna, although Arthur had the company of Guy and his old friend Keith Nichol, Nichol knew how terribly unhappy Arthur was, that he was "confined, not only in body but in spirit".²⁸⁹ Despite the camp being heavy with artists and musicians, for Arthur the atmosphere wasn't hospitable. Arthur still stood out, was still considered a figure of fun. Les Anderson, a corporal in Arthur's unit, remembers a group gathered round while Arthur was drawing "a wolf with teats and somebody lying underneath with their mouth open"²⁹⁰ ...and [they]were standing around laughing". In a repeat performance of the Murrumbidgee schoolroom, Arthur didn't respond: "he just kept working away, a bland look on his face".

At one point, a painting of Arthur's, considered by the authorities to be anti-war, was confiscated. It showed Britain and America sucking the life blood out of Russia, when the Russians were being left to fend for themselves against the Germans.²⁹¹ One less overt work was sent to John Reed. On a small piece of notepaper, in pen and ink, Arthur drew a receding assembly line of marching, rifle-carrying soldiers. An arrow points towards the soldiers and Arthur's handwriting explains: "not grasshoppers, its the army". A figure stands in the foreground, emaciated, ribs showing. In one hand he cradles a small creature that resembles a baby rabbit, in the other he holds a dog/cow/wolf composite. A horse that appeared in later works nudges the man's shoulder. Under the sketch Arthur writes: "St. Francis and the Army. The picture I am painting".²⁹²

Les Anderson's bunk, along with twenty or so others, stood roughly a foot off the temporary wooden floor. On winter nights the temperatures could fall below zero. Anderson didn't stay around to experience it. He was off through a hole in the fence and a nice warm bed in a room he had rented in town. There was little security: "it was a bit of a joke really ... we were 'chocos', chocolate soldiers", soldiers who would melt in the heat of war. Arthur, together with Nichol and others, also rented a room in town on the main street where they painted, particularly on Wednesday when the afternoons were free for recreation. It was a shabby affair, the furniture so nondescript it could find its way into the fire on a cold night.

At the beginning of October the *Bendigo Advertiser* reported on the Soviet resistance in Stalingrad, the Australian advance in New Guinea, India's worst malaria epidemic in years and Churchill's report on the heavy losses at Dieppe. On the Bendigo home front a strenuous fortnight-long campaign was being waged against stray canines. This local news was given prime space alongside the shock report that the price of theatre tickets was going up. At the Plaza, Arthur's favourite actor, Charles Laughton, was starring in *It*

²⁸⁸ "At the Cartographic Unit ..." Interview Les Anderson, November, 2001; May, 2004.

²⁸⁹ "At Fortuna ..." Interview Neil Pearson, op cit. Pearson was an acquaintance of Arthurs: This quote as told to him by his friend Keith Nichol.

²⁹⁰ "...a wolf with teats and somebody lying underneath ..." Les Anderson interview. This sketch would find its way into a letter to Yvonne at Narre Warren.

²⁹¹ "It showed Britain and America sucking ..." Arthur Boyd: David Langsam, *The Independent Monthly*, December, 1995

²⁹² "Under the sketch ..." Reed boxes, manuscripts, SLV.

Started with Eve and the blurb promised, "Take an Eve and an Evening and you'll get into heart trouble".

Arthur's heart had been in trouble for the past two months as a flow of letters between Narre Warren and Fortuna picked up pace. Aside from the letters to his mother from Rosebud, these letters to Yvonne would be the largest collection of writing ever produced by Arthur. All his correspondence was written in pen and ink, and mostly on giant sheets of cartographic paper.

Yvonne had spent her twenty-second birthday in late July with the Reeds at Heide, just before departing for Peg Lennie's farm at Narre Warren. Despite the surname, Yvonne's boss was not in any way related and the relationship between employer and employee was strained from the beginning: they held no common interests, even down to their choice of radio stations. In the middle of nowhere there was little escape from the constant "lowbrow"²⁹³ droning of either the wireless, or its owner. Yvonne saw her as "a gross old woman who never got out of bed". Once the euphoria of finally quitting the bank had worn off, the change in lifestyle was burdensome. There was no ballet to be watched, art to be discussed, or gin to be slung.

Yvonne had left Melbourne just as it had begun to fill with American troops; a two-hour train ride later and all the snappy comments and adoring looks of these 'exotic' soldiers had been replaced by herds of cows with doleful eyes and insistent moos. Initially Yvonne, sitting on her milking stool, must have stared up at the udder of a cow with the same incredulity as a country hick craning to observe a skyscraper. Even though she was strong and athletic the physical work, including carrying sacks of chaff, was an extreme change from the bank and she was exhausted. Saturday afternoons were free, but only until 4p.m. She was no country girl. Finding a newborn calf in a paddock, she picked it up and put it on its rickety 'jelly' feet, only to realise it had been the wrong thing to do. The result was a lonely girl in a lonely paddock in floods of tears.

The postman brought different degrees of happiness: letters from girlfriends, sister, mother and father, suitors in the Air Force and the Army, but none so eagerly received as those from Arthur. An envelope with Arthur's enormous scrawl, dated July 21 1942, must have been sitting on Peg Lennie's hallstand waiting on Yvonne's arrival. The memory of the weekend at Murrumbena had not diminished in either of their minds.

In response to Yvonne's "Where are you?" comes "Oh this is terribly sad for me. Here I am in Bendigo trying to be one of the boy's so hard for me you know". In a letter perhaps sent to Yvonne before Narre Warren, Arthur attempts to come up with schemes to keep Yvonne's interest: "Why don't you go to my studio and paint for weeks there is no need to go the house only to eat I will tell my mother I know all the dirt revolts you

²⁹³"In the middle of nowhere ..." Letter from Yvonne Lennie to Arthur Boyd. Bundanon archives. None of the letters that passed between Yvonne and Arthur during this period bore dates. Postmarks on envelopes (mis-matched with letters) provided some clues, but the majority of the jig-saw was pasted together simply through following the pace of the conversation and hints of circumstance that were contained within each letter. All correspondence was found in the Bundanon archives.

but it might give you atmosphere". Arthur believed Yvonne was a good painter, that she "had something there". Her diary response was to "hope more than anything that Arthur [had] a lot".

Some of Arthur's letters were never sent, they had been self-censored because the author was "half tight". But perhaps with the help of the bottle again, Arthur confesses he wants to "look, kiss, sleep, touch, talk and eat" the object of his desire. Exactly halfway through the sheet of draughtsman's paper, he breaks down and scrawls, "I love you I love you I love you Christ! I love you" then, seemingly surprising himself, adds: "...how unexpected from poor old Chook". He signs off, "Poor Man Arthur Boyd". Yvonne writes back in reply to his query, "You want me for some unearthly reason to diagnose your feeling for me ... Well from your own account I should say its nine tenths my terrific sex appeal & may be one tenth something else – thats probably flattering myself - Would you love me if I had all my front teeth knocked out – That is the question... I have the most terrible soul-destroying vanity – you could save me from that – a nice little job for chookie!"

Few of Arthur's letters pass without a frustrated cry over his writing and verbal skills. He feels it acutely, aware that these are talents Yvonne admires:

"How dull I am ... how stupid of me ...I am sorry this terrible writing ... " "You know it takes more than 10 mins for me to write 2 lines its taken 2 hrs to write this bad nothingness. I am sorry I am thinking terribly much about you ... you are allright aren't you? I want to write you a nice big letter that will hold your interest ... I can't write I will I want to talk to you. talk talk."

Arthur discusses the progress of his painting with Yvonne, just as he had done when writing to Doris from Rosebud; but despite Wednesday afternoons off and leave time and the facility of the studio, he cannot find the energy and inspiration of those beachside days: "...its very good that you have painted such a good picture. It will help to make up for me not painting anything although I started a picture last night".

From the girl who had in early March wondered if she would "ever love", comes declarations: "If I had you Arthur Id have the whole world & Ive always wanted the whole world." Like Juliet she promises her Romeo that she will follow him throughout the world and lay her fortune at his feet. "I love you like Ive never even imagined before - If you said Will you come with me to China tomorrow I would tear off. I would have sixty or seventy children if you liked or eighty – all at once if necessary." After a letter from her father telling her of the "pots and pots of money from the dear old Bank" she asks Arthur, "Would you like me to send you a pound a week?"

Lovers' tiffs keep up the pace. There is a flare of jealousy from Arthur over Yvonne's teasing mention of a letter from John Sinclair (the then journalist on his way to becoming a music critic). "How like Sinclare. John such a nice letter he would write all confessions poor out his soul on paper, then you perhaps write to him nice comforting letters This isn't comforting you is it? NO." It is Yvonne's turn to feel disgruntled when

Arthur doesn't materialise in Melbourne for a meeting of the Contemporary Art Society: "Can't you be a man just for once and come and see me – I came to town to see you this weekend so I thort but No it was Joy instead – she sent me a telegram and I thort it was you I love you so very much its now beginning to hurt..."

John Perceval would have been able to attend the CAS meeting without too much trouble.²⁹⁴ It was a tribute to Perceval's persuasive power that he would manage to convince his officers to cite the reason for his discharge in August of 1942, as "being medically unfit" despite his duties and his health remaining unchanged since enlisting, and despite his flouting of army rules. It enabled him to entertain Yvonne in Melbourne with such insights into his friend of six-months as, "Arthur had always liked blondes"²⁹⁵ while Arthur was trapped in Bendigo. But Yvonne, in her letter written after the weekend of the Contemporary Art Society General Meeting, was Arthur's. She longed to "live ... sleep ...eat ... and walk out the gate ...and especially especially sleep" with him.

Around the beginning of October, the stars aligned. Yvonne was called in by Peg Lennie to be told that her attitude was wrong, that she was impatient with the cows. This came as an extreme shock to Yvonne as her only source of impatience had been Mrs Lennie. When she was told she would be "given notice" Yvonne, deeply offended, went to her room, packed her bag, gave her heavy shampoo bottles and cosmetics to her fellow land girl and walked the long distance to Narre Warren railway station with her still laden suitcase, struggling, but fuelled by outrage. She hadn't telephoned her parents. She had left the bank with some fanfare and knew her father would be distressed by the news (he hadn't wanted her to leave the bank). All she could think of now was that the train she would catch would not head south along the coast to Melbourne, but inland and Arthur would be waiting on the station platform at Bendigo to meet her.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ "Perceval would have been able ..." Once Perceval had discovered the Cartographic's plans for a move to Bendigo he had began playing up. He joined the Cartographic as draughtsman six weeks after Arthur on 12 January, 1942 and lasted less than three months. Yvonne Boyd suggested that John went into the army "as a sort of gesture ... although he had this crippled leg. I suppose he wanted to see if they'd take him, and of course they took him ... they'd take anyone." At the end of April Perceval was demoted to Private Ungrouped for inefficiency and transferred to Relocation camp at Caulfield. Joy Hester revealed in a letter to Albert Tucker [Reed boxes, LaTrobe] that Perceval avoided further postings by hiding in the lavatories when called for a transfer, went AWOL, not once but twice, and was docked four days pay on both counts. Shortly after the second offence he was discharged at General Details Depot, Caulfield on 20 August, 1942. [National archives of Australia. Series B884. Item: V14406. Perceval, John De Burgh.] This is an important date. John Perceval's discharge has been mistakenly reported as occurring at the time of Arthur's. [Janine Burke is one of the few biographers to correctly note this date: see Albert Tucker, *Australian Gothic*]. It has significance in the interpretation of each artist's work. For example, Barrett Reid, a biographer of Perceval *Of Dark and Light the Art of John Perceval* National Gallery of Victoria, Victoria, 1992] stated: "This extraordinary flowering [of Perceval's work] can be seen in the context of a concentration of events in the artist's life: the constant company of Arthur Boyd from 1941 to March 25, 1944, when they were discharged from the army..."²⁹⁴

²⁹⁵ Letter from Yvonne to Arthur from Narre Warren.

²⁹⁶ "It enabled him to entertain Yvonne ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

They hadn't set eyes on each other for almost four months. The faces they had both been sketching, attempting to conjure each other in their lonely evenings, were now as real as the emotions they had expressed in writing. Was Arthur speechless at the sight of this beautiful woman, tall and slim and elegant in a wool sweater and hounds-tooth skirt, delivered to him, suitcase in hand? Emotional exposure was an alien state for Arthur, but at this moment did the prediction he had made in a letter to Yvonne come to pass? "... I know that when I see you Ill slobber all over the place and blurt out something I didn't want to say".

Having only had a few hours notice of Yvonne's arrival, Arthur had made no arrangement for accommodation apart from a ground sheet and a few blankets. Perhaps he had considered taking Yvonne to the studio but suspecting they may not have the evening alone there, opted for a quiet tract of land overlooking the city.

They spent the night on top of an emerald green hill, once full of gold, under a spring sky glittering with stars.²⁹⁷ In Yvonne's memory it wasn't quite as romantic as it sounds, they were both novices and Arthur a virgin: "It wasn't very successful ... a consummation but not devoutly to be wished ... we *kind of* made love".²⁹⁸

Arthur rigged up a little tent from an army ground sheet but the night became cold. They woke shivering and to find they could have given new meaning to falling in love. They had been perched on the edge of an old mine shaft; Bendigo had over six thousand of them, some over one-and-a-half kilometres deep. After taking photographs of each other (looking very happy to be alive) they headed down to town where Arthur deposited Yvonne in the rented studio perched over a shop in one of the main streets of Bendigo. They spent all the time together they could, with Arthur going back and forth to the camp, reporting in and slipping away.

While Arthur was back at Fortuna, Yvonne had the choice of either staying and painting in the derelict old room, or wandering around Bendigo exploring. For days it rained so steadily she bought herself a long raincoat down to her ankles. At one point Arthur, in a gesture that would become a habit of a lifetime, took Yvonne into a church, not to pray but to play, freestyle, on the organ. Some nights Arthur's old mate Keithie would drop by, often in the company of another soldier and artist from the unit, Jack Freeman. Freeman was appearing more often than desired and on one of these occasions someone bought a bottle of sherry just for Freeman and just to get rid of him. Making sure they poured each refill in double quick time, it wasn't long before Freeman went staggering off into the night. In his inebriated state he attracted thieves, and his assault attracted the Military Police. When questioned on his whereabouts at the time of the incident, Freeman pointed in the direction of the place he last saw sober and reported: "Up at Yvonne's".

²⁹⁷ "They spent the night ..." It was most likely Quarry Hill, the closest green hill to the railway station.

²⁹⁸ "In Yvonne's memory ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

Perhaps Arthur stayed the night but he would have left to get back to camp before roll-call at 6.30, for Yvonne was alone when she was woken by a knock at the door. When she asked "Who is it?" and the reply came muffled through the door, "The Police", she greeted it with a "Ha! Ha! ...how many?" The deliberated and plodding response of "Two ... two" chilled Yvonne into extreme wakefulness. She opened the door to find "a Hollywood detective, or trying to be, hat down over one eye, snarling" and his partner, "prim ... humourless." They may as well have been two pompous church ministers the way they moralised. They would be so indelibly imprinted on her mind that she would sketch them later.

Arthur was fined three pounds for removing four blankets, one palliasse and one ground sheet but Yvonne was humiliated.²⁹⁹ The police had been "severe" in their questioning: "Who are you? ... Where do you come from? ... What do you do?" ... demanding names and addresses of family, friends, past work places. Perhaps they would have been less intimidating if they had stood in more traditional surroundings, in a 'decent' middle-class house; but instead they reprovingly lectured "You shouldn't be up here living with soldiers". When Yvonne replied "I'm not living with soldiers, only one", she was told to leave town, "her type" wasn't wanted. They would, they pronounced to this twenty-two year old woman, inform her father. She was given a day to leave. Yvonne worried desperately about her father's response. She went to the police station to make a plea. She would leave town, but insisted: "Don't tell my father ... there's no need to tell my father". They consented, but not totally, declaring that they would "leave the matter in abeyance". The threat of unfinished punishment, the words 'in abeyance', would forever send a shiver down Yvonne's spine.

Yvonne felt wretched: Arthur felt responsible. In the beginning Yvonne had found it all "exciting ... a climax ... a fulfilment of something [she'd] been humming and hahhing about." She felt committed. Her handwriting in the diary had never been bigger, bolder or more confident. On October 12, two days after Arthur furnishes the room with the palliasse and blankets, and two days before Arthur receives his reprimand and fine, Yvonne takes three pages to scrawl:

*Free 22 ... and at last in LOVE with:- Arthur Chook Boyd ... Facts:-
Resigned from Bank ... Worked on Dairy Farm ...kicked out ...
Went and lived practically with Arthur aforementioned but not nearly enough
Boyd at Bendigo ... Going to marry him if we all survive. FREE!³⁰⁰*

But now Yvonne was returning home. The farewell, coming little more than a fortnight after the arrival shattered Arthur. He wanted her to stay.³⁰¹ Waving to Yvonne as the train disappeared towards Melbourne, perhaps he was thinking about the luck of John Perceval and Albert Tucker, who were now free of the army after less than a year of service: free to be able to paint, see friends and family, and be with their girls. Arthur

²⁹⁹ "Arthur was fined three pounds ..." Arthur's fine, administered 14 October, 1942.

³⁰⁰ "Free 22 ...". Bundanon archives.

³⁰¹ "The farewell..." David Boyd interview. "Yvonne could have stayed, Arthur wanted her to stay."

must have turned away from the station more round-shouldered than ever, and dragged himself back to camp.

CHAPTER SIX

The empty stage

"In the 1943-44 suburban paintings and drawings, environment is not an embracing entity, as it will be later, but an empty stage, a platform of lonely desolation on which the gestures of frenzy, desire and suffering are acted out." Franz Philipp³⁰²

³⁰² Philipp, Franz. Ibid.

Act One

*"The idea, I suppose, is to turn this disturbed state ... into art".*³⁰³ Arthur Boyd

When Yvonne arrived back in Melbourne she felt "chastened". The experience in Bendigo had been "nasty". A certain taint surrounded Arthur Boyd as far as her parents were concerned: "They thought he didn't look the part, he wasn't in their eyes, upstanding. I think they were slightly disappointed I didn't have a big, strong, handsome man.". She describes her mother's reaction to Arthur as "tight lipped" while Beryl recalled all lips in the family firmly pursed. Yvonne's veteran father, who had a "terrible patriotism, almost jingoism" thought "Arthur didn't look like a soldier" and Yvonne knew that was criticism in his eyes.

At this stage Yvonne had mixed emotions over Arthur's pacifism. She had grown up looking at the pictures on the wall of her mother's brothers, her "two young dead uncles" killed in World War I; and living with her father's severe limp earned at Gallipoli. Perhaps Mr and Mrs Lennie suspected Arthur's underlying influence in Yvonne leaving the bank, and then the farm. Perhaps they had some inkling of the happenings in Bendigo. While Yvonne needed to censor the incident at home, at Heide she regaled the Reeds and Joy and Bert with the drama of the police, and the reason for her departure from Arthur. "Of course they loved stories like that ... they enjoyed that ... my close friends were very indignant." Yvonne was both triumphant and cowed: straddling the camps of the bourgeois and the bohemian she was not at home in either.

Arthur was distraught. After Yvonne's departure he spiralled into depression. "*Dear Dear Yvonnie OH I have missed you missed you like mad I love you I love you more and more and more...*" The official story that Arthur enlisted Bert Tucker's help in plotting his escape from the army is partly true. Arthur was tutored by Tucker in ways and means to feign anxiety and thereby secure a discharge, as Tucker had successfully done himself. But in Arthur's case it was a convenient cover. In later years, reiterating the story of Tucker's coaching to an interviewer, in typical ambiguous fashion, Arthur added, "...if I went to that trouble you'd think I wasn't faking it wouldn't you?"³⁰⁴

Arthur's anxiety was not an act and his own words confirm it. In a letter written to Yvonne some time between her departure in mid-December 1942, Arthur is as direct and precise as he ever would be:

[The doctor] wanted to put me in the Hospital for about 4 days but I said I would go on with my work if he would give me some sort of tonic ... I have been very depressed lately and most jittery I want to see you terribly much it seems years and years since I saw you its only 7 days I know. OH I feel more and more sad everyday I try to pull myself together but somehow I just cant I have felt myself going like this for some time. Dear Yvonnie don't ever let your self get

³⁰³ Boyd, Arthur. Interview with Hal Missingham, 22 September, 1965. Hazel de Berg tapes, NLA.

³⁰⁴ "...if I went to that trouble ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

depressed. I dont want to make you sad with this terribly moaning letter but I just have to tell somebody. I will be cheerful as I can. If you see Bert or John R please tell them to see Guy R³⁰⁵ if they can or will there is another man they could see too I don't know his name. Please don't tell my mother I am sick she has enough to worry her as it is. I will get some leave on the 2nd Jan. to the 4th if Bert or John R want to know...OH dear Yvonne Pray to God to stop me going crazy.³⁰⁶

Act Two

*"Separation is a terrible thing to happen to anybody ... if you're kept out ... it's not a good feeling."*³⁰⁷ Arthur Boyd

On 18 December, 1942, Arthur was admitted to the Camp Dressing Station at Bendigo and diagnosed as suffering from neurasthenia, an old term and catch-all for what was then a poorly understood nervous condition referred to as 'nervous debility' or 'exhaustion of the nerve centres'. On 23 December he was returned to his unit and on the day before Christmas re-graded from Draughtsman A/Group 1, to Litho Draughtsman A/Group 2. A little over two weeks later he was in Heidelberg Hospital and by his own admission, he had "stopped eating so I was pretty skinny, fairly light ... I'd lost a lot of weight."³⁰⁸ He had missed Bert Tucker by two months. After five months at Wangaratta, drawing medical charts, Tucker had been transferred to Heidelberg to make detailed drawings of the men in the Facial Reconstruction Unit; it was a distressing job, but one that allowed weekends off with Joy at Heide and lasted only five weeks until his discharge in October 1942.

On her return to Melbourne Yvonne was in a state of flux. Before taking a job as secretary at Radio Corps she toyed with the idea of joining the Navy, going on the land again, and working with the Army Medical. She wrote to Arthur: "You know if I gotta job at Heidelberg Hospital – I could look after you if you got so sick you had to be sent there". Only one part of her prediction came to pass: when Arthur was admitted Yvonne was a visitor, not a nurse. She thought Arthur looked "frail ... a bit shaky ... fraught ... walking about in a dressing gown." It didn't occur to her "that he was really ill".³⁰⁹ When the Reeds informed her after their visit that Arthur was "a very sick boy" she was shocked. In retrospect she considered that "perhaps I wasn't seeing enough".

³⁰⁵ With all probability this is John Reed and Guy Reynolds, friend of John Reed, a psychiatrist and member of C.A.S. It was a piece of Arthur's shorthand

³⁰⁶ Bundanon archives

³⁰⁷ "Separation is a terrible thing ..." Interview Arthur Boyd, 7 September, 1978, ABC archives, Sydney.

³⁰⁸ "...he was "pretty skinny, fairly light ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

³⁰⁹ "It didn't occur to her ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

Arthur was being assessed by those who had to decide whether he was “mad enough to be put out of the army”. Arthur knew clearly that he was “sane enough not to be in it”.³¹⁰ Reg Ellery, a psychiatrist, was one of the inquisitors. He interviewed Arthur and then asked him to produce drawings to help analyse his condition: “I had to show my work, I had to show my wares”.³¹¹ Once again, Arthur and his work were ridiculed, this time not by the enlisted men but by the officers. He was taken to a lecture given to a group of army doctors and asked to explain the meaning of his works to the audience. One particular drawing, of a horse flying over a pair of lovers, prompted the doctors to ask whether Arthur had read any Freud.³¹² He had, or at least had heard many discussions on Freud but to avoid further questioning and perhaps from fear of verbal fumbling, replied “No”. This caused great guffaws amongst the doctors who saw vast sexual reference in the work. This personal scrutiny would have been excruciating for an already shaken young man who tried so hard to “cover up” his deepest feelings.

Denison Deasey, excused Cadet Corps as a conscientious objector, had not been able to avoid enlistment.³¹³ He too would be introduced to the view through the wire-barred windows of Heidelberg, to the psychiatrists, and to the ominous male orderlies. On 3 September, 1939, Denison’s diary had recorded thoughts that would have been fiercer still in the minds of the survivors of World War I, those who knew first-hand of the horror that awaited their children.

... I feel a queer sensation. As if the beautiful youth of 1914 were standing on their old graves and saying – nothing. They are dumb. They are pointing at themselves. “Look, look, look at us. We also moved, as thou dost move, in prime of youth and quick in love.” Isn’t it strange. 25 years of play on the stage, men crying for peace, men silently working for war, and now just the same 1914 awe, but a conscious awe. Was it worse for them, who knew nothing of what was to come?³¹⁴

The lonely footfalls of Tucker, Boyd, Deasey ... ghostly connections, echoing down through the same long white corridors of Heidelberg.

Arthur was stranded. It is apparent in the words he writes on Australian Red Cross letterhead to Alan McCulloch from Heidelberg. Though reading between the lines is always a necessity with Arthur, in these few simple sentences to his older friend his loneliness is obvious:

³¹⁰ “Arthur was being assessed ...” Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

³¹¹ “He interviewed Arthur ...” *ibid*

³¹² “One particular drawing of a horse ...” This horse will be repeated in a number of line drawings. It is reminiscent of the flying horse in Rousseau’s ‘War’ that is ridden by a rampaging woman who leaves nothing but despair, tears and ruin in her wake.

³¹³ Denison Deasey, excused Cadet Corps ... Deasey was posted to the 2nd/4th Independent (Commando) Company in the Northern Territory.

³¹⁴ “September 3, 1939 ...” Deasey papers, Manuscripts, SLV

Please forgive me for not getting in touch or writing to you before this it is difficult when you are cut off from your friends for such a time to write and say anything of importance I have been sort of sick lately they put me here (Heildberg) I shall write you a letter. Give my very kindest regards to your Mother. P.S. I hope this doesnt anoy you³¹⁵

Arthur, just as he had with Yvonne, would have begged Alan McCulloch not to contact his mother. Doris, oblivious to any trouble, had written a letter to Arthur on the very same day he was admitted to the Australian General Hospital at Heidelberg, 11 January, 1943. Above all, this is evidence that Arthur's breakdown was not a sham. Arthur would have done anything rather than worry his mother. If this had been a staged drama, Doris would have known. There is a terrible sadness in the notion of Doris sitting down to write to her son, bravely painting a sunny glow on every tiny instance of domestic news, telling him to "keep cheerful and cosy" until their next "reunion" in three weeks while, at that very moment and unknown to her, he was being placed under psychiatric care.

Doris's letter to Arthur was reassuringly domestic: blankets were being washed, mattresses made from grass, and Arthur's trees were being watered. His brothers had arrived home on weekend leave and the following day would be his nephew's birthday. 'Dad Dads' was well and was potting, and waiting on Hatton to fire the kiln. Scouty still visited Sundays and, Doris adds, had lent her a copy of Eliot.. She reassures Arthur on the finances, reporting that "Guyzie's cash will be coming next Thursday." In the middle of the roll call Mary is missing. Doris's stoic report is: "John and Mary are back again but are out today and I don't know when they will be coming home." Mary had only just turned sixteen. In less than six months of knowing the family, John Perceval had moved into Open Country.³¹⁶ Perceval had been introduced to the family by Guy, not Arthur, even though Arthur spent more time with him at the Cartographic. Later, Arthur told David he hadn't been the one to invite Perceval home because he thought he "would destroy".³¹⁷ Although Arthur thought Perceval talented, according to David, he also thought him dangerous.

On 23 January, 1943, after being confined for almost a month in Heidelberg³¹⁸ Arthur was sent back to Caulfield to be re-assessed. It would not be surprising if, given his deep need for emotional privacy, he had immediately begun to shrug off his hospitalisation and adopt the story that he was following Bert Tucker's instructions. More importantly, he would have seen it as a way to protect his mother from any further concern. Now, back close to home, with David on leave, he could be with his friends and family, and of course, be able to see Yvonne. There is no record of his reaction to what he experienced,

³¹⁵ "Please forgive me for not getting in touch ..." McCulloch archives

³¹⁶ "In less than six months of knowing the family ..." Letter from Joy Hester to Albert Tucker written in winter of 1942, between June-August: "(Perceval) sleeps at Arthur Boyds and only goes to camp (Caulfield) on pay day ..." Tucker papers SLV

³¹⁷ "Later, Arthur told David he hadn't been the one to invite Perceval home ..." David Boyd interview..

³¹⁸ "On 23 January, 1943 "In discussion with Grazia Gunn Arthur recalls he was "in Heidelberg for about a week".

with one possible exception. Given that there were no oils available at Heidelberg, it is most probable that in this last week of January Arthur produced one of his earliest expressionist oil paintings, *The Kite*.³¹⁹

T.S. Eliot's notion of "...some infinitely gentle/ infinitely suffering thing"³²⁰ is made visible in this loosely drawn, but densely felt, work. A weeping figure, arms outstretched in a gesture of crucifixion,³²¹ is "spread out against the sky like a patient etherised upon a table"³²² ... "his soul stretched tight across the skies."³²³ Many triangles are to be found within the painting, the primary one forming the means of control of a tortured figure. Just as Merric, in the throes of an epileptic fit, would cry out "I am held" while Doris with her arms around him whispered "Love Governs" in his ear, so too is this figure held - held by a trinity of ties that bind. A crazed puppeteer pulls the strings. A tent or bandstand,³²⁴ is empty and joyless. In the foreground two anxious people gesture towards the captive figure floating isolated, beyond reach. Tears fall from the eyes of the victim, through the heated air, towards the tormentor. Although the puppet and the puppeteer are naked, only the puppeteer is sexual. His mouth is flung open, wound-red, and his penis is blatantly exposed. He clutches two palm trees, dwarfed in his hand.³²⁵ He is a runaway force of nature; all the elements are his - animal, vegetable, mineral - as he pounds the ground, strips down the trees, manipulates the body.

The painting differs from the working drawing: in the drawing there is no sun, no bandstand, the palm trees are flowers (they will, in the future, generally be seen by Arthur as funeral bouquets) and the tormenting figure has no genitals. This is a private story and Arthur seems to be adding, changing and juggling images to alert those he is addressing, while at the same time employing the disguises of allegory, decoration and symbols like an author's disclaimer. Years later, when Arthur was forced to discuss these paintings of the war years, he would offer: "it's all personal ... all connected with ... well it's very domesticated ..."³²⁶

³¹⁹ "Given that there were no oils available at Heidelberg ..." In the Barry Pearce interview Arthur states "they didn't have oil paints in ... Heidelberg...they had gauche or watercolour ..." Pearce tapes.

Note: In the AGNSW publication 'Arthur Boyd Retrospective' this painting is re-named the *Crucifixion*'

³²⁰ T.S. Eliot. *Preludes*

³²¹ "A weeping figure ..." In an interview with Barry Pearce 19 February, 1993 Arthur acknowledged that the kite men (this image occurs in several paintings but becomes more obviously a crucifixion) were "God figures." In future paintings he depicts both "God the Father and God the Son. In one work God the Father is seated on a throne "turning his back" oblivious to the suffering of his son. Here too, although less throne like, the elderly figure is seated and arguably blind to, or incapable of alleviating, the suffering.

³²² T.S. Eliot. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

³²³ T.S. Eliot. *Preludes*

³²⁴ A bandstand ... "John Perceval, in a painting of July, 1943, depicts a bandstand (similar to Arthur's in January of 1943) as centre piece to *Old Lady Selling Windmills at a Fair No. 2*' The bandstand is associated with South Melbourne. As Arthur isn't transferred to the Albert Park depot until May 1943 it is possible that it was a meeting place used while Arthur was on leave from Bendigo.

³²⁵ The image of the palm trees grasped by a manic monster is repeated in an oil painting by John Perceval circa 1944, titled *Negroes at Night*.

³²⁶ "Years later, when Arthur was forced to discuss these paintings ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

By 6 February Arthur was back in Bendigo with a B classification, the authorities not deeming him so incapacitated as to warrant a C1. If his psychiatrist Reg Ellery wasn't entirely responsible for Arthur's ongoing incarceration his report would have contributed greatly to it. It is a puzzling fact, given that the Reeds were aware of Arthur's serious condition, that Ellery hadn't been briefed by them to help Arthur. Before Arthur's confinement, in a nod to John Reed (the psychiatrist was a contributor to Reed's magazine *Angry Penguins*), Ellery had tried to use his influence to prevent Bert Tucker's call-up. The following year, in July 1944, when Sidney Nolan was committed to Heidelberg, Ellery would at the behest of John Reed, write a report that parroted the wishes of Sidney Nolan and deemed him unfit for duty.³²⁷

Arthur's misery found reflection in Eliot's poetry and some time in January, while at Heidelberg or soon after, he began to write poetry of his own.³²⁸ Eliot was an overwhelming influence on Australian artists and writers of the time. Although Arthur's unpublished prose owes a good deal to Eliot's influence, the feelings expressed in Arthur's untutored style were his own: hard won and vivid. For a man who was so private, this prose was an outpouring. We can glimpse Arthur in January 1943, locked in white rooms with those who sought to "prod" his soul. His prose describes Heidelberg's "grinning intellectuals", those who "over-run the room to heal the bruised and cornered mind with strips of theory", the doctors who are the "key holders to the unconditional gates". Arthur's analysis of these "pompous men" seems to be that they can no longer comprehend the natural world, their new found Freudian phallic symbols blocking a recognition of innocence. Among the crowds Arthur records the images of singular beings: a man whose name "pounds" his ear and "cuts his cheek", and a lover who "checks" his "coarse approach".³²⁹

Part of Arthur's anxiety had been assuaged by the doctors' reports. He had been harbouring a great fear, a fear that would have, according to Christian Science doctrine, been considered 'error'. He could not have comfortably expressed it at home. At Heidelberg he voiced it, asking the doctors if it was possible to inherit his father's epilepsy. Having experienced the damage it could cause, both to the sufferer and his family, Arthur must have been given great peace of mind when he was assured that epilepsy could only be passed down through the female line.

During the fortnight Arthur spent at Caulfield being re-assessed, he was in close proximity to Yvonne. This must not have produced a happy outcome because shortly

³²⁷ "...Ellery would at the behest of John Reed ..." Despite so many incorrect reports of Arthur Boyd belonging to 'the Reeds camp' Arthur's relationship was totally removed compared to the bond between the Reeds and Nolan and Tucker. Nolan, upon entering the army, leaves all his property to Sunday Reed and appoints her sole executrix of his Will. Albert Lee Tucker of 2 Martin Street Elwood leaves all his property to John and Sunday Reed plus a third of his paintings "chosen by them at their discretion and the remainder to my son Sweeney at 21." Reed papers, Manuscripts, SLV.

³²⁸ "Arthur's misery found reflection in Eliot's poetry ..." Arthur Boyd to Richard Haese. Interview conducted 1974. Manuscripts, NLV. Arthur to Haese: "I wrote a bit of poetry myself when I was in the army ...[Eliot] certainly influenced things a great deal"

³²⁹ "We can glimpse Arthur ..." This poem, handwritten and typed, is in Bundanon archives.

after Yvonne records in her diary that she believes she is “making Arthur miserable...”³³⁰ Her “humming and hahhing” begins again.³³¹ Perhaps it is around this time, after Arthur has been demoted from draftsman to driver, he pens a letter that seems prompted by angst over a would-be rival by the name of John Perceval:

Dear Yvonne You ask me what I think of JP well now! he has just painted a most excellent picture. He is the best painter Artist or whatever they call them in Australia that is not counting woman artists I would like to think I was but if I put myself with the woman perhaps I will not be bad then as for J.P. as a man thats pretty touchy because well who knows what the right kind of man should be like, what I mean is the right type or best type. Might be like Max. J.P., David, or anybody even me although I don't quite think I would fit the part. Anyway you didn't ask me wether he was right or not. I do like him very much I think you do too Yvonne...”.

Yvonne was “committed and not really committed”. Her feelings were confusing to them both. Although she felt Arthur “must be a genius” because “he [stood] out so clearly from [his] fellowmen, in a take it or leave it turn of mind she sees him only “when he happens to turn up”.³³² She feels “restraint” when she is with him, that she can't “open up”.

Yvonne's need for deeper communication, her restlessness, her shifting feelings are reflected in the growing unease in extracts from Arthur's correspondence: “Please if its possible to have any sort of good time by going out with some nice dark intelligent man please go. You were quite wright about having some prospect...” “I go to bed at night saying Yvonnie Im sorrie Im sorrie Im sorrey ...” “Were you wild with me for not doing anything I should have ...why couldn't you tell me what was wrong ...” “Do you think me realy dull and sad and have only maternal feelings for me but I suppose I should be greatiful that you have any feelings for me at all ...” “Please don't think it's a bad thing for me to become more fond of you...”

When Arthur tells Yvonne he thinks she has changed, her response must have been sharp for it produces this sad reply from Arthur:

Dear Yvone If I did say you had changed I was wrong I know only well ...Your letter was most helpful. I am now as normal as any person or Soldier all my complexes have gorne to the wind I will become self asured and vain. forgive me for not realizing in writing those letters what I was doing to you ... I realy do care and love you please don't worry because I sharn't hang on you in that way again I am going about quite normaly now. I intended this to be very short and

³³⁰ “This must not have produced a happy outcome ...” Yvonne Boyd, Diary entry. Dated February 19. Bundanon archives.

³³¹ “Her “humming and hahhing ...” Interview Yvonne Boyd. When discussing her feelings about moving in with Arthur in Bendigo “It was a fulfillment of something I'd been humming and hahhing about – not that I didn't continue to hum and hah after that ...”

³³² “Yvonne was “committed and not really committed”. Ibid

bisness like I suppose I do take a little notice of John and Bert but not as much as you think in fact very little (You wish me to forget you existed sometimes. I will paint my best pictures) (How light is his passion, that he should wonder in what fashion to mould his mind.") (not Eliot) (ME) If I may I will ring you up when I get my leave and we may be able to arrange a meeting you see how business like I am. I will not hang on you, please don't think I will. I can see quite easily about you giving up (Art) and all that but you must believe me about your picture's. I would really like to see you again sometime. When I think what I have subjected you to in the past. Bendigo. Rain, Beds, Police, Soldiers, Stuidos, I am inhuman.

In one letter sent to Yvonne, Arthur had enclosed a drawing as a postscript. It appears to be the same sketch that attracted derision as he sat working on it in the barracks at Fortuna, but what his fellow soldiers had assumed was a wolf was a cow. Yvonne had written to Arthur from the farm at Narre Warren using a high-blown simile as she mused over the decision of leaving her job and setting off for Bendigo: "The cows are myself and you are my soul - which will I choose?"³³³ Arthur's sketch shows a naked man lying under a cow. This slightly drawn, unformed character is forerunner to the figures that Arthur will depict as lovers within the next two years; an amalgam of the helpless; the foetal, new-born, geriatric and corps like. One arm holds the cow while the other grasps his own famine-thin, rib-exposed torso. The man's mouth, placed directly under the udder, is flung wide open. The cow weeps. Its front leg pierces the genital area (in later drawings the cripple's crutches will also double as a blade-like weapon). The legs of the man are splayed in a sexual position and the only detail given to the body is a dissected area of the stomach exposing irregular circles. Arthur's explanation under his drawing, "You see the man has drunk all the milk and it's gone to his tummy" goes a small way to illuminating the drawing.³³⁴ It remains menacing and mind-curdling in its strangeness.

Only once in Arthur's life did he board a plane and see the earth from the perspective of the sky. There were early episodes that may have produced his phobia. Granny Gough's hero, the aviator Bert Hinkler, the man she lauded in a poem titled, 'The Homing Bird of Bundaberg', had died in a plane crash while attempting to break yet another record.³³⁵ Stories had been told by Arthur's father and uncles, of R.A.F heroes being killed in

³³³ "Yvonne had written to Arthur ..." All letters between Arthur Boyd and Yvonne Lennie, sourced from Bundanon archives.

³³⁴ "The legs of the man are splayed ..." Reed boxes, SLV

³³⁵ "Granny Gough's hero, the aviator Bert Hinkler ..." Evelyn Gough, apart from regaling Arthur with stories of Hinkler's flying exploits, wrote an ode to the air ace. Titled *Hinkler Souvenir: The Epic of Bert Hinkler The Homing Bird of Bundaberg* it was printed by A.H. Massina in Melbourne in 1928. It details his record-breaking flight from London made in that year on 7 February to his arrival in Australia sixteen days later – one day under his ETA. Gough personifies the biplane as female, evoking with words such as "touch ... rhythm ... throb ... quivering an earthy, sexual passion between pilot and machine. Hinkler is her "Wonder man!" her "heart throb!" He would die five years later, crashing into the Italian Alps. Arthur would have just been turning thirteen when he learned heroes can die, with or without wars.

World War I, of bodies falling from the sky and thumping into the ground.³³⁶ Now the cream of Australia's youth was being shot from the sky. And there was the loss of men he knew, such as Basil Burdett, the man who had initiated the first major purchases of his work, who was killed when his plane crashed while serving in the Red Cross. In a few months no doubt Arthur would hear about Sidney Nolan's news from Wimmera where there had been "a bad plane crash ... killing the crew". It was a "shaking experience" for Nolan - "no piece, other than the engine, was bigger than two or three feet."³³⁷ In 1942 Tucker had painted *Death of an Aviator*. On one of his many visits to the State Library Arthur no doubt viewed Brueghel's, *The Fall of Icarus*. In Brueghel's vision, Arthur would have been the odd man out: the only one turning, keenly anticipating the fall from the sky.³³⁸

When the news came that Yvonne's Aunt Beryl had lost her husband, Geoffrey Waters, in an air crash on 27 March involving the deaths of twenty-three men, mostly R.A.A.F. officers, it confirmed one of Arthur's fears and exacerbated another: that of losing Yvonne. Arthur had taken accrued leave from 30 March to 4 April to spend time with Yvonne at her home. He was sleeping in the maid's room off the kitchen on the day the news was broken by a telephone call. Putting the receiver down Yvonne's father gruffly announced, "Geoff's dead". Arthur was there to offer comfort and to dissuade Yvonne from the plan she formed, to leave for Sydney to live with her bereaved Aunt Beryl. But she did go. And Arthur waited; for Yvonne's return and for the army to release him. But it would be a year to the day from Geoffrey Waters's death before Arthur's discharge was noted on his army service and casualty form.

³³⁶ "Stories had been told by Arthur's father ..." "As far as my father going to war, and he didn't talk about the war at all except to say when he was camped in France -- and he was in the Australian Flying Corps, which had only been formed -- he was sitting in a tent, or he was asleep in a tent, anyway, and these planes with these young men ... or children probably were trained by the dozen ... were flying around. Anyway, they kept on thumping into the ground. Every time he'd hear one of these thumps he'd know that was the end of a young life." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes. Note: Arthur's memory would appear to be incorrect. Perhaps he is confusing the memories of Penleigh or Martin for, according to records available, Merric remained in Britain driving transport vehicles and unlike his younger brothers, Merric never saw action. Merric may, of course, experienced the fall to earth of bombers over England.

³³⁷ "It was a "shaking experience" for Nolan ..." Sidney Nolan to John and Sunday Reed, Reed boxes, NLV.

³³⁸ "On one of his many visits to the State Library ..." Pieter Brueghel's interpretation of the myth of Icarus shows the boy, whose wings had melted, crashing face-first into the sea. He had ignored his father's instruction of taking the middle course and flown too close to the object of his desire, the sun. The populace in the painting goes about their business, unconcerned, turning from the tragedy as it occurs.

Act Three

"A victim has to have a back cloth to act out his problem or his victimization you have to have an audience ... not a public audience but an audience within the story".
Arthur Boyd³³⁹

In the first week of May 1943, Arthur was transferred out of Bendigo to the 11 Field Survey Depot located at Albert Park in Melbourne, opposite the St. Kilda oval. Within this depot's dozen long wooden buildings, under gabled roofs, maps and charts were crated and dispatched. Arthur's task was to drive these maps in an army panel van between Melbourne and Bendigo. He had, at his own request, reverted to Private Ungrouped, content to do the most mundane job possible to enable him to return home at the end of the working day. By now John Perceval was well ensconced at Open Country. Initially the entire household had found him enchanting; bright, articulate, gifted³⁴⁰ and no doubt thought him courageous, given the swaggering way he dealt with the trauma of his gammy leg. Perceval's personality towered over his five-foot-four-inch frame: he could charm with his wit, exuberance and mischievousness. With his muscular ego expressing itself in one-handed press-ups, it would have been difficult to guess that he, like Charlie Adams and Peter Herbst before him, was a young man in search of a family.

Perceval's mother had walked out when Perceval was eighteen months old leaving him in the care of his father Robert, a tough, taciturn, irascible farmer. When she returned to reclaim him, his life continued to follow an erratic pattern with his mother divorcing, remarrying and moving between States. For vast stretches of time he was left in the care of his mother's friends, the Rowans. Unhappy with his fate, Linwood Robert Stevens South would change his name to John de Burgh Perceval.

The Rowan family remained a reassuring fixture for John Perceval: interested in him and encouraging his interest in art. Their bookshelves, containing fine reproductions of landscapes by van Gogh and Cezanne, excited his interest. Arnold Shore, co-founder of the Bell-Shore art school in 1932, had experimented with post-impressionist form. A fervent admirer of van Gogh and a friend of the Rowans, Shore gave Perceval his first box of paints and tutored him in the power of direct, unmixed colour and broad brush stroke that would encourage Perceval towards Les Fauves. At the age of thirteen Perceval obtained a bursary to Trinity Grammar and, as a boarder, was once again separated from his mother. No doubt anxious to try to hold her attention, Perceval pursued her love of art and began to paint. He showed so much promise that the school provided him with a special studio room of his own.

³³⁹ "A victim has to have ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

³⁴⁰ "Initially the entire household had found him enchanting ..." David Boyd interview, Yvonne Boyd interview, Lucy Beck interview.

'Paralysed Boy of 15 Paints Like a Master,' was the headline the *Sun News Pictorial* of June 25 1938 blazoned above John Perceval's self- portrait. His assured, finely drawn, strongly composed work confirmed the headline. It also gave credence to epithets such as "oozing with talent" and Arnold Shore's "phenomenal", and supported the forecast that "... some day John de Burgh Perceval will be more than a name to the Australian public". At this turning point in his life Perceval contracted polio from a boy he met on the beach. At the time he was stricken he was, he admitted he was "... just getting into the swing" with his painting.

However, Peceval hauled himself up again and after his short stint in the Army, John Reed helped keep him behind his easel by giving him a stipend of one pound a week and occasionally buying his paintings. The Reeds involved on one level, insinuated their way into another. Always with an eye to the aesthetic, they encouraged the romance between beautiful young lovers. They saw it as a fairy story and perfumed linen sheets and sprigs of lavender tucked under pillows greeted the couple when they visited Heide.³⁴¹ David Boyd recalls that the first time Mary set eyes on John Perceval she "just fell ... she was infatuated straight away ... " Naturally the Boyds would not have welcomed the Reeds' interference, but would have been reluctant to criticise. It was against their philosophy: they trusted that people knew how to behave. John Perceval was only too aware of this. David Boyd contradicts what many naturally assumed, that Perceval was invited into their home: "He informed us, no 'May I?'"³⁴²

Of course, once the entire story of Perceval's bereft childhood was revealed at Open Country, it was a passport to pardon for many a transgression.³⁴³ And when John Perceval chose, he could be a sterling candidate for forgiveness. He was protean, a conundrum: no matter how acerbic a comment made by a friend or acquaintance, often it would be followed by a compliment.

Some time during John Perceval's early courting of Mary Boyd, Doris drew the quiet, serious, Peter Herbst aside and said: "You come here quite a lot. I wouldn't mind seeing you as a son-in-law." She would have seen the way Peter looked at Mary. He would follow Mary's life as it unravelled, never forgetting her. As a young man he had been "very attracted ... Mary was so beautiful." But Mary was, according to her sister, "absolutely crackers" about Perceval and Herbst knew he was out-gunned: "Perceval seemed to be the very embodiment of an artist and Mary was caught up with that". Herbst couldn't compete, "I could never quite shed the image of a teacher ... it didn't work to my advantage ... there's something ridiculous about a pedant".³⁴⁴

John Perceval once told a close friend: "The first thing that crosses my mind in any situation is who is going to be boss".³⁴⁵ David Boyd believed that Perceval "took over, he literally took over ... he became a "Major Domo." David felt that Perceval, being a

³⁴¹ "They saw it as a fairy story ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

³⁴² "David Boyd recalls ..." David Boyd, *Delinquent Angel*. A film of John Perceval by David Blackall .

³⁴³ "Of course, once the entire story of Perceval's bereft childhood" David Boyd interview.

³⁴⁴ "But he knew he was outgunned ..." Peter Herbst interview

³⁴⁵ "John Perceval once told ..." John Yule, as reported to him by Neil Douglas. Op cit.

“domineering and dominant person” undermined his father’s position: Merric was “a very accommodating person, but he was also a very dignified man ... and he had a sense of his own position as patriarch”. David held the opinion that Perceval “contributed a lot to Merric’s demise”,³⁴⁶ that he “tormented the living daylights out of Merric”.³⁴⁷ Lucy admitted John Perceval had taken advantage of her parents but reflected, in the deeply charitable way she had been brought up to view the world, “he couldn’t help it”.³⁴⁸ A non-family witness, Peter Herbst, confirmed Perceval usurped Merric: “He pushed Merric out of the way... he may have used words to do the pushing”.³⁴⁹

One of the few things, perhaps the only thing, sacrosanct at Open Country was Merric’s chair. If Merric entered the room, anyone sitting in the chair would immediately jump up but, according to many sources, Perceval made a point of staying put.³⁵⁰ David recalled Perceval in the chair, stretching out and saying, ‘Come in Merric, make yourself at home;’ which so upset Merric that “sometimes an epileptic attack would follow.”³⁵¹ Perhaps the eyes of a concerned son simply saw it that way. It is hard to credit that if the attacks had been an obvious outcome of Perceval’s behaviour towards Merric, the family, particularly Doris, would have put up with it.

A sombre painting, *The Brown Room*, executed most probably in the second half of 1943 should perhaps have been titled *Bleak House*.³⁵² However, the atmosphere that Arthur reveals needs no underlining. Despite light through the window, oppressive colour pervades the room. The view does not reveal the overgrown green tangle of Open Country. Every blade and leaf has been obliterated, with not a branch or vine allowed to temper a barren view. Merric sits huddled, isolated and removed, despite being surrounded by images of family. His youngest son, David, plays the piano brought to the house by Merric’s son-in-law, Hatton. David sits on chair made by Merric’s favourite brother, Penleigh, and given as a wedding present. Above the piano hangs a painting by his wife Doris and behind him curtains made by his eldest son, Arthur. In front of him his grandchild, Lawrence, plays with the family dog. But Merric remains oblivious to this and any other prospect of familial happiness. A photograph, taken around this time shows John Perceval seated at the piano in David’s chair and prompts the notion of musical chairs. If, as the painting shows, David has now reclaimed his usual place, is John now usurping Merric’s space? Is the spectre of Perceval, sitting across the room in Merric’s chair by the fire, the vision tormenting the eyes of the dethroned King?

³⁴⁶ “David held the opinion that Perceval ...” David Boyd, interview.

³⁴⁷ “... that he tormented the living daylights” David Boyd to John Yule. John Yule papers SLV.

³⁴⁸ “Lucy admitted John Perceval ...” Interview Lucy Beck.

³⁴⁹ “A non-family witness ...” Interview Peter Herbst.

³⁵⁰ “If Merric entered the room ...” Yvonne Boyd interview. David Boyd interview. Lucy Beck interview. Phyllis Boyd interview.

³⁵¹ “David recalled Perceval in the chair ...” David Boyd interview.

³⁵² “A sombre painting, *The Brown Room* ...” This would be the first time Arthur had access to oils.

In July, when Joy Hester was visiting Open Country she records that Merric pitched Perceval out of the kitchen.³⁵³ If Merric had been seeing the change in his sixteen-year old daughter that Joy observed, perhaps part of his confusion and anger was associated with that. Joy believed that “[Mary’s] values may be warped if she is not careful ...she is so young to be continually in the company of people at least 10 years older than herself – such as the reeds and bert and myself ... physically and mentally she has matured ...outwardly at least in a certain direction.” But, compared to the girl Joy first met, these changes in Mary were “quite alien to her true nature”.³⁵⁴

“Home was a protective thing from within us and without us ...” was how Mary remembered it at the close of the century.³⁵⁵ And so we can only wonder at Arthur’s feelings when, at last able to return home at night to his reduced family (Guy was now in Sydney and David in Queensland) he was confronted by John Perceval waiting at the door. Arthur was ill-equipped to defend himself, avoiding confrontation was the only way Arthur could operate. David confirmed this: “whenever there was any dissension or argument Arthur would get out of the way ... do a bunk ... just disappear, like Grandpa Boyd.”³⁵⁶ Even Perceval would eventually come to understand that, even though Arthur never said ‘no’, his silence was by no means an affirmation.³⁵⁷ In this instance, the entire family was forced to become obtuse, for when the passive family philosophy of love and forgiveness was pushed to the limit, John would simply “dangle Mary” as a shield.³⁵⁸

In the mid-winter of 1943 there was little comfort in Arthur’s life. In those bleak months in South Melbourne he sought refuge from the cold and wind and loneliness of Albert Park. In a little bookshop he would sit and observe the customers: “sad women ...poor people ... those who came in to buy *True Story*”.³⁵⁹ In a pub, where he was so inconspicuous he didn’t need to buy a drink, he would huddle by the fire. No one talked to him and so he would listen: “listen to the men’s voices make a nice sound.” Nevertheless, in a letter to Yvonne in Sydney, he confessed he missed “femininity”-- Yvonne’s femininity. She was, he added, the only woman he could “talk to in a reasonable fashion”. He was haunted. On the streets he found himself looking with vague envy at sweethearts who seemed “uncomplex”. He wondered if they had “terrible frustrated feelings ...in secret” or if it had “all bred out by now”. Insistent that Yvonne wasn’t to “feel sorry” for him, he assured her he was “not really hurt at all about repressions.”

Although this letter reveals that problems dogged the relationship, it is also clear that Arthur still longed for Yvonne. She saw her time in Sydney as a “break” from Arthur, a

³⁵³ “In July, when Joy Hester was visiting Open Country ... Extract of letter from Joy Hester to Yvonne Lennie, dated July 5, Bundanon archives.

³⁵⁴ “But, compared to the girl Joy first met ...” Ibid.

³⁵⁵ “Home was a protective thing ...” Mary Nolan interview.

³⁵⁶ “David confirmed this ...” Interview David Boyd.

³⁵⁷ “Even Perceval would eventually come to understand ... “ Interview Ken McGregor. “John used to say Arthur was a ‘yes’ man, whether he meant it or not”.

³⁵⁸ “In this instance, the entire family ...” Interview David Boyd.

³⁵⁹ “In those bleak months ...” Letter by Arthur Boyd to Yvonne Lennie. Bundanon archives.

"hiatus."³⁶⁰ This is obvious in an early letter from Joy Hester when she writes to Yvonne, "SINCLAIR is being transferred to sydney tonight! So you may see him if he rings up shall I give him your address? Or do you feel like a complete cut off?"³⁶¹

Arthur was bereft: not only was his future with Yvonne doubtful, he had no home as he had known it, and no time to paint. The long-haul driving, three or four times a week, left him with no time "to paint or even think or write".³⁶² In one of his rare letters he makes a direct, and therefore unc customary, complaint: "John Perceval is painting a great deal sometimes 4 or 5 pictures a week this sticks in my neck mainly because I am able to do so little even so I have a consience about not working (painting) hard enough". This was a gentle outburst considering Perceval had not only moved into Open Country, usurped his father's position and seduced his sister,³⁶³ but had also taken over Arthur's studio and was churning his paintings off the easel bequeathed to Arthur by his grandfather. Every inch of the walls Arthur had built himself was covered with Perceval's paintings. Joy Hester imagined that this sight must have made it "almost impossible [for Arthur] to paint", but wasn't sure if this "demoralized" him.³⁶⁴

Arthur, giving weight to David's life-long belief that his brother "wasn't temperamentally able to talk much about himself",³⁶⁵ didn't say. Instead he rented the C.A.S. studio in town two nights a week and began to 'talk' there. Taking inspiration from his drawings, he began to develop a visual narrative. There is reason to believe that drawings bearing the year 1942 were dated in error, and were in fact executed in 1943.³⁶⁶ Certainly they were signed many years after the fact. The majority of the signatures on the paintings of 1943/44, bearing the year and the month, are written in Arthur's immature hand; hardly recognisable to the mature signature on the drawings.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁰ "She saw her time in Sydney as a "break" ... Interview Yvonne Boyd.

³⁶¹ "This is obviously an early letter ..." Letter from Joy Hester to Yvonne Lennie, n/d. Bundanon archives.

³⁶² "The long-haul driving ..." Letter from Arthur Boyd to Yvonne Lennie, n/d Bundanon archives.

³⁶³ "This was a gentle outburst considering ..." In later years, when John Perceval was being unusually difficult, Doris would often bemoan "he seduced poor Mary." Interview Yvonne Boyd

³⁶⁴ "Joy Hester imagined that this sight ..." Letter from Joy Hester to Yvonne Lennie. July, 1943. Bundanon archives

³⁶⁵ "Arthur, giving weight to David's life-long belief ..." David Boyd interview.

³⁶⁶ "The is reason to believe ..." In an interview with Barry Pearce, February of 1993, Arthur said: "Some I dated a year back a year forward. I know I did it because I was asked to, I didn't want to ... some were further on, some further back." Pearce tapes. To Richard Haese, in his 1974 interview, Arthur confirmed, "...all those drawings were done in the army"³⁶⁶ and to Grazia Gunn he stated that after he was transferred to South Melbourne "he drew many of the subjects he was to paint later."Gunn tapes³⁶⁶

³⁶⁷ "The majority of the signatures ..." The drawings appear to have been signed sometime between 1973 and the late 1980's. For example, *Figure in Factory Chimney with Beast*, Plate 75, in the 80's edition of *The Art of the Boyds* is signed and dated '42, yet in the 1973 publication of *Arthur Boyd Drawings*, along with the majority of the drawings, it does not bear a date. Richard Haese, in his book, *Rebels & Precursors*, states that this painting (and others that follow in 1943) was "prefigured by a series of important drawings done in 1942 in South Melbourne at a time when Boyd and Perceval shared a studio in South Yarra." However, according to the recorded interview between Arthur Boyd and Haese (Melbourne 2 December, 1974) Arthur dates the South Yarra studio during the brief time he and Perceval were in the Cartographic together in the city: " ...*Progression* ... was done in the studio ... I think that was about the only picture that I did in it. *Progression* was signed and dated in Arthur's hand, March, 1941. We

During Arthur's months at the depot, when he was desperate to paint, he sketched the sights around him. A simple drawing³⁶⁸ shows the gabled huts of the 11 Field Survey Unit, the gas works and the nearby St. Kilda football oval. The drawings were not conclusive images, but "slight" like "notes"; they were an aide-memoire, "reminders".³⁶⁹ He would "identify with some of the characters but not with others" and "transfer generalised problems to individual ones ... force them onto the crippling sort of notion ... onto an individual or to a character ..."³⁷⁰

Looking back on those paintings in the eighties, Arthur remembered it all: "There's the man with trumpet and dancing figure ... South Melbourne man again ... there's a crippled dog ... that's a bit like those factory girls ... there's a little lighthouse thing in South Melbourne ... a jetty thing ... the man with the hanky ... and the weeping dog ... here's the park you see ... this is also a little maddish, simple child this woman used to carry about with her ... I put this woman's dog, this paralysed dog in front of him ... and this perambulating ... cripples ... the reason you saw so many wheel chairs and people in perambulators due to infantile paralysis ... that's what effected Perceval ..."³⁷¹

Arthur's drawings describe people mired and trapped, by paralysis of either the mind or the body: a woman wheeling a disabled dog, powerful amputees on crutches, polio victims in perambulators, a woman crying on a step, a man rushing up and down the beach flying a white handkerchief, while blowing noisily into a trumpet and, "another man running with a flower trying to ingratiate himself".³⁷²

In July 1943, the month of Arthur's twenty-third birthday, he produced *Man with a Sunflower*. The subject is a demoralised triangle: the deformed, the desolate, and a dog. A hunched-backed beast-man advances towards a stricken figure clutching a sunflower. The beast thrusts the flower forward as, according to Arthur's later commentary, a "peace-offering ... a funeral bouquet ... some sort of pacification"³⁷³ to the lonely figure whose face is shielded in its hands. A copy of Van Gogh's *Sunflower* was made by Perceval in his early years and later became a signature subject of the artist. Arthur would speak about Perceval as "painting like Van Gogh".³⁷⁴ Certainly it was a connecting symbol between the two men, a love they both shared. Perhaps the sunflower represents the possession of happiness, recalling Eliot's cry, "... will the sunflower turn to us ...?"³⁷⁵ The loosely defined stricken figure, with no detail, is the embodiment of one emotion - grief. The docile canine, resembling Peter the family pet, its ears down,

converted an old stable into a studio ... it was pretty bleak...I think I got transferred after that." Yvonne Boyd visited the studio, once: "it was in somebody's back garden" in South Yarra.

³⁶⁸ "During Arthur's months at the depot ..." *Arthur Boyd Drawings* Cat. No. 77

³⁶⁹ "The drawings were not conclusive images ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

³⁷⁰ "He would "identify with some of the characters ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

³⁷¹ "Looking back on those paintings ..." Arthur Boyd, *ibid*.

³⁷² "Arthur's drawings describe people mired and trapped ..." Arthur Boyd, *ibid*

³⁷³ "The beast thrusts the flower forward ..." Arthur Boyd, "pacification" Gunn tapes. Other quotes tbs

³⁷⁴ "Arthur would speak about Perceval ..." Arthur Boyd to Bert Tucker, Reed papers, SLV

³⁷⁵ T.S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*

subdued, directs its attention towards this forlorn figure. It is a symbol of the powerless; capable of observing, but unable to respond? In a copy of this work, in later years, no doubt due to altered circumstances in his life, Arthur will give the dog testicles.

There is an arresting feature in this painting; only after the viewer's eye has been constantly pulled back to it, does it register that the strange juxtaposing of the nose creates a Janus-faced beast (again, this is not shown in the drawing on which this painting is based). One face, turning towards the dog, is full of serious intent, concerned perhaps that the act of ingratiation is being noted. The other face, directed towards the isolated figure, bears a smile. Home is nowhere to be found. The only shelter comes from the dark, lifeless rows of terrace houses. They all but block the hope of open sky and the deep blue path that leads back down the coast to Rosebud.

Up in Sydney Yvonne had little need of a chaperone. Her grieving Aunt Beryl, after struggling through the day as art director at the advertising agency, Lintas, was not a candidate for social evenings. Besides, money was tight: even on Yvonne's twenty-third birthday the budget demanded they "hit the high spots from the side seats".³⁷⁶ Mostly Yvonne's nights were quiet. Her days, processing invoices for a wool exporter in a dark basement, held little interest. Beryl recalled, "things weren't too gay ... [Yvonne] didn't meet anyone, poor darling".³⁷⁷

But someone waited. Yvonne hopes "[Arthur] is not really sad about me. I've been writing to him as well as one can". Sydney had not become a centring force for Yvonne. She writes to Joy: "somehow can't relax and get to grips with reality ... hooey ... I never did anyhow ..." To those back home, Yvonne's life appeared far more glamorous than it really was. Through Beryl's influence, Yvonne had posed for a few photographic modelling assignments, the most noticeable landing her on the cover of the September edition of *Woman* as a glittering, Hollywood-style war bride. But by the time this issue was released, Yvonne had left Sydney.

A letter dated 8 August, written by Joy Hester from the front room of Heide on Sunday Reed's typewriter, was the last letter she sent to Yvonne in Sydney.³⁷⁸ She begins with instructions on painting, prefaced straightforwardly but insensitively with the news that Sinclair had come back from Sydney saying he did not like Yvonne's work. Joy then goes on to urge Yvonne, despite the C.A.S. rejecting Yvonne's submission, that she "get down to painting". It continues:

...one is sure to blunder - look at arthur - ! He blunders quite often but I feel in the long run he will have done worthwhile things - he has already If you were absolutely certain of Arthur you would not have left him - a woman does not walk out on someone she loves. So he cannot be the right man - or is it that you have not had the courage to teach him to be the right one to let him know

³⁷⁶ "Besides, money was tight ..." Yvonne Lennie in a letter to Joy Hester. n/d

³⁷⁷ "Beryl recalled ..." Interview Beryl Reid, London.

³⁷⁸ "A letter dated 8 August ..." Joy Hester to Yvonne Lennie, Bundanon archives.

what your qualities are. OR IS HE JUST BLIND. And clumsy? Something is wrong. He is pining his heart out for you. I know. Perhaps it is he that is wrong – in fact I'm sure he is. If you love him you could teach him, let him know exactly what you want. Let him know exactly what you are. Change him and yourself as well ...if you do not think that he can fill the bill do not for god's sake keep him in this awful suspension. You can bugger yourself and him by that attitude. If you do not love him well – I don't know I know many of his faults I can see them – not all perhaps. Yvon if YOU ARE TO SURVIVE you must face up to your pshycological difficulties – not only in regards to Arthur... I have not said anything to Arthur or hardly discussed you with him. Nor do I intend to. That is your affair...

Joy's letter offers a rare measure of Arthur's emotional state. This must be one of the few times in Arthur's life he found it impossible to hide his feelings. Perhaps Arthur had confided to his family; perhaps it had been Mary who had confided in Joy about her brother's melancholia. But whatever the case, despite Joy's insistence on privacy, it is difficult to conceive that Arthur and Yvonne's relationship was not discussed in the forum of the Reeds' sitting room.

Yvonne travelled home in August. She had come to town for a short visit on a round-trip ticket and her aunt was expecting her imminent return; they had "a plan to sail the world together."³⁷⁹ Instead, Beryl received a call from her niece from a public phone box somewhere on Flinders Street, to say that she wasn't coming back, that she was staying on in Melbourne to be with the man standing by her side, Arthur Boyd.

It had been an instant decision. Walking down Flinders Street, Arthur had said, "I was beginning to forget you." Yvonne took Arthur's statement seriously. It prompted her to think, "Oh that won't do." She was aware Arthur was "starting to be very cool"³⁸⁰ and must have noticed how Arthur's long declarations of love at the end of his letters had been lately reduced to the perfunctory farewell of 'AB'. Despite the relationship seeming "fairly elastic" now, suddenly faced with the prospect of "a last chance" scenario, Yvonne thought "this is where I should be, this is where I should stay ... I wasn't going to leave him again". After the call to Beryl, Yvonne and Arthur ran to cash in the return half of her ticket before the time for a refund expired. This cash, they planned, would secure the rent needed for a place of their own. Almost sixty years after that life-altering split-second, Yvonne reflected, "He was there ... if he hadn't been there I don't know if I'd have felt so strongly ... funny way to establish a long relationship".

By early September - like Flaubert's and Strindberg's protagonists, Madame Bovary and Miss Julie - Yvonne was split and vacillating, a mixture of the conservative old and the liberated new. Aware of the roles restraining women, both sexually and intellectually she had, and would, buck the system. Yet for all the bravado of her decision to live "in sin" (as it was called even into the 1970s) she kept the critical facts from her parents,

³⁷⁹ "She had come to town ..." Beryl Reid interview

³⁸⁰ "Walking down Flinders Street, Arthur had said ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

just as she had about her sojourn in Bendigo: it was something “nice girls” didn’t do. All the Lennies were told was it was Yvonne’s studio, and no mention was made of Arthur. To help pay the rent, Yvonne would travel back home to Thornbury to do her mother’s laundry. Her new address, on the corner of Nicholson Street, sat on the border between Carlton and Fitzroy. No 2 Henry Street was a studio above a garage that came complete with a kerosene cooker, a hand-basin, a tiny lavatory at the end of a corridor, and rats. The Melbourne Public Baths, where sixpence bought you a towel, a sliver of soap and a hot bath, was a short tram-ride away.

While Arthur continued to drive his army van between the South Melbourne depot and Fortuna, returning home at night to paint, Yvonne struggled between the dream and reality. Pursuing her creative work was now wide open, but more difficult than she had imagined. She painted a little, wrote a little, took lessons in her new passion, piano, from a little old lady in a curtained front parlour, and walked across to Parkville to practise on the piano in a loft rented to John Sinclair and Sidney Nolan by a singer, Douglas Cairns. Time, unsatisfying, crept by.

Yvonne may have cashed in her air ticket to Sydney, but she was still in transition. Although she continued to feel there was something in her relationship with Arthur that had never existed with anyone else before, and although she couldn’t imagine having children by any other man, her “cold private questioning” continued. There was a stumbling point between the ideal and the actual. She was still seeking. Arthur stood immovable on two issues: he would always be a painter and he wanted to marry.³⁸¹ Yvonne deliberated. At one stage, together with Bert Tucker and Joy Hester as witnesses, they actually made it to the Registry Office. Joy was “agog ... full of excitement ... and singing ‘Happy the Bride the sun shines on’”³⁸² as they headed off to the Registry Office in William Street. It was a half-hearted attempt: according to Yvonne they were turned away, rejected, for lack of respect and not filling in the forms correctly.

Not one of Arthur’s houses was in order: Murrumbreena, the gabled huts of Field Depot 11, or Fitzroy. They were all halfway houses to a complete life.

³⁸¹ “Arthur stood immovable on two issue ...” Yvonne Boyd, Diary entry, Bundanon archives.

³⁸² “Joy was agog ...” Yvonne Boyd interview.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Cripples, Lovers, and other Victims

***“In order to possess what you do not possess
you must go by the way of dispossession ...”*** T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*.

In the middle of one of Arthur's last letters to Yvonne before she returned from Sydney he had erupted with a frustration borne of little schooling and perhaps dyslexia:

"My God I feel this not being able to spell it just about drive's me mad I could be ten times more explicit insted of fumbling for 10 minutes with one word. Van Gough could sit down anytime and pour out his soul so easily he couldn't have done so if he were unable to spell or think about a word for more than a second".³⁸³

But Arthur Boyd had begun to pour out his soul by using a "language"³⁸⁴ of his own devising, rich with symbols he would repeat, over and over through the years, like a mournful chant. Some are easily read as references to loss and calcined hope: the chimneys, fiercely on fire, spewing suffocating smoke;³⁸⁵ the figures rising from the black vapours;³⁸⁶ and the mausoleums of Brighton Cemetery,³⁸⁷ reminiscent of Merric's large brick kiln,³⁸⁸ that morph into South Melbourne factories and terrace houses in Fitzroy.³⁸⁹ But even minor symbols speak in a major way, echoing through the works like a declension made both backwards and forwards. One such symbol is so subtly repeated it seems almost an unconscious linking. It is a semi-circle, a half-hoop.³⁹⁰ It can be found in the iron fretwork of fence posts and roof tops, or defining burial grounds and graves.³⁹¹ It forms a frieze in a room housing a corpse.³⁹² It caps a paling fence cordoning a pair of exposed lovers.³⁹³ It partly composes the symbols of State and

³⁸³ "My God I feel this ..." Arthur Boyd to Yvonne Lennie: Bundanon archives

³⁸⁴ "... by using a 'language' of his own ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes. "When you do a lot of drawing and painting and you go on and on messing about, you develop a language or you make a language, an imagery. You make something that connects and you do it on purpose".

³⁸⁵ "Some are easily read ...the chimneys, fiercely on fire ...": *Figure in factory chimney with beast*, 1942 (signed at a later date) Plate 75 Reference *The Art of the Boyds*: Dobrez, Patricia, Herbst, Peter. Bay Books, Sydney.

³⁸⁶ "the figures rising from the black vapours ..." *Cripple in smoke from factory chimney* 1942. (signed at a later date).

³⁸⁷ "... and the mausoleums of Brighton Cemetery ..." The majority of the Boyd/Gough/a'Beckett family is buried in Brighton cemetery, including Arthur.

³⁸⁸ "reminiscent of Merric's large brick kiln ..." *Cripple and Factory Chimney*, 1950-1. Reference plate 61. Franz Phillip, *ibid*.

³⁸⁹ "that morph into South Melbourne factories ..." " *Study of Man with Sunflower*, July 1943, reference plate 32 & *The Gargoyles*, February 1944 reference plate 34, *Arthur Boyd Retrospective*, Barry Pearce, The Beagle Press, New South Wales, 1993.

³⁹⁰ "It is a half-hoop ..." The full circle is associated with perfection and eternity. It is also, in artistic terms, the symbol of the consummate artist - to draw a circle freehand an age-old demonstration of artistic skill.

³⁹¹ "One such symbol ... a half-hoop ... can be found in the iron fretwork ..." *Bridegroom and Gargoyles*, 1958' Reference plate 47, Franz Phillip. *Ibid*.

³⁹² "It forms a freeze ..." Drawing 479, titled *Figures with hospital bed and sleeping dog: Army Hospital*. Cat. No 82 reference *Arthur Boyd Drawings 1934-1970*. Secker & Warburg, London, 1973.

³⁹³ "It caps a paling fence ..." *The Hammock*, 1944.' Reference plate 95, Franz Phillip. *Ibid*.

Note: This fence is very reminiscent of the paling fence depicted (without the semi-circle) in 'The Brown Room', 1943.' When Emma Minnie died, part of Open Country was involved in the estate. Merric's siblings insisted the land be sold. When the Hurley's bought it, it necessitated the felling of a huge wattle and the moving of Arthur's studio closer to the house. The advancement of the Hurley's paling fence,

Crown and Church (crown, sceptre, uniform) in the form of a soldier and also in the cudgel and the hand about to bludgeon the soldier.³⁹⁴ It creates a coffin of the grassy verge in Murrumbidgee where Merric experienced an epileptic attack.³⁹⁵ It becomes anatomical, depicting curvature of the spine or facial structure in the lost, deformed, injured.³⁹⁶ This semi-circle signals a half-life, a physical entrapment, the breakdown of natural forces: it flags areas where people are victimised, incarcerated, buried alive.

Art critics have wondered at Arthur's extraordinary change in subject matter: from the sun-filled fields of Rosebud to Milton's smoking plains of Hell. Robert Hughes proposed, and others agreed, that "the war convulsed Boyd's Arcadian plein-airism into the violent expressionist images", that "to be yanked from the womb into wartime society, with its hysterias and naked passions shattered Boyd's dream of innocence".³⁹⁷ But this was too pat. Arthur confirmed that he saw a general spirit of "despair and destruction" going on even before the war; that there were "problems ... awful problems ..." much more related to his immediate surroundings".³⁹⁸ There is attribution from Arthur that many of his images represent expressions of emotions from his early years: the deformed kittens and calves, his father's fits, the kiln fire, his mother's struggle, the death of his grandfather, his habitual sense of otherness within Murrumbidgee, ongoing instances of exclusion at school; a continuum of fear, punishment, anxiety and isolation. Although his work during 1943-44 mirrors war, it is personal; the layering of memories and events belonging to Arthur's "private ... experience".³⁹⁹ His work, he admitted, was "expressing a feeling more than anything else".⁴⁰⁰ These paintings would later be described as "the actual representation of feelings themselves ... magnified and swollen until they occupy the whole world. Or stand between one and the world like a fire or a madness".⁴⁰¹

topped with cyclone meshing, diminished the garden and intruded upon Open Country – its sense of complete seclusion gone forever.

³⁹⁴ "It partly composes the symbols of State and Crown and Church ..." *Crowned Soldier and Figure with Cudgel*, circa 1941' Reference pg 54, *Arthur Boyd, Art and Life* McKenzie, Janet, Thames and Hudson, London. 2000.

³⁹⁵ "It creates a coffin of the grassy verge ..." *The Seasons*, 1944' Reference plate 23, 'Arthur Boyd' Philipp, Franz, Thames and Hudson, London, 1967.

³⁹⁶ "It becomes anatomical, depicting curvature of the spine ..." *Figures in a Factory Chimney*, 1942.' Reference plate 14, *Ibid*.

³⁹⁷ "Robert Hughes proposed ..." Robert Hughes, 'Nolan and Boyd', *Nation*, 4 April, 1964.

³⁹⁸ "Arthur saw a general spirit of despair ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn interview.

³⁹⁹ "Although he work during 1943-44 mirrors war..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes '...some drawings were not in fact drawn from the South Melbourne period but were derived from earlier associations. *The cemetery* and *The seasons*, and other pictures with blossom trees, coffins ... might have come from a memory of my grandfather's death."

⁴⁰⁰ "His work, he admitted, was "expressing a feeling ..." Arthur Boyd. Interview Laurie Thomas, Sydney 1973. Foreword to *Arthur Boyd Drawings*.

⁴⁰¹ "These paintings would later be described as ..." Brian O'Shaughnessy's catalogue introduction to the South Melbourne paintings shown at Whitechapel Exhibition held in London June/July 1962.

Arthur Boyd discovered the present by looking at the past.⁴⁰² His paintings didn't preach the revolutionary messages of the day as Noel Counihan and others dedicated to the Communist Party would have him do. He painted how war felt. Whether it was happening in a corner of suburbia in peace-time, or during the world-wide conflict, he painted the consequence, not the action; the effect, not the cause. His personal particular of loss and alienation was in direct relation to the global condition. Not only did Arthur draw on his experiences, but those of Bosch and Brueghel, finding their nightmarish interpretation of the sixteenth-century apt for the twentieth. In Bosch, aggressive sexuality and riotous behaviour is seen as a threat, and countered by constant watchfulness and detachment. Brueghel's emphasis is placed on the other great theme, death. With less instruction than Bosch and more ironical detachment, Brueghel details our stumbling blind path to our inescapable end.

While Eliot, in bomb-shattered London, completed his time-bending masterwork, *Four Quartets*, Arthur had begun to eerily express similar visions:

"And what the dead had no speech for, when living, They can tell you, being dead: the communication/ Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living ..."⁴⁰³

Time became elastic. Arthur could not have conceived of the horror of the death camps, yet in a chilling coincidence, long before the photographic evidence of 1945 seared into the collective consciousness, from the deathly smoke of his chimney stacks came grief and dissolution unfurling like Eliot's 'dust of dead bones'.⁴⁰⁴

In Arthur's own words he was "painting out ... fear".⁴⁰⁵ Like an actor or a singer with a stutter, when Arthur practised his craft he found his unencumbered voice. It was a force, he believed, that operated outside himself: "the paint words ... the describing paint ... automatically [took] over" – he "didn't have to think it out".⁴⁰⁶

His internal, private war was governed by pacifist beliefs. His liberal, gentle nature ruled out the option of physical force, or even harsh criticism, against the destructive elements in his life. But the world of his canvas was another place. It could be used as both a shield and a weapon. Gustave Flaubert once said he sought a calm and boring life so he could be untamed and savage in his novels. If Arthur had been granted a calm and boring life there is no doubt he would have viewed it as a blessing. It would have allowed him to pursue his love of landscape painting, and be content with the title he would earn as one of his country's greatest exponents of that genre.

⁴⁰² "Arthur Boyd discovered the present by looking at the past". In conversation with Peter Fuller (*Modern Painter*, vol 3 no 2 pg. 22) in 1990 Arthur stated: "you're discovering the present and don't discover it until you look at the past."

⁴⁰³ T.S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*

⁴⁰⁴ "dust of dead bones ..." Ibid

⁴⁰⁵ "In Arthur's own words he was "painting out ... fear." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁴⁰⁶ "As he explained, "the paint words ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

Arthur's expressionist paintings were his release valve, as Franz Philipp noted: "image in Boyd's art ... is a fact simply of inner necessity".⁴⁰⁷ Arthur described these early works, known as the South Melbourne paintings, as portraying "desolation" and admitted he "identified with some of the characters".⁴⁰⁸ The paralysed dog being wheeled by hind legs; the man with a flower "trying to ingratiate himself"; the child cradled in a woman's arms, who sticks a finger in the woman's eye. When Arthur saw these instances of love and friendship manipulated, obfuscated and rejected he felt "involved" and sketched them "on the spot".

By coding thoughts and emotions he could be uncensored and frighteningly raw, yet remain safely unexposed to the world and its taunts: "they are actual incidents but wouldn't necessarily be accurately painted".⁴⁰⁹ His brush could contain, control and extricate as he once, surprisingly, explained: "You see this figure here with the butterfly ... it's punching the image out of the picture ... punching the whole thing and getting rid of this character ... he may be me or someone else ... but he's trying to dislodge ... because something else is needed".⁴¹⁰ This discreet, internally focused man was following the dictum of his mother who would face her terrible problems by refusing to utter a negative word, and his maternal grandmother who would deal with hers by "unsee(ing)".

What burdens did Evelyn Gough unsee? Arthur would verbally and visually describe many times over the fall to earth of her hero, the Australian pioneer aviator, Herbert 'Bert' Hinkler. Yet Arthur never spoke of Thomas, his maternal grandfather, nor of his death:

At the back of the belt there was securely tied a rope, the end of which passed in a slip-knot around the railing of the banister, where it was fastened. To this rope, a foot or two away from the end fastened to the belt, was tied a piece of very strong tape, the other end of which was tightly bound around the deceased's neck. The apparatus was such that the rope, the tape, and the upper half of the old man's body formed a triangle, and when he hung suspended the tape as well as the lower part of the rope supported his weight.⁴¹¹

Did Arthur paint out his grandfather's lonely, despairing death in the form of the kite man? He did admit that his solution to 'unseeing' was to "paint it out of [his]system".⁴¹² The suffering lay trapped in the paint and bound to the canvas.

There had been a start at the beginning of 1943 with *The Kite* and in July with *The Sunflower Man* but by August the works flare out, urgently picking up pace, reflecting in part the same obsession. From August 1943 through to March of 1944, the year dubbed

⁴⁰⁷ "But Arthur's expressionistic paintings were ..." Franz Philipp: *The Art of Arthur Boyd*.

⁴⁰⁸ "Arthur described these early works ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁴⁰⁹ "...they are actual incidents ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁴¹⁰ "His brush could contain, control and extricate ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁴¹¹ "...his death, as outlined in detail ..." *Argus*, 'Remarkable Suicide', 31 January, 1905, p7.

⁴¹² Ibid

by the art historian, Franz Philipp, as the artist's 'annus mirabilis', Arthur produces an allusive emotional calendar: images of intense feeling, wrapped in a despairing shroud of memory.

As the psychological drama unfolds it reveals, as one critic observed, a world in which "there is no such thing as concealment, restraint or repose, and peace does not exist."⁴¹³ These seminal works are based on "incidents ... particulars ..." and are conjured around "stories...poetry".⁴¹⁴

Set against an empty stage Arthur presents a recurring cast of three: cripples, lovers, victims. He tells us the cripples are: "victims of natural forces ... unable to cope with ... a crippled mind or body ... [or with something] self-inflicted ..."⁴¹⁵ The lovers can be seen as "sinners" but "mainly they were unprivate ... exposed to being watched".⁴¹⁶ All are victims, and pointedly, Arthur confessed, so too is the painter himself: "...apart from curing the disease or preventing a scourge of paralysis ... would be to paint it out of your system ... expunging your own guilt by painting ... trying to get rid of it or facing up to it".⁴¹⁷ Like a mirror to the truth, a doctor to a patient, a confessor to a penitent, the paintings expose hurt, attempt to heal pain, and hold the power of forgiveness.

Dating each painting by month was a thing Arthur had never done before and would never do again. Why did he chronicle his work so emphatically during this period of his life? Did he hope that by exposing his despair he would forge an understanding with the "character" he was "trying to dislodge" and the hurt would cease? Was it a form of blackmail: did every new and dated painting threaten to reveal the real characters in place and time? Or was it, given his closely-knit peer group, particularly that of Tucker and Perceval, simply a way of Arthur staking claim to his images, particularly as all three artists were simultaneously submitting works to the C.A.S. for exhibition? If the latter were true, it was a short-lived phenomenon because since early school days Arthur always had a horror of exclusivity; the selfishness and rivalry of the arm around the exercise book. Besides, by the end of 1944, when he started to live and paint side by side with Perceval fulltime he began omitting the year.

⁴¹³ "As the psychological drama unfolds ..." Brian O'Shaughnessy. Op cit.

⁴¹⁴ "These seminal works that Arthur tells us ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁴¹⁵ "The cripples ..." Arthur's quote as been mistakenly reported since the publication of Gunn's *Arthur Boyd: Seven Persistent Images* as: "At times I see cripples as metaphors of evil". In fact the notion was prompted by Gunn and immediately refuted by Arthur. GG: "Do you also see your cripples as metaphors for evil? AB: "I don't think they are metaphors for evil. I certainly don't think I've used them in this way".

⁴¹⁶ "Through his eyes ..." Arthur did not, as reported, use the word "victim" as in "I saw Lovers as victims: they suffered ..." that line was inserted on the transcript by Yvonne. The interview went in Arthur's usual evasive style: GG ...in your pictures did you look at those lovers as sinners? AB probably did. Yes that's possible. GG You did? AB I don't think so, but I think that is possible. I think mainly they were thought of as being unprivate ...

⁴¹⁷ "Although some works present obvious victims ..." This answer was prompted by Gunn's question: "So do you see your cripples as being victims of natural forces? AB: "I think so, sometimes self-inflicted of course, in the same way that the guilt is usually brought about by ... pressure of actions or ... connected with your own attitude or some form of self-punishment.

Revealing the 'real' characters in the works of 1943 and 1944 was something Arthur assiduously avoided throughout his life. In later years he would tie his interrogators in knots: his "ums" and "aahs" would punctuate rambling and contradictory statements. Listening to him analyse this work it is obvious that despite decades passing the "private subject" still loomed large in his memory. He knew exactly what he was looking at but, when his interviewer quizzed him further, he would reveal no more. He was censoring himself, much like the muzzled dog that came wandering into his paintings in those later years.

At one point, at the beginning of the 1980's, he uncharacteristically explained his reticence, warning: "I could tell you things that could make your hair stand on end but wouldn't really be too good for the future at all ... not for mine but other people ... so you've got to be careful you can only go so far ... you mustn't damage other people ... they could go off their head ..."⁴¹⁸ Although, in later years, he would give detailed accounts of his figurative work, when it came to the paintings of the 1940's he would rarely identify the key characters. There was a notable exception: Arthur named John Perceval.⁴¹⁹

At some point between Yvonne's Bendigo departure and the return with Arthur to Open Country, John Perceval would, with all seriousness and intent, vie for her attention. Yvonne, loath to credit this episode in her life with any deep meaning, insisted on describing it merely as "an encounter".⁴²⁰

*'See, now they vanish, The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them, To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.'*⁴²¹

August, 1943, characters in this painting characters are chained to a pram, interred in a coffin (pram), enclosed in a tent, and fixed to a crucifix.⁴²² Hands and arms push, reach, are nailed fast: no body connects. Images that continue throughout the South Melbourne works come together here: the sea, the burning sun, the kite man, the angular blonde, the pram/coffin, the pavilion/house/tent, the elongated ghostly spectre reaching towards the heavens. Evident too, are two symbols which will play a part in paintings over the next forty years: the triangle and the semi-circle. Here they are seen in shadows cast by the

⁴¹⁸ "At one point, at the beginning of the eighties ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn interview.

⁴¹⁹ "Arthur named John Perceval ..." When discussing *The Gargoyles* in the Barry Pearce interview Arthur says of the main character, "The one in the early one was John Perceval with the funny leg ..." To Richard Haese when discussing the recurring motif of the crippled figures, Arthur replied: "Well, that's based on a fairly early association with people like John Perceval ..." To Grazia Gunn, scattered throughout the interview, Arthur interjects: "it's a sort of John Perceval face..." "You see that's John Perceval..." "Oh that might be a bit like John Perceval ..."

⁴²⁰ "Yvonne, loath to credit this episode in her life ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁴²¹ T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

⁴²² August, 1943. This painting came to light in 2007 when Barbara Tucker presented it to Yvonne Boyd: it had been in the possession of Bert Tucker for so many years Barbara had no idea of its provenance. Yvonne Boyd, in keeping with Arthur's simple and direct titling, named this work: *Sun, kite & figure pushing pram*.

perambulator, and the tent. Many decades later the shape of the kite man will dissolve into a skate, and be reflected in the structure of rocks and caves in the glassy waters of a river.

'But the torment of others ...' ⁴²³

September of 1943, the first month of the antipodean spring (in T.S. Eliot's mind and hemisphere, 'the cruellest month') brings pain to the retina. In the work titled *The Baths* a frenzied figure sticks a finger in the eye of a victim. Arthur had observed this in South Melbourne when a mother had been assaulted by her retarded child in exactly the same way. This episode of love abused by a damaged mind assumes a nightmarish quality. The tortured figure cradles what, at first glance, resembles Peter, the family dog, depicted in the Brown Room: a closer study reveals a metamorphosing form, a creature half-alive, half-dead - one part dog, one part cadaver, similar to *The Horse Carcass*. Subjugated to the background (and not included in the original drawing) appears a scarecrow figure with flailing arms: this man will populate works through decades to come, frantically waving his warning to the blinded and the blind. The dark, looming architecture suggests the noisy and public (beach hut, bath house), the claustrophobic (terrace house) and the deathly (mausoleum), offering no peaceful shelter. Yet, in common with many of the works, hope appears in the natural world. A blue sky and sea float on the far horizon like a receding dream.

'On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold ...' ⁴²⁴

October becomes a wasteland in *The Butterfly Hunter*. Ghostly cadavers rise from spewing factory chimney stacks. The fore-grounded figure with a skeletal deathly face swoops to grasp the centre of the drama: a fluttering creature, with a sting to its tail. Steadily striding, but without the foothold of perspective, a dog-like beast with jaws flung wide, advances. It is a nightmare suspended. There is no resolution: the beast is in limbo. Any decisive action is beyond the knowledge of both the audience within, and without, the painting.

'...Desire itself is movement, Not in itself desirable; Love is itself unmoving ...' ⁴²⁵

November, the harbinger of summer, is smothered in cold white. In an out-of-kilter triangle a proud pooch leads a roundelay of cripples and, despite the loss of a leg, it trots with head and tail high. An angular blonde, deftly and swiftly manoeuvring crutches, bears down on the canine bitch. Not even in the race is a half-human crippled beast. The beast's attention is not directed on the race but concentrated instead on a crescent moon that, by being positioned on the forehead, is literally on the mind. Bosch used the crescent moon as an emblem of the devil and of licentiousness. ⁴²⁶ It recalls the 'mouth

⁴²³ T.S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*.

⁴²⁴ Ibid

⁴²⁵ Ibid

⁴²⁶ "Bosh used the crescent moon ..." Allen, Traudi: *John Perceval* op cit

of the Victory girl', an image Albert Tucker famously used to depict wanton female sexuality, and John Perceval incorporated in many of his sexually oriented works.⁴²⁷ Its golden light is reflected in the prancing pooch.

*'Caught in the form of limitation Between un-being and being ...'*⁴²⁸

In December *Butterfly Man*⁴²⁹ presents a metamorphosis. It could represent transmutation from the human to the primitive, from man to beast; a fall from grace, the loss of will. It could be a symbol of doomed and fatal attraction. Once again, the landscape is reduced by a single palm tree cornered and cordoned off. Geometric shapes in the opposite corner are a further reduction of Sidney Nolan's Luna Park in his 1940/41 works⁴³⁰ and set the action in South Melbourne.

*'We only live, only suspire, Consumed by either fire or fire.'*⁴³¹

In January 1944, *The Beach* and *The Hammock* depict sex, death, and the damaged. The lovers, whether frantic or in a less orgasmic mode, do not embrace: their palms, flung open like beggars seeking alms, receive only empty air. The overall structure of *The Beach* forms two triangles which divide the elemental: earth, air, sea, fire. The 'little death' of sexual union can only be read here in the most negative sense. A coffined body drifts towards a crematorium-hot sun. The crucified gesture of the figure in the coffin is repeated in the form of the lovers. A long-haired blonde strains towards the floating corpse. The body is within reach but she is senseless to it, searching empty distance. All are lost: those 'at sea' and those on the granite-hard bed - all deathly wrecks of feeling, abandoned and abandoning.

As Arthur told an interviewer: "the sea might play a part ...it would be purifying perhaps ... if the situation needed purifying ... a tidal thing ... there were suns and moons and so forth I don't get connections myself but I might be preventing myself from seeing ..."⁴³²

*'Who then devised the torment? Love.'*⁴³³

⁴²⁷ "Its crescent shape recalls ..." The crescent shape appears in these Percevals works: *Boats and Moons*, 1944, *Setting Moon Surprised by the Dawn*, 1944, *French Nun*, 1944.

⁴²⁸ T.S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*

⁴²⁹ Three drawings prefigure the painting: in the first example the figure is female and the following two have male genitalia. The titles of these works were, in 1973, given with Arthur's approval. Instead of a butterfly and man there is: (1) 'Figure with moth embracing beast' (2) 'Figure with moth and beast,' and (3) 'Figure with moth and outspread arms and legs.' The dog/beast in the painting is not being embraced (as in drawing 1), nor is it sorely burdened (as in drawings 2 and 3.) It is only the addition of half-hoops defining the straining head of the beast that hint at entrapment.

⁴³⁰ "Geometric shapes in the opposite corner ..." Compare these similarities to *Icare - Designs for the Ballet 1939-40* and *Luna Park*, 1941.

⁴³¹ T.S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*

⁴³² "As Arthur told an interviewer ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁴³³ T.S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*

Lovers, absorbed within the form of *The Hammock* represent the shape of the crescent moon. All figures within this work, either active or passive, included or excluded, are equally doomed: grasping not holding, watching not doing, doing not seeing. While we cannot say who the figures are, three images place them in Open Country.

The frog inspired the original inhabitants to name the area. 'Murrumbeena' is aboriginal for "a place of frogs" and this amphibious creature was, in the 1940s, still a major resident of the area. Frogs would often be seen hopping through the streets and the sound of their croaking was the music that dominated the night. At school the frog assumed the symbol of separation, the rejection of the other, and Arthur remembered the chant into old age: "Proddy dogs jump like frogs in and out the water" countered by "Catholic dogs jump like frogs in and out of the water."⁴³⁴ The frog could also be read as a biblical symbol. Given Arthur's early instruction perhaps he was aware of frogs being, as described in Exodus, a plague:

And the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into thine house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon thy bed⁴³⁵

A suburban paling fence bordered one side of Open Country and can be seen (without the semi-circle) in *The Brown Room*, 1943.⁴³⁶ The hammock was also a feature of Open Country. Bought by Yvonne it hung in the garden and doubled as a bed to accommodate overflowing guests.⁴³⁷ Arthur offered: "I think the hammock might have been to do with a way of dealing with a closely knit situation ... imagine anything in a hammock must be pressed together and anchored to the trees and there can't be a separation ... certainly not easily ..."⁴³⁸

The shape of the crescent moon, repeated in the hammock, is again employed in another half-hoop formed by *Lovers in a Boat*. The story unfolds on the marshy shoreline of Hastings. Within the boat sexless, hairless, inchoate beings, seemingly neither living nor dead, cling rather than embrace and within their uncomfortable situation overflow their boundaries. The black swan that flies over the boat Arthur sees as "the bird of death".⁴³⁹

Arthur had bought a tract of land in Hastings, a swampy area on the coast of Westernport and he continued to pay it off in instalments. As John Perceval recalled,

⁴³⁴ "At school the frog assumed the symbol of separation ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁴³⁵ "And the river shall bring forth frogs ..." Exodus Chapter 8:3 Holy Bible King James version, Cambridge Press.

⁴³⁶ "A suburban paling fence ..." When Arthur Merric died part of 'Open Country' was involved in the estate. Helen and Martin insisted the land be sold. When the Hurleys bought it, it necessitated the felling of a huge wattle and the moving of Arthur's studio closer to the house. The advancement of the Hurleys' paling fence, topped with cyclone meshing, diminished the garden and intruded upon 'Open Country' – its sense of seclusion gone forever.

⁴³⁷ "It hung in the garden and doubled as a bed ..." Before the actor Rod Taylor left for Hollywood and fame (perhaps best remembered for his role in the film, 'The VIP's') he slept in this hammock in the garden of 'Open Country' when visiting from Sydney with Clytie Jessop (Hermia's sister) and his girlfriend, Beryl. Interview Yvonne Boyd.

⁴³⁸ "Arthur offered: "I think the hammock ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁴³⁹ "The black swan..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

"Arthur bought land with his army pay, I bought grog".⁴⁴⁰ In one of his early love letters to Yvonne, Arthur fantasises: "I am going to get out of the army soon how when I don't know. When I do will you come to Haystings with me till you get fed up..." That was late in 1942, when all Arthur thought about was Yvonne and escaping to "Haystings and black swans and lovely studio's and boats and mangroves and mud." At the beginning of 1944, the objects of his daydreams had become symbols of a nightmare: now the boat slides away, out of the haven of the bay, towards the open sea and the treacherous waters of the Bass Strait.

*'Here is a place of disaffection'*⁴⁴¹

In February 1944 life in the inner city is exposed in *The Gargoyles*. The scene is set close to home: Arthur saw buildings with similar ornamentation near his rented room in Fitzroy. The cripple attempts to fly, not in an effort to be free but to embrace, with open arms, a trinity of ugliness. The gargoyles are caught in the act of launching themselves in the direction of the running cripple, mirroring the same wild energy he displays. A fearful, shrinking figure, huddled in the shadow of the terrace houses, covers its eyes at the sight.

The gargoyles, the man on crutches, and the crouching figure are all cripples, all depicted with one leg. The crouching figure is trapped in a triangle: by the oncoming shadowed figure rushing towards him, by the gargoyles leaping above, and by the open jaws of attacking beasts created by the shadows of the gargoyles. They surround the house, undermining the very foundations. Most telling is the shadow formed by the protagonist of the story, the rushing cripple – it forms the shape of the gargoyle. Arthur admitted this figure was John Perceval.⁴⁴²

*'And we all go with them, into the silent funeral, Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury'*⁴⁴³

March, 1944, and all the sense of threat and foreboding in the previous months is described in one of the more explicit paintings of the series, *The Cemetery 1*. An ultimate loss has finally occurred. The wide-flung arms of the coffined figure in *The Beach* are folded across his chest, deathly still. The metamorphosing *Butterfly Man* reappears as the mourner astride the coffin. His arms spin frantically in the direction of the two blonde spectres forming a half hoop over his head. They echo the blonde figures in *The Hammock* but span the two trees in a reverse arc. Although the trees are winter bleak they are in ice-white bloom, suggesting a negative blossoming of some kind, perhaps related to the female figure who, for the first time, is depicted sexually. Attached to her, but rushing down through the air, is the Perceval figure from *The*

⁴⁴⁰ "As John Perceval recalled ..." John Perceval interview, Melbourne, 1999.

⁴⁴¹ T.S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*

⁴⁴² "Most telling is the shadow formed by the protagonist ..." "It's supposed to be John Perceval ... he's trying to fly up and become a gargoyle or to fly like the gargoyles because ... they were able to take off." Arthur Boyd, interview between Tim Fisher and Janet McKenzie, NGC, July 1993.

⁴⁴³ T.S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*

Gargoyles, his hand grasping towards the frenzied mourner. The triangle is repeated in three burial sites that form a receding line. Arthur used the image of the coffin to “generalise the emotions of love or love-making.”⁴⁴⁴ The absence of love is the presence of death.⁴⁴⁵

August 1944: with the completion of *The Seasons*, over a year and a half had passed since Arthur first began painting out his story. This, and *The Tent*, also dated August, appear to be the last paintings Arthur labelled with the month. Arthur admitted that these images were “more concocted than the others” suggesting perhaps that the previous works originated from a direct experience.⁴⁴⁶ Here all months are reduced to only one season: a dark, wind-buffed time. The sun, though as large and red hot as in previous works, casts only a dying light. As one critic noted: “The natural cycle of desire and satisfaction is, in these paintings, at loggerheads with the most cyclical of all natural events, the rising and setting of the sun”.⁴⁴⁷

A cyclical tree (fruit, blossom, autumn colours, bare branches) portions the image into three and is seen by Arthur as “regeneration.” Nature has been reduced to a strip, a nature strip, and restricted by half hoops. Within this space nothing moves. Two dignified upright figures, wrapped in classic robes, turn to each other in a consoling embrace. They cast their eyes, not towards the corpse laid out on the grass in front of them but at the defeated figure crumpled beside the body. He wraps his arms about himself and shields his already closed eyes against the scene unfolding. The foot and the sharp crutch of the manic cripple, the cripple who has become the overriding nightmare, is about to break into this space. He denies peace. His frantic energy desecrates a private place. He charges, screaming and leaping onto the grassy nature strip where Arthur had once rescued his father after an epileptic attack; and where his grandfather’s body now appears to lie, stiffened, mouth flung open in marbled death. In the outside world of the frenzied cripple where factories foul the air and long oppressive rows of brick narrow, a roundel of revellers including a primeval beast, dance.

Tellingly the working drawing⁴⁴⁸ shows the grieving figure as a dog. This is one of the few aggressive dogs in Boyd’s oeuvre. The ubiquitous dog will be, in the coming years, companionable, faithful, waiting, watching. But this dog, with snarling jaws and protective stance, guards the prostrate figure from the oncoming assault of the cripple, its aggressive defence shutting the cripple’s mouth. In the final painting Arthur opted for a passive response, and the dog is replaced by the huddled figure whose shoulders are

⁴⁴⁴ “Arthur used the image of the coffin ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁴⁴⁵ “The absence of love is the presence of death”. In his novel *A Difficult Young Man* Martin Boyd describes his brother Merric: “...I felt that intolerable pity which he sometimes awoke in me, when that streak in my nature which resembled his own, my touch of the blood that darkened his imagination beat more strongly in my views, and gave me a knowledge of what he suffered when the absence of love was for him the presence of death.”

⁴⁴⁶ “Arthur admitted that these images were ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁴⁴⁷ “As one critic noted ...” Brian O’Shaughnessy, article titled *Arthur Boyd – painter of ideas and people*.

⁴⁴⁸ “Tellingly the working drawing shows ... *Arthur Boyd Drawings. Cripple beneath tree with embracing figures, prostrate figure and dog*. Catalogue 156.

weighed down, as they have been over the past year, by the cripple. As to the identity of this cripple, all Arthur would say, "might have been related to John Perceval ... might not".⁴⁴⁹

The undated drawing, titled *Dog Devouring Cripple*, may have been executed around this time. This triangle, two figures and a dog, is fearsomely violent. The space is confined. The figure with the crutch, whose facial features are disguised by a long, dark howl, is being devoured by a dog that has all but consumed one leg. If this figure wasn't a cripple before the attack, it is now. A flying figure reaches, not towards the tortured cripple but towards the genitals of the beast. Was the obsession of the flying figure towards the beast the prompt for the attack? Or is the castrated beast simply a faithful hound guarding his territory, albeit, the gates to a deadly place? When Arthur used the expression "eaten up" he defined it as being "absorbed into a world in which you would be too inhibited to break out of ... develop[ing] certain hatreds that you needn't have".⁴⁵⁰

In *The Tent* the cast of characters remain more or less the same as in *The Seasons* but the manic cripple is now a whirling dervish dancing on the coffin of the dead. He prances with the beast, his attention so rabid that, without taking his eyes from his partner, he shoves his hand into the face of a third figure. This rejected partner, reminiscent of the flying figure in *The Cemetery 1*, is attempting to form the three-figured roundelay depicted in *The Seasons*. Another familiar reference is the man/beast seen in *The Cripples*, The tableau of the grieving couple and the huddled figure with bent head and closed eyes remain, almost the same as in *The Seasons* except for one illuminating difference: although the grieving figure appears to be blind to the brutal scene unravelling before him, his eyes, in the shadow he casts, are wide open. Far in the distance, like a peaceful dream beyond the nightmare, by a sliver of light blue sky two lovers embrace.

"I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile, and cunning". James Joyce, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'.

From September 1943 through to the end of 1944, while Arthur painted in his rented room in Fitzroy, Perceval was living in Arthur's studio at Murrumbena. They worked on opposite sides of the city yet seemed to be engaged in a year-long conversation in paint: a society of two engrossed in the same subject involving a third person, countering each other's claim, attentive to the nuance of every small detail, responding with symbolic cuts and thrusts of their brush. The architecture of South Melbourne and North

⁴⁴⁹ "As to the identity of this cripple ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁴⁵⁰ "When Arthur used the expression ..." Arthur Boyd, Richard Haese interview. This quote was in regard to the Reeds.

Melbourne: Luna Park, park benches, bandstands, deformed horses, dogs, kites, flowers/windmills/palms, and suns and moons, all become common links. A stable window, possibly a symbol of the shared, converted stable-to-studio in South Yarra, is introduced in Perceval's work.

In November 1943 Perceval painted *Boy with Kite* as if in answer to the subject Arthur had depicted January of that year in *The Kite*. In June, July, October and November 1943, Perceval produced a series of works titled *Performing Dogs*, suggesting life as a thoughtless, if not cruel, circus led by a manic ringmaster. In July, October, November, September, December 1943, Arthur painted his versions of victimisation, incorporating dogs in various guises.

In Perceval's October work, *Child Drawing in a Carlton Street*, the row of single-storeyed terrace houses resembles the size and structure of the terraces in Henry Street. In September of 1943, Perceval produces *Woman Pushing Boy with Polio* and in November Arthur introduces one of his most iconic images: the maimed on crutches, which perhaps connects further back to 1942, and one of Perceval's early works *Man on Crutches*. Although Perceval never used crutches and needed the aid of a stick only in the first months at the Cartographic unit, Arthur would give him the symbol of the cripple.

In early 1942 Arthur and John Perceval had pored over art books in the State Library together, searching for inspiration and instruction. Two years on, they appear to be playing off each other, using symbols to register their reaction to incidents shared. "All the paintings tell stories, mine and Arthur's", Perceval admitted.⁴⁵¹

In March 1944 as Arthur depicts a fall, a death, in *The Cemetery I*, his South Melbourne paintings draw to a close. On the other hand, John Perceval March 1944 presents a beginning, not an end: he pictures the dawn of a new day. As his biographer describes:

In *Setting Moon Surprised by the Dawn* the Jack-in-the-Box surprises the cockerel. With dawn it is about to surprise the lovers who copulate beneath a haloed van Gogh moon. Perhaps the lovers must part at daybreak which catches them still engrossed, to the right corner of the painting. Day will break at 5 a.m. and the hands of the clock show five to five. Perceval's clock often adds an element of tension, here confirming that a dawn scene is being witnessed.⁴⁵²

The Jack-in-the-Box is used in many of Perceval's works. In 1942 it made its first appearance in a room resembling the studio (a stable) in which Arthur and John briefly worked together.⁴⁵³ *Soldiers at Luna Park* 1944, incorporated a portrait of Arthur and

⁴⁵¹ "All the paintings tell stories ..." John Perceval to Ken McGregor. Ken McGregor interview.

⁴⁵² "In *Setting Moon Surprised by Dawn* ..." Traudi Allen, *John Perceval*: Melbourne University Press, Hong Kong, 1992.

⁴⁵³ "The Jack-in-the-Box is used ..." The stable window is depicted in many of Perceval's interiors. There was only a short period Perceval and Boyd were in the cartographic together (Jan – June 1942). As Arthur

Yvonne.⁴⁵⁴ They stand in front of a carousel. Arthur is in army uniform and the peaks of the Digger's hat have been exaggerated to look like horns. Behind them a grinning jester springs like a Jack-in-the-Box from an ornamental circular spout. This image bears a strong resemblance to the ghostly figure rising from an ornamental chimney stack in Arthur's work of October 1943 *The Butterfly Hunter*.

Has Perceval already identified himself in Arthur's work? Is he now answering with a self-portrait, picturing himself as a Jack-the-Lad, the Joker – amusing but threatening, contained yet confrontational? In *Setting Moon Surprised by the Dawn* 1944, is Perceval recalling his father and his childhood memory of the slaughter of chickens? Or is the debilitating hold on the cockerel a reference to Arthur's nickname, "Chooky boy"? All is clandestine, sexual. The lid on Jack's coffin-like box has obscured the faces of the lovers. Gondolas float towards a phallic-shaped stream of light which penetrates the arch of a bridge.

In Perceval's *Hornblower at Night*, 1944, a woman sits protected, partially obscured and sheltered under an umbrella and recalls Arthur's earlier work, *Lovers on a bench*. Another female (once again a blonde with her back turned, her face obscured) runs naked in the rain. Jack-in-the-Box embodies ecstatic transport. He is the tunnel of love; his backbone forms its arch. Hornblower certainly bears a resemblance to the intruder peeking around the door of the stable in *Floating Mask I*. He wields an object so phallic it leaves little doubt as to the pun in the title. As the woman turns her back on Hornblower, Jack-in-the-Box appears to level his gaze towards him, flashing a wide, jeering grin; seemingly more interested in his effect on Hornblower than the woman he is seducing.

We know Arthur was taking inspiration from stories and poetry. In his own words Eliot "certainly influenced things a great deal".⁴⁵⁵ We see the influence of Edgar Allen Poe in *The Organist*. It is credible that the pavilion in Arthur's 1944 painting of *The Tent*, and perhaps even the bandstand in earlier works, although inspired by an actual South Melbourne landmark, may have held a connection to William Blake. Arthur's universe - his suns and his worlds -- at once both shadowed and feverish, merge with Blake's words and images: "...And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning ..."

Blake was the motivation for more than one of Sidney Nolan's works and in one painting, *The Eternals Closed the Tent*, 1940, Nolan borrowed his title directly from

discussed with Richard Haese: "We converted an old stable into a studio – it was pretty bleak ... I think that ... *Progression* ... was the only picture that I did in it ... I got transferred (to Bendigo) after that".

⁴⁵⁴ In *John Perceval* (op cit) Allen states that the "...foreground subjects ... of *Soldiers at Luna Park* ... were Perceval's friends Arthur Boyd and Yvonne Lennie."

⁴⁵⁵ "Eliot ... certainly influenced things a great deal". Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

Blake's *First Book of Urizen*. Arthur was aware of Nolan's use of this image as a symbol of captivity in his set design for the Ballets Russes company in 1940. In 1941 Arthur viewed Blake's drawing in the State Library and in 1943 he gave a book of Blake's poetry to Yvonne for her twenty-third birthday.

Arthur first met Nolan in the latter's Russell Street studio, where he had come to view Nolan's first one-man show. Arthur recalled the walls of the "bombed out sort of studio at the back of the National Gallery" were covered with "hundred and hundreds of ... Kleeish drawings". He introduced himself to Nolan as "a painter" but as he cast his eye around the room full of abstracts and collages he qualified that with, "not as modern as this". As usual Arthur kept his true opinion to himself: he thought "everything very fresh but ... babyish". His view would change, however, when Nolan became "more interested in the Australian landscape".⁴⁵⁶ Nolan had two memories of this meeting: Arthur was sporting leggings and he was "very gentle indeed".⁴⁵⁷

Sidney Nolan was three years older than Arthur. He had grown up son of a tram driver, had discouraged from pursuing his love of painting. Unlike Arthur, Nolan's talent had been recognised and nurtured by no one other than himself. During the six years he worked as spray painter of advertising and display stands, he read avidly and seriously, following the Melbourne University syllabus. In 1934, the year Arthur started working at Uncle Madder's paint factory, Nolan enrolled in night classes at the National Gallery School but, like so many of his peer group, he found far more instruction within the art books in the Public Library.

Nolan, after separating from his first wife, with (according to Nolan) some questionable encouragement from the Reeds⁴⁵⁸ lived at Heide, off and on, for eight years. April 1942 he was conscripted into the army. In December that year, Nolan painted an industrial scene with gabled roof tops and a smoking factory chimney: images that will be seen in Arthur's work within the next two years, and ever after.⁴⁵⁹ Nolan's work, stacked in the hallway and always on display at Heide, would have been accessible to Arthur after his initial visit in the first half of 1943. When Arthur was later stationed in South Melbourne, amongst the scenery Nolan had depicted, perhaps Arthur made a connection between Nolan, Heide, and his own entrapment.

When Bert Tucker first met Sidney Nolan, he used the same descriptive for Nolan as Nolan had used for Arthur, "gentle." But behind Nolan's "slightly oblique ... ethereal" façade, Bert saw "the scientist and the man of steel". Tucker glimpsed Arthur's hidden steel, too. He would watch Arthur listening to people arguing and talking, seemingly unaware of what was going on. However, as Tucker astutely noted, if anyone bothered

⁴⁵⁶ "He introduced himself to Nolan ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁴⁵⁷ "Nolan had two memories of this meeting ..." Letter written by Sidney Nolan from Dimboola, 5 November, 1942. *Sidney Nolan: Landscapes and Legends*, Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1987.

⁴⁵⁸ "Nolan became a foundation member of the C.A.S. ..." According to Nolan, he learnt some years later from Elizabeth Paterson's mother that John Reed had told Elizabeth that she was ruining Nolan's life and that he could never become a proper painter while they were married. Reported in *Such is life* op cit.

⁴⁵⁹ "On the December 4 that year, Nolan painted ..." This Sidney Nolan work is in the 'Heide' Collection.

to ask Arthur a question, "in that curious bumbling way ... he'd suddenly come right in on the central point".⁴⁶⁰

Arthur saw Bert Tucker as "an extremely powerful influence ... quite an exceptional personality ... interested in just about every intellectual aspect of art that you could touch on".⁴⁶¹ Tucker was free with his knowledge but secretive about his work. In later years Arthur, and other painters in the peer group, would remember Tucker's reluctance to expose his newest paintings, covering them up whenever he had visitors to his studio. Tucker's work held little sway over Arthur, who was "sufficiently self-obsessed ... self-absorbed".⁴⁶² However, Tucker's deep knowledge of Eliot was an influence. When Tucker discovered Eliot's preoccupation with loss of spirit in modern culture, it hit a chord; it was "a simple act of recognition". There is little doubt Tucker regaled Arthur with his thoughts on the poet and, on weekends when he visited the tiny studio flat in Fitzroy, while he sat and talked, he recalled Arthur painting "the houses, gargoyles, characters on crutches, coffins and so on".⁴⁶³

Bert Tucker would have recognised Henry Street in many of Arthur's working drawings and paintings. In 2004, standing at the top of the street where the old studio once topped the garage, Arthur's perspective remains. Parallel rows of small Victorian working-class terrace houses narrow to a horizontal row that blocks the horizon line. As Arthur painted, Bert talked. It is likely he read Eliot's poem *Gerontion* to Arthur. The conjuring in the poem of a 'decayed house', and passion 'reconsidered ... lost ... adulterated', a 'flowering judas', a betrayal and a 'heart ... removed' would have hit the heart of the eldest son 'in a rented house' removed from the 'old man driven ... To a sleepy corner'.⁴⁶⁴

Usually Arthur was taciturn with his titles, using them as pure identification: *Seated Figure Embracing Kneeling Figure ... Prostrate Figure with Ladder ...* and so on. In *Flower-headed Figure in Chair with Crouching Figure in Street* he elaborates on his usual clueless title and reveals his emotional source, *Gerontion* (Eliot).⁴⁶⁵ A road illustrates Arthur's journey -- the gabled army huts, the factory chimneys and the terrace houses. At the end of this road is his father's chair. The old man, seated, wears his hair in the manner of a jester, tied and decorated with the flowery pom-poms worn by victims in *The Baths* and *The Cripples*, a garland for Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, the Holy Fool. Holding one hand palm up he reveals like Goya's revolutionary hero in *Third of May 1808* the raw wound of crucifixion, the stigmata. The crouching, stricken figure is not yet over the hearth but still in the street, suggesting the journey has not yet been completed, or that he is metaphorically cast out, homeless.

⁴⁶⁰ "However, as Tucker astutely noted ..." Richard Haese interview. Manuscripts. SLV

⁴⁶¹ "Arthur saw Bert Tucker as "an extremely powerful influence ..." Arthur Boyd, Haese interview, December, 1974.

⁴⁶² "While Tucker's work held little sway over Arthur ..." Arthur Boyd, Haese interview, op cit.

⁴⁶³ "There is little doubt Tucker regaled Arthur ..." Albert Tucker, Haese interview.

⁴⁶⁴ T.S. Eliot: *Gerontion*

⁴⁶⁵ "In *Flower-headed Figure in Chair with Crouching Figure in Street ...*" Catalogue 99. *Arthur Boyd Drawings*.

Throughout his life, Arthur renders and re-renders this image, in an ongoing quest to “capture the strength of feeling ... the tenderness of the father’s hands on his son”⁴⁶⁶ that Rembrandt achieved in his great painting, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. The Prodigal Son was a subject that represented an umbilical cord to his father. It was an image Arthur had grown up with, as deeply rooted in his memory as the mulberry tree, whose canopy had struggled unsuccessfully over the years to preserve his father’s plaster sculpture.

By adopting the subject of a master, Arthur challenged preconceptions. There is no richness or grandeur here; no fine, deliberately executed pen marks describing a family of great stature. With swift rendering Arthur invites his audience to see the cripple and the fool with the eyes of Murrumbeena residents and the pupils in his school room. He puts us in the position of judging by traditional standards. Do we turn away without really looking into the loosely executed lines, dismissing what we see as slight and unimportant because it appears simple, strange, different? Arthur challenges us to look beyond form to spirit, to “feel” intensely, to find mutability.

As the wounded reach towards each other, perhaps it is only now at this point in his life that the son is able to feel, from the perspective of the forsaken outsider, the sufferings of the father.

⁴⁶⁶ “Throughout his life Arthur renders and re-renders this image...” Boyd, Arthur. *Arthur Boyd Drawings*, preface Laurie Thomas. Sydney, 1973.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Through the Unknown, Remembered Gate⁴⁶⁷

*"He took such cognizance of men and things,
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw;
If any cursed a woman, he took note;
Yet stared at nobody – you stared at him
The town's true master, if the town but knew!..."*
'How it Strikes a Contemporary', Robert Browning

⁴⁶⁷ T.S. Eliot: *Four Quartets*

The Arthur Boyd who came out of the army was a different man from the one who went in. His Certificate of Discharge from the Citizen Military Forces, dated March 25, 1944, bears witness to that. It states that, after serving for one hundred years, this eleven-foot tall black man was decorated with the Victoria Cross. These are the scratchy pen and ink adjustments and additions, scrawled by an obviously deliriously happy Arthur Boyd, across the piece of official paper that guaranteed his freedom.

The Army was not in mourning either. Arthur's final military career, as trusted carrier of sensitive information, probably hit rock bottom when Cartographic Headquarters began receiving calls from police stations lining the route from Bendigo to Melbourne. Concerned citizens had been flocking in with maps stamped 'Top Secret' that they had found littering the streets and fields. Like Mr Magoo, Arthur had whistled along his route unaware his cargo was streaming out behind him – a one man ticker-tape parade. One superior of Arthur's remembered him rushing up to him, quite distraught, with the news that he had forgotten where he had left his truck. Another friend swears that in the middle of rush hour, in the centre of Melbourne, Arthur just got out of his Army truck and walked away.

Two days after his release from the Army, still in a state of shocked euphoria, Arthur rushed into John Reed's office to deliver a painting for a book cover. He brought along a piece of work three times too big which made no allowance for title or author's name, and had forgotten to bring the manuscript Reed had loaned him. But Reed found Arthur entirely forgivable. He and Sunday had now met all the Boyds and thought them "a strange and lovely family".⁴⁶⁸

Reed had exhibited and purchased Arthur's *Progression*, a work embraced by Vic O'Connor as social realism at its most promising. It depicts David Boyd pushing Carl Cooper in a wheelchair down a suburban street. Cooper, although a Murrumbidgee neighbour, had only recently been introduced to the Boyd family through John Perceval, who had met Cooper in hospital when they were both suffering from, what was then known as, infantile paralysis. In *Progression* space is compressed, claustrophobic, threatening. The figures move insistently towards the viewer, seemingly on a collision course, suggesting that soon all will be victims; not only those inside but those outside the frame.

Robert Hughes considered Arthur's turning away from his past considered technique, a "brave act ... the painter trying, dutifully, to be graceless and get rid of his vocabulary."⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ "But Arthur had become ..." Extract of letter written by John Reed to Max Harris, 29 November, 1943. Throughout the chapters letters of John Reed have been obtained through a number of sources: from *Letters of John Reed: Defining Australian Cultural Life 1920-1981*, ed. Barrett Reid and Nancy Underhill, Penguin Books Australia Ltd., Australia, Victoria, 2001; from Reed, Tucker & Langley boxes, Manuscripts, State Library of Victoria; from Alannah Coleman's papers at the Tate Gallery archives, London, and from the Bundanon archives.

⁴⁶⁹ "Robert Hughes considered ..." Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, pg. 156 Penguin, Australia, 1970.

Arthur, since his return to Melbourne, had been steadily submitting works to the CAS with an entirely new 'vocabulary' and John Reed was so impressed that he had come to the conclusion that Arthur could "probably be truly called a genius." He thought *The Pavilion* (*The Tent*, August 1943) "an outstanding painting" and had reproduced it in *Angry Penguins*. Comparing this work to Arthur's peer group (with the exception of Nolan) Reed believed it carried "by far the most powerful motive responses". By the end of 1944, in a letter to Munroe Wheeler, the Director of Exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, John Reed wrote of Arthur: "[He] comes from a family which seems to have a natural and intuitive artistic genius. The intense imaginative quality of his paint, his unusual colour sense and disturbing lyricism have made him one of the most noticeable local painters".

Arthur told John Reed that he had been released from the Army on the condition that he produce utilitarian pottery. Before the war household crockery had been mostly imported, but by 1944 crockery had become scarce and home-based manufacture was necessary and encouraged. Perhaps this had helped Arthur's sales pitch, and the Army, now on the home run to victory, was happy to be convinced. It was a nebulous plan; according to Alan McCulloch, it had been hatched at his recommendation. Arthur had hit a low point, wondering how he could survive: "How on earth is a person like me ever going to earn a living ...all I can do is paint?" When McCulloch suggested making use of Merric's pottery, Arthur appeared lukewarm. By midnight, after hours had ticked by, Arthur had worked himself up into a state of such positive excitement that he rushed off into the night, swearing, "I'm going to do it right now".⁴⁷⁰

On the other hand Peter Herbst recalls Arthur describing the pottery scheme "with distant amusement ... he didn't think it would happen".⁴⁷¹ What Arthur did know, with empty pocket certainty, was that he wasn't making any money from his expressionist paintings. The only people buying Arthur's work in 1943/44 were John and Sunday Reed and they were paying little more than he had earned as a teenager; they saw it as their right to purchase works under market price and money was so tight that few artists attempted to haggle. The optimistic, semi-traditional landscapes that could have guaranteed an income seemed beyond Arthur's emotional reach. Perhaps, too, the Reeds, along with Arthur's peer group, formed a line of resistance to this type of painting that Arthur didn't have the strength to push.

Taking sides was alien to Arthur. It made him feel uncomfortable. He thought it arrogant to insist his views and beliefs on others. Yet he couldn't avoid the distressing, discordant views of his friends as they began to form separate and volatile groups within the CAS. There had been a period of relative quiet after John Reed ousted George Bell in 1938 but, during late 1942, disunity between the Communist Party and the C.A.S began to cause major disruption. The differences between John Reed and J.D. Blake, National Secretary of the Communist Party, expanded into a public debate on whether politics

⁴⁷⁰ "It was a nebulous plan ..." Alan McCulloch. *All Those Wonderful Summers* Art Gallery of NSW archives.

⁴⁷¹ "On the other hand Peter Herbst recalls ..." Interview Peter Herbst.

should influence art, and what form that art should take. Arthur, the flip-side of didactic, never indulged in polemics and was certainly not inclined to use art as a medium for propaganda.

Much of the argument was aired in the Reed-Harris publication, *Angry Penguins*, with Vic O'Connor and Noel Counihan facing Bert Tucker in the verbal ring, all throwing and blocking political and art theoretical punches. Blake took exception to one of the magazine's editors, Max Harris, who was an expelled member of the Communist Party. He wrote to Reed stating that he found Harris "a pompous egocentric with a high-school boy's mentalitythe type of intellectual who will never be able to work with ordinary working people."⁴⁷² Reed's letter in response was tart but restrained, seeking to be conciliatory. But the patrician in John, and his underlying sense of noblesse oblige, must have been a considerable irritant to Blake. This is subtly underlined in the postscript: "PS Max, by the way, works very well with ordinary working people. I have assured you already that he is a remarkable man!"

Blake, a first-class doctrinarian, a man who believed in the imminent collapse of capitalism,⁴⁷³ thought it his duty to overhaul the work of the intellectuals in his own party, and would eventually lose support from within. June 30, 1944, a crucial election meeting ostensibly swung on the debate as to whether or not James Quinn, a traditionalist, would be admitted as a member of the C.A.S. Quinn was an unwitting tool with which to challenge the modernism of the Reed faction. The party fell between those behind the Communist Party (the 'social realists' who believed art, particularly in a time of fascism, should be employed as a weapon for change) and those backing Reed, who saw art as free, individual, intuitive: the symbolists, surrealists, expressionists.

Ironically it was the members Reed viewed as staunch opponents of the CAS: ("O'Connor & Co") Vic O'Connor, Noel Counihan and Yosl Bergner who argued the liberal case. They pointed out, reasonably, that Quinn's rejection made nonsense of a society created to embrace every kind of artist. O'Connor saw Reed as an "art godfather" and promoter of the avant-garde who was changing the CAS into "something that was not originally meant to be."⁴⁷⁴ One of Blake's lost faithful would be Yosl Bergner, who riled at Blake's instruction to change the subject matter of his paintings, to discard the truth (as Yosl saw it) in favour of the politics of the day. That's how Arthur saw it too: just politics. In later years O'Connor admitted: "a lot of manipulation went on, on both sides... it became a bit of a knock down, drag out fight."⁴⁷⁵ When asked why he left Melbourne for England at the end of the 1950s, Arthur replied he was tired of "shaping up." When Arthur used the words "shaping up", he would illustrate it by shadow boxing.

⁴⁷² "Blake took exception to one of the magazine's editors ..." Reed letters. In fact Harris's 'high-school boy's mentality' was far from shabby. As a 'kid' in Brisbane he had hired a hall to announce God was dead, and at the age of 16 had read all of Jung and Freud.

⁴⁷³ "Blake, a first-class doctrinarian ..." Vic O'Connor/Blackman interview, Oral History, NLA

⁴⁷⁴ "O'Connor saw Reed as ..." Ibid

⁴⁷⁵ "In later years O'Conner was candid ..." Ibid

Arthur was opposed to the “tyranny of the academic bully boys at the top who said that art had to conform to certain requirements” and in the same breath mentioned Menzies and his attempt to establish his academy of art.⁴⁷⁶ He believed the splitting of the Right and Left to be “a cruel business” and sympathised with the Left, believing “they really didn’t get a look in because of Melbourne’s class ridden society... if you weren’t of the establishment you weren’t there.”⁴⁷⁷ Arthur found Melbourne “a terribly snobbish place”. He saw it in the way his old school friend, Keith Nichols, was treated: “there was a snobbery about Keith Nichol being a state school boy. I had a different cache because of my father and mother ... painters and writers.”⁴⁷⁸

Yet despite his disaffection for society and societies the survivor in Arthur (the adolescent who lobbied for escape to Rosebud and the young soldier who extricated himself from the machine gun unit) placed his bet on Reed. Arthur saw the C.A.S “as a way of exhibiting” and the only thing Arthur wanted to do was paint. He “loved the painting” from Brueghel to Blake to Cezanne but “couldn’t get on with the talk”.⁴⁷⁹ He didn’t embrace the new with the same fervour as Sidney Nolan, trusting his eye more than his ear; and while the ‘ists’ and ‘isms’ were being expounded, Arthur quietly found “an abstract element in any little section of a Hieronymus Bosch” and considered him a “better example of surrealism than Dali.”⁴⁸⁰

He longed to be left alone to work, without lengthy analysis or politics. While stationed in Bendigo, Arthur sent a letter to Reed apologising for his absence from the CAS general meeting:

It was not good of me not to go to the meeting John P told me that you were sad I am very annoyed with myself and feel like a heel Had I known a day sooner! Its no use telling any more I am still very sorry How Bad.⁴⁸¹

Yvonne believed that Arthur became a member of the CAS council because he was “dragooned by John Reed.” Nevertheless Arthur was attracted. He felt it was “exciting ... the core of something ... original.”⁴⁸²

Certainly John Reed seemed sure of Arthur’s commitment at this time. In a letter to Max Harris he reveals that his vote for president in the June election will be Tucker. His vote for vice-president will go to “Tucker if defeated for President, otherwise Nolan, or if he does not stand (as he may not), then Boyd”.⁴⁸³ Perhaps the society could have soldiered on with different views but Reed would, on this particular occasion, juggle art ideology

⁴⁷⁶ “Arthur was opposed to” Arthur Boyd, *The Age*, 29 September, 1981.

⁴⁷⁷ “He believed the splitting of the Right and Left ...” Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

⁴⁷⁸ “I had a different cache ...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁴⁷⁹ “Arthur saw the CAS “as a way of exhibiting”, Arthur Boyd, Richard Haese interview, Melbourne, 2 December, 1974. Bundanon archives.

⁴⁸⁰ “He didn’t embrace the new ...” Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

⁴⁸¹ “His vote for vice-president will go to ...” Reed letters.

⁴⁸² “He felt it was “exiting ...” ...” Arthur Boyd, Haese interview

⁴⁸³ “His vote for Vice-President will go to ...” Extract from letter of John Reed to Max Harris, 16 June, 1944. Reed letters.

with politics and call in proxy votes to win his point (and only just win control). By doing so he split the society.

Arthur shrank from the “endless verbal battles” conducted in “Angry Penguins and other magazines”: they seemed “pretty uninteresting”.⁴⁸⁴ On one occasion in the drawing room of Heide, Joy Hester tried to stir up Arthur’s blood by attempting an analysis of music, at one point describing Brahms as “bullshit”. She baited Arthur for over three hours only to be “worn down” by his obstinacy. Her frustration poured out in a letter to Bert Tucker: “Arthur seems to have a completely pacifist attitude ... he says ‘how can one criticise music when for all we know we may be completely wrong?’”⁴⁸⁵ This was a time when it was *de rigueur* to stridently have an opinion, to firmly hold a view, yet Arthur would never fly a flag. He saw his job as work “on the two-dimensional surface”: there was no right or wrong way to go about it. His roundabout explanation formed an all-embracing circle: “you can put all sorts of ideas on a painting and they can be quite right, but then somebody else can have equally forward views and they can equally be quite right but be the opposite to yours”.⁴⁸⁶

With the exception of the C.A.S, Arthur remained a conscientious objector in every fracas. Arthur could never have become close to the Reeds for this reason alone. A firm friend, both of Arthur and the Reeds, observed: “John and Sunday didn’t like Arthur’s mode ... he didn’t get talking to them”.⁴⁸⁷ The Reeds needed the stimulus of people who exposed their minds and Arthur rarely revealed his. Neither was he in search of a safe haven or a surrogate family, as were the majority of the Reed stable. He felt that visiting the Reeds was “going out”. It was a place where people were “always on their best behaviour, a place where he “never felt completely relaxed ... never wanted to spend a lot of time ...”⁴⁸⁸

The painter, Lawrence Hope, a visitor to Heide in the forties before he moved to Melbourne in the fifties, observed that Arthur followed “his own direction”, kept “a certain distance”.⁴⁸⁹ Arthur admitted in later years he felt in danger of being “absorbed into a world” in which he would be “too inhibited to break out of”. The overriding issue for Arthur was the realisation that if he became too deeply involved with the Reeds he “might develop certain hatreds” that he “didn’t need to have”. His upbringing had been one of universal acceptance, and besides, the restrictiveness of army life had been enough to last Arthur a lifetime. At this point in his life he was strung to a high tension: “I felt I had had enough and that it was all I could do actually to paint... if you are

⁴⁸⁴ “... Arthur shrank from the “endless verbal battles ...” Arthur Boyd, Haese interview.

⁴⁸⁵ “Her frustration poured out in a letter to Bert Tucker ...” Joy Hester to Bert Tucker (undated, most likely written between May and September 1943 as John and Mary accompany Arthur but no mention is made of Yvonne) Tucker papers.

⁴⁸⁶ “His roundabout explanation...” Arthur Boyd, Haese interview

⁴⁸⁷ “A firm friend, both of Arthur and the Reeds ...” Neil Douglas interviews extended to two telephone interviews in December 2000 and January 2001, and an interview in Nhill, Victoria on 21, 22 October, 22, 2001.

⁴⁸⁸ “He felt that visiting the Reeds was “going out ...” Arthur Boyd, Haese interview.

⁴⁸⁹ “The painter, Lawrence Hope ...” Interview Lawrence Hope, London, November 2004.

involved with people in their actual emotional lives it takes time and also it takes a lot of energy".⁴⁹⁰

"We were so jubilant when he got out of the army", Yvonne recalled. "He had been given a felt hat and a single breasted grey suit and we took it to the nearest second hand shop and got ten bob for it". Money was a problem, yet Arthur and Yvonne didn't move back to Murrumbeena. Why? Yvonne believes it was because "Perceval was in Arthur's studio, occupying that pretty well, and we couldn't go back before he decided to move out".⁴⁹¹ It was John's marriage to Mary in November of 1944 that settled issues. Doris had drawn the line against Mary marrying until she turned eighteen. It was only after the marriage that John Perceval moved in with Mary, but even then Merric was anxious, demanding to know who the man was in his daughter's bedroom.

The wedding ceremony was conducted in the Brown Room and Merric took charge. He spoke of Love, God and his own happy marriage, which, he sweetly informed all those assembled, he viewed it as one long honeymoon. Finally he instructed the redundant Reverend Stanley Neighbour and all those present to kneel and join him in prayer. The Reeds, who had bought the wedding cake, were on their knees alongside Sidney Nolan who was on the run from the authorities, having gone AWOL in July. Lucy and Hatton Beck were there and Yvonne recalls it was all "very domestic". She and Sidney Nolan were the official witnesses.

Arthur returned home when John married Mary and, in the last months of 1944, an abrupt change occurred in Arthur's paintings. His earlier South Melbourne works, those Yvonne described as "...slightly crazy ones with brilliant colour and little flying figures ... mostly painted in Fitzroy", the ones she thought "neurotic" and John Perceval pronounced, "pretty twisted",⁴⁹² stopped. When Arthur moved back home, landscape replaced the empty stage of South Melbourne. When Arthur re-established himself within the family group he no longer dated his works.

Two Lovers is a bridging painting, midway between concreted emptiness and wild fertility. When Sidney Nolan viewed this work at Murrumbeena in 1944 he saw "the bush, ...very golden ...very pastoral". But there was an 'x-factor', something he hadn't seen before in Australian art: "it had an added dimension ... the figures being involved in the landscape in a very curious way". Arthur's painting proved to be a revelation to Nolan, one that would change his life. Nolan recalled thinking "there's a message in that for me ... I can use it ... put something against the bush ...completely opposite." Arthur

⁴⁹⁰ "At this point in his life ..." Arthur Boyd, Haese interview.

⁴⁹¹ "Yvonne believes it was because "Perceval was in Arthur's studio ..." This reason for not returning to 'Open Country' was supported by both David and Lucy Boyd.

⁴⁹² "John Perceval pronounced" Interview Ken McGregor.

Boyd's *Two Lovers*, also known as *The Good Shepherd*, would trigger the most famous, the most iconic image in Australian art -- "the black mask of Kelly".⁴⁹³

In *Two Lovers* the threatening, fecund wilderness has not yet been introduced. Instead, the stage is washed in soft, open-field light. The persistent triangle remains in the shape of a pair of lovers and a shepherd. The male lover, with limbs belonging to the metamorphosing butterfly man, faces his audience with the same eye-blinding directness as the lover in *The Orchard*. If related to that picture, this lover could be read as 'evil'. In *The Orchard* an impaled head hovers over a figure that bears a striking resemblance to the male figure in the *Two Lovers*. Arthur saw this Christ-like head as a spiritual symbol, to keep evil away".⁴⁹⁴ The expression of the lover in both works mirrors the same condition -- exposure. It is the moment of recognition: that frozen second when the hunted realises it is caught in the cross-hairs of the hunter. The lovers, cradling or copulating, cling. Sheep graze. A shepherd in the distance, head bowed, rides slowly by on horseback. The mood could be pastoral, almost tranquil: *almost* the landscape of Rosebud but for a ewe and rutting ram, juxtaposed with the lovers, that rent the scene. Given that the flesh tone and texture of the couple is identical to the tree under which they shelter, is there a suggestion of pantheism? Is the shepherd (and the viewer) positioned as the interloper? Or is the artist, by placing the lovers on the same level and proportionate and parallel to the beasts, suggesting an out-of-kilter world, a world where human love is at best lustful, at worst soulless?

As the cripple exited, the ram entered.⁴⁹⁵ In later paintings the ram will be replaced with a beast. This image will continually be associated with lovers, usually in a forceful and sometimes monstrous way, but at times it will represent unassailable energy and fertility (perhaps in acknowledgement of the necessity of procreation and positive Darwinian links).

Arthur was aware of Shakespeare's tale of Othello⁴⁹⁶, the princely warrior, weakened by the affliction of epilepsy but destroyed by the disease of jealousy. There are similarities of images in Arthur's work and the images described in *Othello*: the creatures: the "black ram tugging the white ewe... the beast with two backs;" and the toad (frog), "...I had rather be a toad/And live upon the vapour of a dungeon/Than keep a corner in the thing I love for others' uses". Like the madman Arthur saw running up and down the beach in South Melbourne flying his white handkerchief behind him, Othello is similarly controlled and driven to madness by a white handkerchief. Othello, the lover/madman,

⁴⁹³ "When Sidney Nolan viewed this work at Murrumbidgee in 1944 ..." Sidney Nolan's quotes are to be found on the audio track to *Sidney Nolan: An Australian Dream* - a co-production between Don Bennetts and the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1982.

⁴⁹⁴ "In *The Orchard* an impaled head ..." Gunn tapes (see reference to 'The Mockers' in preceding chapter.)

⁴⁹⁵ "As the cripple exited, the ram entered". The cripple will appear throughout the years in minor roles throughout Arthur's works; his identity will change, but never will he be shown as such unrelenting emphasis.

⁴⁹⁶ "Arthur was aware of Shakespeare's tale of Othello..." At this point in time, while living in Fitzroy, Yvonne's diary records that she was reading and copying out passages of *Othello*.

believing he is the outsider in a love triangle, pleads: "...nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction..."

Arthur found instruction for his shadowing passion in his images. When questioned once about the symbol of the ram, he recalled exactly when he had first used it and free-associated John Perceval with the symbol: "there was a drawing of John Perceval's he did of a ram I think when he first came to live at Murrumbeena."⁴⁹⁷ In fact, in John's portfolio of drawings, rams were recorded in 1942, and again in 1943. Perhaps Perceval's 1942/43 self-portrait titled *Recollection of the Artist as a Small Boy Riding a Goat*⁴⁹⁸ influenced Arthur's image of a man riding a ram. According to Ken McGregor, "John saw the truth" in Arthur's early paintings: "he interpreted them ... he saw himself, time and time again ... artists don't really lie ... John could take it, he accepted it ... saw it and knew it absolutely."⁴⁹⁹ Given John Perceval's forthright nature there is every chance he confronted Arthur. In defence and to preserve his freedom of expression, perhaps Arthur simply changed symbols, embracing another Dostoevsky opportunity to "cover up". The ram would serve Arthur well, becoming a form into which he would pour feelings related to many different people and circumstances. Although landscape had returned after a drought of almost four years, the "obsessive-compulsive ... world of introspection," which Franz Philipp diagnosed in these early works, would not end. The "crucifixion of desire" depicting "sexual union", that Philipp astutely saw then, would remain a life-long obsession.⁵⁰⁰

Exactly when it occurred to Arthur that the pottery shop of his brother-in-law, Hatton Beck, would offer a perfect site for his proposed pottery is not certain. Perhaps Hatton's late decision to enlist in the armed forces was prompted by the prospect of his brothers-in-law (by this time John had decided to join Arthur) descending not only upon the house but upon his business, whether he remained in it or not. With his sons, Lawrence and Robert, under the age of four, Hatton would have welcomed a regular income from the Air Force, along with the one hundred and fifty pounds he was asking in exchange for the goodwill in his business (there was no mortgage involved, the premises were rented.) Some time between the close of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 Hatton sold his 'crocery' business.⁵⁰¹ The cost was split three ways between Peter Herbst, John Perceval and Arthur. Peter was the business partner: he had "no illusion of being an artist of any note" but saw the move as an "anchor" fixing him fast, to both his adopted family in Murrumbeena and to Australia.

⁴⁹⁷ "...there was a drawing of John Perceval's ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce interview

⁴⁹⁸ "Perhaps Perceval's 1942/43 self-portrait ..." See Plate 2, *John Perceval*, Margaret Plant, Lansdowne Australian Art Library, 1971, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne..

⁴⁹⁹ "According to Ken McGregor, "John saw the truth" in Arthur's early paintings ... Interview Ken McGregor.

⁵⁰⁰ "The "crucifixion of sexual desire..." *Arthur Boyd*: Franz Philipp

⁵⁰¹ "With two small sons under the age of four ..." On Hatton Beck's 'Application for Enlistment as an Airman' for the Royal Australian Air Force, dated 22 February, 1945, he attests to having "recently sold" his "crocery manufacturing business." He withdraws his application for the 'interim air force' March, 1946.

The inclusion of Perceval was critical to the purchase. The pottery was bankrolled not only by Herbst but by Perceval's mother; Arthur's loan from her of fifty pounds was, according to Yvonne, paid back fastidiously. Merric's old equipment was rotting away in the garden and some of it, such as the blunger (a mechanical churn for making a slurry of clay and water) was resurrected for use in the new pottery, along with plaster moulds for teapots, cups and saucers, some so ancient they had been salvaged from the pottery fire.⁵⁰² Arthur would have been painfully aware that Merric's style, his organic forms dedicated to Australiana, were now more or less laughed at by the followers of fashion who hankered after English and Japanese inspired purity. Nevertheless he named the pottery, located at 500 Neerim Road, Murrumbena, 'Arthur Merric Boyd Potteries.' He was "cashing in", he said, on his father's reputation.⁵⁰³ They built a new gas kiln, installed a stillage and designed an electric wheel. When these changes took place or when the 'AMB' pottery actually began firing is not clear but on Hatton's enlistment form dated February 21, 1945, he states his "crookery manufacturing business" had recently been sold.

While Arthur had plans, Yvonne did not. She was a talented painter, but unsure of her talent. One or two of her pictures had been accepted in the annual exhibition of the CAS in Melbourne, but rejected in Sydney: "I wasn't their cup of tea at all." Her art-school prize-winning charcoal drawings of classical form "meant nothing to the CAS ... you had to be modern".⁵⁰⁴ When she first went to live at Murrumbena, she "wanted to be painting" and "was keen to be equal" but living in such close proximity to three other families, all involved with some form of creative work, and slammed up against the talent of Arthur and John Perceval, it was daunting. Years later Arthur would say, "My wife did paint too, but she got rather put off when she found there were so many Boyds ... they did rather swamp the ship, I suppose."⁵⁰⁵ Nevertheless she painted "a little" and in the 1945 CAS exhibition submitted *Apollo Bay* with the high price of twenty guineas (as opposed to seven pounds for a work by Mary Perceval and five pounds for a Joy Hester painting).

Day-to-day living took energy and time. Although the studio was not as cramped as Fitzroy, the facilities were fewer. The studio, sited next to a grove of elm trees, was dank and in winter extremely cold. The outdoor lavatory was shared by all. Although the bathroom in the main house was available, Yvonne used it infrequently as access meant entering through Doris's bedroom and she shrank from intruding. Instead, in a stoic, no-nonsense way, she would boil a couple of kettles on the twin kerosene burners that sufficed as a stove, and have makeshift baths in a tin tub.

Initially, Yvonne tried to assemble some structure, proposing that she take responsibility from Doris. When telling the story Yvonne seemed wryly amused, not quite recognising

⁵⁰² "Merric's old equipment was rotting away in the garden ..." Detail sourced from 'The Painter as Potter,' Geoffrey Edwards. Catalogue National Gallery of Victoria.

⁵⁰³ "He was "cashing in" ... Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

⁵⁰⁴ "Her art-school prize-winning charcoal drawings ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁵⁰⁵ "Years later Arthur would say ..." Arthur Boyd to Roger Bethoud, *The Times*, 'Arthur Boyd: part of a long light-drenched stream of Australian painters', February, 1977.

the young woman she had been. With a shake of her head she recalled: "I even offered to wear keys at my waist ..." Doris turned her down. Order was not the order of the day. No thought was given to dinner until appetite demanded it -- even on Christmas Day. Yvonne never entertained the idea of communal meals and, in the early years, went back home to her parents' home for Christmas lunch.

The family could never be anything but welcoming (Merric would refer to Yvonne as "Arthur's good lady"). Even so, Yvonne stood out in her new surroundings. She felt that Max Nicholson resented her. His visits were frequent: too frequent for Merric and Hatton to greet him with open arms. Nicholson paid attention to Lucy, bringing her flowers; the signal to Yvonne that Nicholson's arrival was imminent was that Doris would smarten herself up with a little powder and a pretty scarf: "it was her only outing." Merric was removed in his own world, but not to the extent that he failed to notice Doris's preparations; besides, when Nicholson was giving one of his readings it meant Merric's impromptu speeches and bible readings were shushed down. Doris leaned on Max Nicholson enormously. He was her master of ceremonies. To one regular of the Brown Room, he appeared to present himself as an impresario, the conductor of a talented troupe; he was a Diaghilev - "Here I have the Ballets Russes."⁵⁰⁶ Yvonne found Nicholson possessive of Arthur and the family and jealous of her. Peter Herbst wasn't warmly welcoming to her either. Her background represented the bourgeois world Herbst had rejected. He remembered her in those early days being "a bit stubborn." He thought she found it "hard to adapt" to the free-form existence of Open Country. "I don't think it was a happy time for her... she showed her displeasure ... she was extremely reticent ... she feared her family". Later, when Yvonne's parents visited, Herbst witnessed her anxiety: "when her father arrived the place had to be presentable".

By this time Arthur's talk of marriage had ceased. He had uncharacteristically stuck his heels in, making it plain that he was a painter and that was all he could do, and all he would do. "It was a pretty black and white statement ... he thought I ought to know that he wasn't likely, just because we got married, to go out and get a steady job and bring in money." Yvonne's superannuation from the bank, the sum of one hundred pounds, was being drawn on to help supplement their meagre incomes. While Arthur was engaged at the pottery during the day and painted at night, Yvonne travelled to town to work at O'Brien Publicity; still intent on writing, she enrolled as a part-time student at the University of Melbourne, majoring in Philosophy and English. She painted when she could.

It was left to Yvonne to propose: "I thought I had better get in on the act ... John and Mary had already got married in the Brown Room ... and coming from a middle class background I was feeling slightly ashamed of the situation". Yvonne still couldn't tell her parents she was living with Arthur. 'Living with the family' was an acceptable

⁵⁰⁶ "To one regular of the Brown Room, he appeared to present himself as an impresario ..." Interviews with Tim and Betty Burstall took place in Melbourne December 1999, November and December, 2000, November 2001, and with Betty Burstall March 2005. In some instances, when unsure of facts and times and when Betty's memory of situations differed from Tim's, he consulted his diary. In another instance he supplied a copy of a letter he had written after visiting England in the sixties.

phrase that allowed her parents to remain blind to the situation. But they distanced themselves. Marriage would mean she could invite her family out to visit. And Yvonne was feeling both the anxiety and the longing for a baby. Mary (six years younger) was expecting her first child in the winter of 1945, and Joy Hester, in February that year, had given birth to a boy she named Sweeney. Yvonne remembered thinking that she "didn't want to 'miss out' as they used to say then ... miss out on having children". Neither did she want to get pregnant outside marriage. "I was too high bound for that".

There are few memories of the wedding that took place on March 6, 1945, in the front parlour of Reverend Stanley Neighbour's manse in Oakleigh, on a weekday, after work. No one was invited. Friends and families were told about the ceremony only after it had taken place, Yvonne believing any celebration "would have been phoney: there we were living in the bosom of the family". Arthur didn't wear a suit; he didn't own one. Yvonne wore a green terry towelling dress she didn't much like, and rustled up the ring herself -- a silver band that had been a gift from Joy Hester. The minister's wife supplied a witness, the gas man, who, having gone to the trouble of combing his hair, appeared more excited about the event than anyone else present. No doubt Arthur kissed the bride but Yvonne recalled, "there was not much levity ... it was seriously undertaken."

And then April came, and levity left the world. "British troops shudder at the sights they see. They have seen war in its ugliest forms at Dunkirk, in Africa and in Italy, but they have never seen anything like Belsen, and a wave of horror is spreading through all ranks." Monday April 28 1945, and on the front page of the *Age*, slotted between giant headlines declaring 'Heart of Berlin pounded by Soviet Guns' and 'Fall of Bologna', in small type was 'Appalling Barbarity'-- two words heralding the story that would shame the twentieth century. The import mattered little. Words failed. The print merged into a sea of grey once the eye focused on the photograph at the bottom of the page. Hundreds of naked bodies, the agony of their deaths apparent from the transparent tissue of skin covering bone, were being spat out by the steel tongue of a bulldozer, tossed down into a deep burial pit. Their ghostly forms flailed as they fell, bone hitting bone, torso thumping torso, parchment white against a wall of dark earth. Even after the sixties, when freshly napalmed children ran towards the lens screaming for pity, even after half a century of intimate portraits of pain and death, we can't fail to comprehend the searing disbelief experienced by those less-hardened eyes of the 1940s.

That day: "Mrs. Boyd ... Have you seen the paper?" The seventeen-year old assistant at O'Brien Publicity needed to speak to Yvonne about what she had seen: "she whispered it almost." Yvonne never forgot the young girl's traumatised question. "It really had the most terrible impact ... the shock that ran through people ... we didn't *visualise* it ... those piles of bodies ... those white bony shapes we'd heard news items but they meant nothing... you got nothing at all in the way of information". Yvonne named it 'Der Tag'. Arthur didn't speak about it: "There would just be an exclamation ... he might swear or something ... he never discussed things like that ... he would listen to other people talking and ask lots of questions". Arthur, late in life, admitted that during this time "newspaper accounts and photographs had the most violent influence on my

development as a painter ...”⁵⁰⁷ In 1945, while Yvonne sought to find expression in her writings, and everyone discussed it, and later a British-made ten-minute newsreel showed it (Allied forces entering the concentration camps of Buchenwald and Belsen), Arthur silently processed it. Soon, and with great force, he would reveal his horror on canvas.

A puritanical streak, as unstoppable as the Yarra River, coursed through every stratum of Melbourne society. Yvonne’s fear of pregnancy outside marriage was not without foundation. Betty Rogers and Tim Burstall, two teenagers who began working at the pottery in 1945, were experiencing public humiliation and punishment because of it. Even in the late 1960’s the State of Victoria was prudish, to the extent that *Playboy* magazine was banned and an ‘entertainment tax’ imposed on the contraceptive pill. In April 1945, an indignant Mr A.J. Tout, president of the Public Service Association, gave voice in a newspaper article on behalf of the good and outraged citizens of the city. He railed against the decadence of “vulgarity called art ... jitterbugging ... boogie-woogie ... surrealist pictures” ... books written “by dirty minds and poems by debased cads” ... and plays “glorifying smart talk, and sculptured monstrosities”. In the same year, Norman Myer was so shocked at the subject matter of Arthur’s *Two Lovers* that he ordered the copulating sheep and lovers off the wall of his Myer Gallery, the venue of the CAS exhibition.⁵⁰⁸ Later, at another exhibition, a vigilant Mrs Grundy attempted to gouge the penis out of one of Arthur’s paintings with her castrating hatpin. In the face of war this Puritanism must have seemed even more mindlessness. Betty and Tim stood firm against this censoring society. In a city where it was considered daring to take off your gloves and carry them, and the removal of your hat was never entertained, Betty and Tim strode barefoot through the streets.⁵⁰⁹ Despite the eight-year age gap between the couples, both Yvonne and Arthur enjoyed the fact that Tim and Betty were “avant-garde and naughty” and they soon formed a friendship that would last a lifetime.

⁵⁰⁷ “Arthur, late in life, admitted” Extract of letter from Arthur Boyd to Meredith Gill, from Ramsholt, Suffolk, 8 August, 1980.

⁵⁰⁸ “In the same year, Norman Myer was so shocked ...” The following is an extract from an interview between Richard Haese and John Reed, on 20 September, 1973, when this particular 1945 Myers exhibition was discussed. John Reed’s abdication from responsibility is interesting. So too is his lack of empathy for the poverty of the artists at that time. Arthur’s pacifism and fence sitting aside, the fact the exhibition may have been cancelled would no doubt have been a major reason why Arthur was reluctant to make a stand.

Reed is asked to comment on a past quote: “At this gallery we were confronted with our first and only case of censorship, when we were told that Arthur Boyd’s famous *Lovers* could not be hung for fear of offending customers. It was a case of removing the paintings or losing the gallery and being left stranded at the last minute with nowhere to hold our exhibition. We felt compelled to give way, under strong protest.”

Reed supplies this footnote: “That’s not completely the whole story ... I was all for having a fight over it but Arthur Boyd was absolutely terrified at the thought of any sort of confrontation over his painting and he insisted on withdrawing the painting. That was more or less the decisive factor – Arthur wouldn’t fight.”

⁵⁰⁹ “In a city where it was considered daring ...” Yvonne Boyd interview.

Betty's first impressions were: Arthur was "pretty twitchy ... he was negotiating my wages ... trying to be a business man ... driving a hard bargain ..."; John was "so funny", performing a "Mickey Rooneyish ... a Ginger Meggs" role; and David "played on my mother's piano ... in a Byronic fashion ... a romantic beautiful genius ..." While the other two were busy playing to the gallery, Arthur, covered in shyness and ineptitude, was left to give credence to the job offer and shoulder the work of discussing finances; it was a chore he, perhaps even more than John Perceval or David, would ordinarily have disdained. The impression Tim Burstall quickly formed was that Arthur had "a heavy dose of reality." He saw that Arthur "always felt protective of David ... the stark good-looking one but with the tragic dimension ... I think Arthur thought Merrie and David had a kind of unreal sense of themselves and an unreal sense of expectations ... romantic, perhaps, but unreal".⁵¹⁰

Like so many people drawn to Open Country, Tim and Betty had experienced problems at home. Betty Rogers was fifteen when her mother suffered a breakdown over her divorce from Betty's father. Betty's grandparents helped with the school fees and she earned a place at Melbourne University, majoring in History and Philosophy. On campus she met Tim Burstall, looking "fairly preposterous": a lanky seventeen-year old with lots of brown curly hair and a red scarf tucked into a sports coat two sizes too big for his five-foot-eleven inch frame.

By the autumn of 1944 they became inseparable. They shed their virginity with Olympian energy. Without a private place of their own, they made use of public spaces: empty corridors in city buildings, even the undergrowth at the botanical gardens, where they would occasionally glance up to see feet striding by. Tim Burstall would recall "the sexual problem was the housing problem". However, not the only problem: their choice of contraception didn't work and within months Betty was pregnant. She was forced to leave university in the first term of the second year: "It was a matter of considerable shame ... I thought I'd have to leave home with the monstrous disgrace".

But while Betty's family enfolded her, Tim Burstall's parents pushed him away. Tim left home and, financed by Betty's grandparents, built a place of their own; an 18ft by 24ft wooden shed complete with kitchen and bathroom in the back garden at Oakleigh. Although they didn't think it mattered greatly, they tried to marry. But Tim's parents exercised a prerogative of the time and made their son a ward of the court, a move that prevented him marrying until he turned twenty-one.

Their baby was due in the October of 1945 but, when Betty took herself to the hospital to book in, she was turned away with the dismissal: "Oh we don't have unmarried girls here." Walking into the Neerim Road pottery every morning, to be greeted by gentle Arthur and bouncy John, must have felt like another world.

⁵¹⁰ "He saw that Arthur "always felt protective of David ..." Tim and Betty Burstall interview.

Then August arrived, and death was laid on the doorstep: "...All living things, both human and animal, were seared to death by the bomb which was dropped on Hiroshima on Monday... Those out of doors were burned to death and those indoors were killed by indescribable pressure and heat, while houses and buildings were smashed ..." The report had taken three days to reach the front page of the *Argus*, August 9 1945. There were no pictures, simply a section of a map of Melbourne showing Albert Park and South Melbourne up to Flinders Street Station, and the centre of the city beyond that; an area of four square miles, the area of Hiroshima, a city totally erased by a single bomb.

These were the streets that Arthur walked, the landmarks and the people that he had grown to know during his posting to the Cartographic in the city and Field 11 Survey Unit in South Melbourne. Now he was forced to imagine them incinerated, reduced to dust, to a shadow, in a split second of time. His empathetic mind would have made connections: the interior of the kiln ... unimaginable heat ... the sucking out of oxygen ... the pressure ... the changing of matter. Words like 'nuclear fission' and 'uranium' were new to the front page. The word 'fallout' was about to be invented; new fears of apocalyptic wars were born.

The whole awful power of the genie was about to be revealed as it rose up from the shadow of Hiroshima. The *Argus*, excited by the new weaponry and sensing victory, described the bomb as "awe-inspiring," reporting that the unusually shaped cloud the bomb had produced was visible 160 miles out to sea. By the following Monday a photograph showed the pluming atomic smoke rising 20,000 feet over Nagasaki: another pall of death composed of thousands of lives evaporating into the ether. In the 1960's, spurred by more destruction in the Pacific, that deadly shape would be re-formed by Arthur in oil. It would illustrate man's intoxication with might: his hubris, his overweening ambition and the terrible punishment that ensued from this fall from grace. It would rise as a funereal bouquet, in the shape of a mushroom cloud, from that biblical king who embodied all this vainglory and suffering – Nebuchadnezzar. Amid this horror came a reprieve when Mary Perceval gave birth to her son Mathew. But death shadowed 1945.

Arthur loved his land at Hastings. He had lauded it to Tim and Betty, to the extent they were willing to suffer the long bus ride down the peninsula one August weekend just to stand on Arthur's ten acres of land and admire the view. No one would see Hastings with Arthur's eye. It wasn't a lazy golden beach. Betty found the foreshore "unexceptional" and Yvonne, despite Arthur longing to live there, thought it "the most unlikely place ... remote ... part of the land ended in a mangrove swamp".

Buying the land, and paying it off with his Army pay seems an unusual thing for a young man in his early twenties to have done, particularly as he was aware of the need to live close to home. Arthur had purchased the land shortly after his grandfather's death and so perhaps he dreamed of another Rosebud, another escape from the duty of eldest son, to the peace and solitude of a remote seaside place.. Or perhaps Hastings represented Arthur's early desire to reinstate the family fortune, or at least bring some stability to Merric's finances. At the turn of the century his wealthy great-grandfather

W.A.C. a'Beckett had held land titles in the neighbouring town to Hastings, and it could be that Arthur associated success with land investment.

Arthur, Yvonne believed, was drawn to wild, bleak places. Arthur's sister, Lucy, thought all her family had an innate desire to own land. Whatever the reason for Arthur's affinity to Hastings, his friends and Yvonne did not share it. On that August weekend they picnicked, paddled in the mangrove-thick water, mucked around in Arthur's boat permanently moored there, and then returned home by bus. The following day, seven months pregnant, Betty miscarried. Tim's mother responded to her son's loss with: "I hope you don't have a lifetime of dead babies".

Betty's strong Renaissance face, framed with wild curls, was about to become a swirling, colourful feature on AMB pottery as decorative pieces began to replace utility ware, but in 1945, shrouding her in earth colours, Arthur captured her stillness. She stares, seemingly oblivious to all but the sight behind her brown eyes. Yet, for all the grief and the vulnerability her expression suggests, she is sculpturally monumental, her wide shoulders stretch across the width of the canvas. Like Jean-Francois Millet's *The Sower*, she embodies a heroic life force. Her skin has colour, her blood rises. Her sensuous mouth slightly curls, as if hovering on the edge of a rebuke or grief. This is one of a handful of portraits of a woman that Arthur produced that is both strong and flattering.

What does Arthur see in Betty? Perhaps characteristics of his mother: her courage in rejecting the status quo, her endurance. And perhaps he admired those qualities he did not possess: Betty's directness and her fearlessness. Many portraits of his mother show Doris worn-down, exhausted. He depicted Yvonne in domestic situations; reading, knitting, sewing, bathing but rarely smiling or relaxed. Her unquestionable beauty was never revealed; only a firmly set lip, a fixed chin, a stubborn stance, a dour cast. Yvonne admitted that the only portrait he executed of her that she liked, *Girl with Trumpet*, was one that didn't look like her: "He never flattered me very much". Discomfort, even pain; certainly suffering, major or minor, was one of the prime prompts for Arthur's portraiture. Throughout his life he rarely moved outside his own boundaries to paint portraits. He would seek, like Millet, the fundamental essence of men and things, attempting to capture the raw emotions of those around him: the injured and isolated, those with broken bones, minds, hearts, egos.

Instead of the expressionistic distortions apparent in his portraits a decade previously, his rendering had become more naturalistic. Rembrandt's self portrait, in the state art gallery, had been a constant source of inspiration and Arthur sought to emulate the master. Through this second half of the 1940's he produced hundreds of black and white drawings. They stand testament to his search for character in physiognomy, his quest to capture the essence of the whole in one small detail. *Susanna being spied upon by the Elders* by Rembrandt conveys, by the arch of a foot grappling with a worn slipper, the desperate anxiety of the moment. Arthur's genius for observation, combined with immediacy and economy of line, followed that tradition and in the rise of a hand, the

slump of a shoulder, the inclination of a head, he exposes not only the engine but the power driving it.

Arthur painted Douglas Woods, the son of neighbours living opposite Open Country. Douglas was deaf and his speech impaired. If his condition had been analysed in his early years, he could have received treatment, made some sort of progress at school and assimilated. But that was not the case. After years of living on the outside, it must have seemed like a miracle to Woods to be included in the pottery and given a job mixing dry powder into clay. Arthur knew that Woods understood what was going on and it disturbed him to see that, although Perceval was very kind to Woods, "he treated him as if he was a different race".⁵¹¹ Yet, in another example of John Perceval's compelling personality, Woods adored him for it. Arthur's portrait gives Douglas Woods a stoic dignity. He wears a shirt and tie and stands formally within the frame, straight and true but without hope, like a resigned victim before a firing squad. His eyes are not blank, but flat and silent as the world they observe. He seems to recoil from the stinging insult of his life, from the suffering of a mind untended, root-bound; able to comprehend, but prevented from doing so.

Arthur painted Carl Cooper, then a decorator at AMB pottery, and another victim. His ambitions had been thwarted. Initially he had wanted to be a pilot or, if not a pilot, then a steward for BOAC. Polio grounded him, hitting him harder than Perceval and sentencing him to life in a wheelchair. These two men together made Arthur's life a misery: "John and Carl ... it was like living with a cat and a mouse ... constantly fighting, constantly brawling ... and it came back to rest on us."⁵¹² If Carl wasn't creating chaos at the pottery, he was disrupting Open Country. Arthur never forgot the scenes: "He used to wind himself around to our house ... he'd have terrible fights with people ... throw things and lash out at anyone at the nearest point to him." Arthur's description of Carl Cooper "... dissatisfied ... fierce ... crushed" is confirmed in a series of portraits. In each painting he seems both mentally and physically uncomfortable. His head is held stiffly, his neck set at a rigid angle. The only movement in one work comes from the loose rendering of his jacket, suggesting the momentum of wildly spinning arms.

Barry Gordon, a precocious 16-year old student actor and Carl's live-in lover, became known as "Carl's legs." Carl Cooper had been instantly attracted to this beautiful young boy with extraordinarily golden hair when they first met at a party that appeared to accommodate "every anarchist, communist, out of work actor, sailor, pimp and prostitute in town". Arthur and John Perceval were there. From the minute Barry Gordon set eyes on these "unkempt and clay covered people" pouring out of the back of a pantechicon that accommodated Cooper's wheelchair, he was intrigued. Gordon had been "given away at birth". When he was fourteen, his adopting mother died and he was forced to live with his much-hated adopted sister. There was little to keep him at home. When Barry told her of Cooper's suggestion that he come and live at his house in

⁵¹¹ "Arthur knew that Woods understood ..." Pearce tapes.

⁵¹² "Arthur never forgot the scenes..." Pearce tapes.

Murrumbeena, his sister's response was to swiftly pack his trunk and thrust ten shillings into his hand for his taxi fare.

Barry Gordon would push Carl Cooper up to the pottery daily. Arthur and John Perceval threw pots for Cooper to decorate, and Gordon mixed the clay needed for high firing: "bashing it, wedging it into a huge mud brick". Gordon confirmed that Cooper's "explosive, jealous, possessive" personality promoted arguments: "it always ended up in a brawl and John Perceval was always in the centre of whatever the brawl was".⁵¹³

Over the years Cooper and Gordon would watch Arthur's works unfold, on occasion sitting up with him while he worked through the night. But early in the piece, perhaps before Gordon moved in with Cooper, Arthur painted Barry Gordon's portrait. In curly schoolboy writing Gordon proudly described the experience in a letter to a young friend:

On Sunday I had my portrait painted by a fairly famous artist and potter – Arthur Merrick Boyd. He did it in four hours, but he didn't like it, so I am sitting again tomorrow night. All the members of his family are artists of some description. They live in a strange old house, and they let the grass of the front lawn grow tall, because they like to roll in it – or so the rumour goes.

Arthur painted himself. Compare the twenty-five-year-old in the painting to the twenty-five-year-old in a photograph taken at this time. In the photograph Arthur sits slumped, and is being directed by Yvonne to look towards the lens. Tucker's camera shows the Arthur the world saw: "a slower man than Tucker,"⁵¹⁴ a "poor" Arthur,⁵¹⁵ "timid, unsure"⁵¹⁶, a man who "hung his head like a dog"⁵¹⁷, "dressed like a dog".⁵¹⁸ But Arthur's portrait shows the man behind the façade. These eyes need no direction. They look intensely, focusing both directly and peripherally. They reflect little joy. It would seem that in these unflinching eyes there is enough knowledgeable opinion to render the most vocal and articulate dumb.

As early as 1945 Arthur began to set a pattern for insomnia in later life. Betty was aware of Arthur's "tough schedule". Yvonne thought Arthur "could sleep a bit more". After working all day in the pottery, straight after a meal he would begin to paint, remaining fixed in front of his easel from six or seven o'clock, through to two or three in the morning. Under a 150-watt lamp he worked through the night and painted the darkness. The open landscape of *The Lovers* disappears and the colours become sombre, muddy, primeval. The tangled vegetation, "undisciplined, sprouting life",⁵¹⁹ overpowers, and *The Hunter* series unfolds. The fires of war are over. now water pours down.

⁵¹³ "Cooper's "explosive, jealous, possessive" personality ..." Interview Barry Gordon, London, 31 June, 2005.

⁵¹⁴ "a slower man than Tucker Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, pg 155.

⁵¹⁵ "a 'poor' Arthur..." John Perceval. McGregor interview.

⁵¹⁶ "timid, unsure" Janine Burke's analysis of Tucker's photograph of Arthur with Perceval, *Australian Gothic*.

⁵¹⁷ "hung his head like a dog ..." Neil Douglas interview

⁵¹⁸ "dressed like a dog ..." Bob Langley interview. Neil Douglas interview.

⁵¹⁹ "undisciplined, sprouting life" Hughes, Robert. *The Art of Australia*

In *The Hunter 11 (The Flood)* a stream rips down through gullies. Trees are broken and uprooted. Humankind, reduced to the most simplistic lines, has been swept away by the punishing flood. Those not drowning, grieve. By dint of an oozing sameness in colour and texture, humankind is shown as vegetative, elemental. Nature, in this primitive form, has been stripped, felled, overwhelmed, with one exception: the Ram and its rider are high and dry – perhaps the cause of the destruction, but untouched by it. The deep cut of the coursing stream is both central to form and to content. The stream acts (as it will in landscapes to come) as a borderline between the connected and the disconnected; between the lovers (or the object of love) and the grieving, observant outsider. At the age of sixty Arthur described how he saw “sexual connotations” in clefts and waterfalls and “any division in a rock face.”⁵²⁰ He would paint many landscapes that were “erotic ... explicitly anatomically sexual.” But in Arthur’s mid-twenties, the sexuality is destructive and chaotic.

In *The King* a deluge has washed the global aftermath down to the edge of the bottom of the world – a wild and forlorn area of the southern-most tip of the Australian coastline. This is home. A place inhabited by Arthur’s creatures: the exposed lovers, the levitating figure, the shepherd, the dog, the ram, his father, and madness being trumpeted by the South Melbourne lunatic. Tortured souls tumble into the same dark pit of Belsen, in front of an unseeing God. They fall directly towards us. Are they falling into the abyss, or into the world in which the viewer stands? Are these states both one and the same? Arthur would seem to be saying so - saying that the horror is being laid directly at our feet ... we are in Hell.

Around this time Arthur heard the news that Wilfred McCulloch, his great friend, missing for three years during the war, was dead. He had been killed in the last few days of the fighting in Singapore. His mother, Annie, fell into a deep depression. A devout Presbyterian, she almost lost her faith in God. Arthur did all he could to help the fatherless Alan McCulloch hold the remaining family together.⁵²¹

Given the connections with the South Melbourne paintings there is the possibility that Arthur had begun to depict a disconnected family, both personal and universal, temporal and spiritual: the decimated family of man. A father, no longer responsible, is removed from the world. A son, faithful, like a dog, helplessly paws at his father’s knee ... ‘Why hast thou forsaken me?’ A spirit, an inspirational but ghostly grandfather, hovers,

⁵²⁰ “At the age of sixty ...” Boyd, Arthur. Interview with Sandra McGrath *The Artist and the River Arthur Boyd and the Shoalhaven*. Bay Books, 1982, Sydney.

⁵²¹ “Arthur did all he could to help the fatherless Alan McCulloch ...” Arthur helped Alan to refurbish Annie McCulloch’s house while she took two weeks off to recuperate after the news of Wilfred’s death. Within the two weeks that Alan took off from his job at the *Argus* they installed new kitchen cupboards and repainted and repapered most of the house. Alan remembered Arthur’s finishing touch was putting: “a bowl of freshly picked roses on mother’s dressing table ...” *Dreamers and Makers Arthur Boyd – A Personal Recollection*. Alan McCulloch. AGNSW archives.

depicted as a levitating figure, or as a white dove in paintings to follow.⁵²² As Open Country begins to fill to bursting, the cast in Arthur's paintings will widen to biblical proportions. Murrumbeena will be described as a Calvary and Open Country as a place of lost innocence, the Garden after the Fall.

⁵²² "A father, no longer responsible ..." In discussion with Barry Pearce over the biblical works Arthur suggests that the symbol of the Holy Trinity had been in his mind and that "the kite man" was the "god figure" He names the trinity while viewing *The Mockers* – "That's god the father, god the son, where's the holy ghost - he must be up here somewhere ..." He went on to explain, "The God King ... he is the figure in the Mockers, he's turning his back" "He can't turn around and face it ... he was supposed to be the creator ..."

CHAPTER NINE

No Peace

"You were free in a sense because you became an observer. There was no question of ever being involved. In a sense you were like a surgeon ... a dissector".

Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.⁵²³

⁵²³ "You were free ..." Arthur likens this quality of remove to Rembrandt: "He loved dissecting things ... he was a dissector right through...but a romantic".

The days at the pottery did not always pass smoothly. In the first year Peter Herbst, still in the Army and still pursuing his philosophy degree, assumed the role of chief organiser..⁵²⁴ He thought John and Arthur worked with impatience, with impetuosity and they found him, at times, pedantic. They were learning as they went.⁵²⁵ Arthur had picked up a certain amount from watching his father and Hatton. John Perceval and Peter Herbst were complete novices. The reconstructed gas kiln was an albatross. Everything had to be placed in saggars, fireclay boxes, to protect the pottery from the flame. The saggars were heavy but fragile, space consuming, and had to be made by hand. Despite the new blower fitted to the gas kiln they still couldn't reach temperatures required for stoneware, so they made earthenware. Even so, Arthur was aware "the pieces were fired too lightly, it was a disgrace ..."⁵²⁶ The early work was, according to Peter, "shockingly bad": the teapots they made required "a cautious cup of tea". Yvonne admitted the pieces were not executed with any "great finesse". The local kids, on their way home from school, were rarely disappointed when they popped their heads around the corner to ask for seconds.

Although there was little profit to be made, selling wasn't a problem: the Ministry of Labour and National Service sourced markets for the wares. But when wartime restrictions were lifted in late 1945, and they were permitted to produce decorated art pottery, there was a backlog of utilitarian stock: "great quantities of unsaleable rubbish" that needed to be unloaded before the market was swamped with better quality imports. They found a buyer in Singapore who took the lot.

They were flying by the seats of their raggedy pants. Officialdom harassed them. The council asked: where were the separate toilets for male and female employees? The taxman enquired: why was the book keeping in such a mess? They were dragged to court when the landlord wanted to break the lease. According to Barry Gordon, the testimony that swung the decision was Arthur mentioning how hard life was because he had a mad father. The judge came down on the side of the struggling and declared that the potters, earning on average seven pound a week, had the greater need. Some objects, like ashtrays, were churned out with an eye to producing sales. Individually decorated pieces, large beautifully painted bowls, brought artistic satisfaction but couldn't fetch more than a couple of pounds. Some were bought in-store by the locals. The rest Peter offered to Georges, a smart city department store and, for another generation of Boyds, the long-standing friend of the family, Miss MacMillan at the Primrose Pottery, could be relied upon for a sale.

On any given weekend the train to Murrumbeena could be guaranteed to be carrying exotic freight into this heart of suburbia: the long haired and the beautiful; wild-eyed; philosophers, painters and poets. Men in hooded duffle-coats, berets or high-waisted

⁵²⁴ 'In the first year Peter Herbst ...' Much of the detail of the working of the pottery was gained from *The Painter as Potter* Geoffrey Edwards National Gallery of Victoria, 'The Arthur Merric Boyd Pottery at Murrumbeena'.

⁵²⁵ "They taught themselves." Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁵²⁶ "...the pieces were fired so lightly ... it was a disgrace ..." Arthur Boyd, interview with Nadine Amadio, Bundanon 1989. Sourced from tape, unpublished material, transcribed by author.

flared trousers, and women in hand-knitted sweaters and brightly coloured shawls; carrying bottles of beer, knapsacks full of fresh salad from the markets, and baskets of bread sticks and cheese. They trailed down past the railway gates, across the main road to the shopping street where the pottery, a reconstructed butcher shop, sat in a curve of a corner between a fruit shop and the wood yard. They would then amble around a maze of similar-looking streets where tin signs attached to telegraph poles proudly declared: 'This is a War Saving Certificate Street'. It amused Albert Tucker as he made his way down to Wahroonga Avenue on his weekend pilgrimage. "The boys were the only ones who wouldn't buy [the certificates] ... that meant all the other neighbours hated them ... they couldn't put up this sign on their street because they were the one set of rebels."⁵²⁷

Many of the visitors had worked at the pottery. AMB employed a constant string of temporary potters, artists, or locals in need of a job. Bert Tucker's stint in the pottery had been brief, according to him, because of his efficiency. Arthur had employed Tucker to make up moulds at the rate of one pound per five cup moulds. Tucker went flat out and finished up making his quota by midday, within four hours. "I could feel the resentment growing ... after awhile they thought I should be getting one pound for the day." An "awful row" ensued. Just how involved Arthur was in the fray Tucker didn't say, simply that he didn't talk to Perceval for a long time after.

Brian O'Shaughnessy, a friend of Tim Burstall, was one of the first unskilled workers to be employed at the pottery. After first setting eyes on David, O'Shaughnessy had expected Arthur to share his brother's genes, be "a Byron". Instead, he found "this engaging, furtive, shrewd Arthur travelling low to the ground". He thought Arthur and John Perceval looked like "the Australian Cricket Team walking out on the field ... like a load of goannas, squinting against the sun with aggression and cunning".⁵²⁸

Since O'Shaughnessy had seen Arthur's paintings at Georges and at an exhibition at the Workers Education Association, and been "impressed", perhaps it hadn't been so much David's image as Arthur's images that had encouraged the expectation of a larger, more forceful presence in the older brother. Arthur bore none of the anger, angst and brooding threat of his paintings. O'Shaughnessy remembered, "... he had nice dark hair over his forehead, his eye twinkling, always a faint humour; he particularly had a touch of the comedian". Over the years he would learn that, when Arthur played the fool, his protective wit, like that of a Shakespearean fool, contained barbs of sharp perception: he was always "warm, kind", but "there was a bit of malice in the wings".

⁵²⁷ "It amused Albert Tucker ..." Tucker papers. The recollections and quotes attributed to Albert Tucker in this chapter have been taken from either a 1978 interview conducted by JM (presumably James Mollison, at this time acting director of the National Gallery of Australia) along with Richard Haese's interview, 7th February, 1974, and writings and letters of Albert Tucker himself. All sourced Tucker papers, Manuscripts, SLV.

⁵²⁸ "He thought Arthur and John Perceval looked like ..." Two extended interviews were conducted with Brian O'Shaughnessy: Hampstead, 7 June, 2001; Hammersmith, 12 June, 2001. With the exception of several of Brian O'Shaughnessy's letters, sourced from Bundanon archives, all quotes originate from these interviews.

Brian O'Shaughnessy had failed his engineering at Melbourne University and in 1944, he was liable to be drafted. Brian "cooked up a medical certificate" but Manpower controlled things and he needed a job. By 1950 he would be on his way to Oxford, having won a scholarship from the Philosophy Department of Melbourne University, but early in 1945 he was "putting spouts on teapots, badly; Arthur's soft, sweet charm slightly dropped when he saw the results of my efforts." O'Shaughnessy found his co-worker Perceval "not friendly but fun", and Arthur "faintly saint-like, tremendously kind and sympathetic, he gave off a friendly heat." O'Shaughnessy worked with Arthur in the pottery by day and watched him paint at night - "there was a big feeling of life in 'Open Country'." He became part of the group and within a year would be jumping into the back of the Dodge with Perceval, Max Nicholson and Peter Herbst, and heading off on a selling trip to Sydney.

The old Dodge, with its soft convertible roof, had sat all through the war rusting under a tin-roof propped up on stilts amid long grass and shrubs. It had been purchased from the executors of Arthur Merric's Estate for the sum of twenty pounds. Not the greatest of bargains perhaps but with the help of Mr. Wood, a kindly neighbour, Arthur would fix it up and make it roadworthy. There was only so much that could be done. It would forever be a workhorse, stopping regularly at the horse troughs around the city to refill on water, always teetering on the threshold of the knacker's yard. While Arthur was away it had been thought of by the family as, at best, a piece of old garden furniture and, at worst, a garbage receptacle. John Perceval had allowed his dog, Bluey, to eat the back seat and the surrounding leather. The twenty pounds aside, the car had great sentimental value to Arthur. Yvonne remembered Arthur's distress at the way it was abused, which occasioned a rare outburst from him: "I can't keep anything". Merric didn't help matters: often the Dodge could often be seen making stately progress down the hill of Wahroonga Crescent, without a driver. The machine obviously irritated Merric, who made a regular habit of releasing the handbrake and Arthur was forever retrieving the old car from the ditch at the bottom of the street.

O'Shaughnessy recalled Arthur behind the wheel of the restored jalopy as the pottery gang puttered up from Melbourne to Sydney on the Hume Highway for six hundred miles, pulling a load of pottery behind in a trailer. To rest themselves and the beleaguered car, they stopped the first night in Yass. Everybody, with the exception of O'Shaughnessy, had money and slept in the hotel. O'Shaughnessy was left to curl up in the Dodge: "Arthur bought me out a beer, typical of him, kinder than the other buggers". There was always something to start a debate. On the same trip Perceval decided he needed a cigarette ... the last cigarette in the group's collective packet. When O'Shaughnessy staked a counter claim, Perceval replied: "You *might like* a cigarette but I *must have* one". Peter Herbst, in his somewhat steely, mixed continental and English public school voice, began analysing Perceval's proposal in depth. Finally, Perceval offered an explanation of his behaviour: "I suppose you'll put it down to my leg" Herbst's reply was succinct: "Well, yes".⁵²⁹

⁵²⁹ "Finally Perceval offered an explanation ..." Brian O'Shaughnessy interview

Not everyone was so patient with Perceval. Tom Sanders floored him on several occasions.⁵³⁰ Sanders loved Perceval's wit but wouldn't put up with his insults. "Perceval reduced both Arthur and me to tears ... he would be deliberately destructive".⁵³¹ Sanders had met David Boyd at the Gallery School. When David first ushered him into the Brown Room, Sanders felt the experience "like a Renaissance." It was mandatory to meet Merric at least three times every visit: "Who is your friend David? You haven't introduced me". Although Tom Sanders would become life-long friends with Tim Burstall and Brian O'Shaughnessy, he rated O'Shaughnessy as "the most self-opinionated man" and Burstall as someone who "always had to be right." A ferocious friend and a ferocious enemy, Tom Sanders was emotional and by his own estimation, "spiky". He was another red-hot coal fuelling the debates. But, according to Sanders, Arthur never fanned the flames: "Arthur never did the 'you listen to me' stuff... never ran anyone down, was never pompous".

Tom Sanders worked in the pottery. Both he and Arthur, like twin Quasimodos, would lurch around town, dragging large leather suitcases full of AMB wares. In a repeat of the days when Guy would brave the neighbour's front door, touting Arthur's paintings of dogs, gregarious Sanders would be sent in to chat up Miss MacMillan at Primrose Pottery and Mr Swift the buyer at Georges, while Arthur waited outside in the street. After one successful trip, when the proceeds were divvied up, Arthur was left with five pounds to last him and his family until the next firing, in three or four weeks time.⁵³²

There were times in the Brown Room when so many potters gathered it would seem the world turned on a potter's wheel. Stanislav Halpern, Stacha to his friends (and most people were) was an innovative ceramicist and another regular visitor. Halpern's pottery describes Halpern: robust, earthy, solid, with an alluring overlay of vivid decoration, applied with great eagerness and speed. He was a Jewish-Polish refugee who spoke English fluently but badly, through the side of a twisted mouth that usually sprouted a cigarette. He was a blower of kisses, an embracer of life. Stacha Halpern and Arthur became great friends. They shared characteristics, such as shortness of body and strength of arms, and both worked with robust physicality.⁵³³ Neither cared a jot about convention. Both wore their hair long and both were amused at the abuse thrown one night from a passing car: "Get off the road, you poofers!"⁵³⁴

Martin Smith would become one of the finest framers in Melbourne but, early in 1945, he was helping out at the pottery while he pursued his love of poetry. Although Smith

⁵³⁰ "...the time would come when even Mary would take a swing at him ..." According to Jean Langley, a long time friend of Mary, she witnessed this event at a party given for David and Hermia in the garden at 'Open Country'.

⁵³¹ "Sanders loved Perceval's wit ..." Interview Tom Sanders, Melbourne, 25,30 November, 2000. All quotes sourced from this interview, Sander's memoirs, or letters from Sanders in Bundanon archives.

⁵³² "After one successful trip ..." Sanders, Tom. *Spare the Face, Gentlemen, Please* Phoebe Publishing, Melbourne, 1993.

⁵³³ Details on Stacha Halpern from an essay titled, 'The Unforgettable Substance' by Cid Corman, supplied by Beth Wilson, nee Halpern.

⁵³⁴ "Neither man cared a jot about convention". Interview with Beth Wilson, nee Halpern, September, 2002.

gave off a feeling of casual ease he was recovering from the nightmare of being a stretcher bearer on the Kokoda Trail, but rarely spoke about it. Martin's girlfriend, Rosemary, who later became his wife, recalls the circle of the Brown Room: she found Doris "the most dominant figure", Merric "very loud and bombastic", and John Perceval capable of being "disruptive". In the gatherings, Rosemary would always be aware of three men (Smith, Neil Douglas, and Arthur) sitting in the corner of the Brown Room, removed from the fray, talking quietly. Like attracted like. Arthur thought Martin Smith "a terrifically gentle, nice soul".⁵³⁵

When Martin Smith took Arthur out to Neil Douglas's home in Bayswater to introduce the two men, Arthur ended the visit by making Douglas a proposal: "You do beautiful watercolours ... decorate my pottery." Arthur found Neil Douglas "a marvellous adjunct"⁵³⁶ to the pottery. After learning how to throw, Douglas became so proficient he made 25 pots a day: "Arthur taught me...he was a beautiful teacher".⁵³⁷ While the AMB pottery was more concerned with experimenting with colour, attempting to make it richer and more luminous, it was Douglas who began introducing the theme of Australian bush motifs. After working with the boys for about a year, he proposed koalas as decoration. They were painting lots of cactus at the time. Perceval, aware that Merric had produced moulded koalas as bread-and-butter pottery, said: "No you don't, none of that teddy bear stuff, not cuddly koalas". Douglas insisted that koalas, when they jumped, looked primeval, extraordinary, like a pink lake or a kookaburra. Neil won his point. He remembered Arthur was on the wheel when he took a set of coffee cups to show him. Arthur said, "Ohhh, that's alright ..."

At a time when the minimalist potter, Bernard Leach, was the doyen and the market demanded stoneware of minimal decoration, AMB pottery, out of necessity, went its own way. Forced into firing earthenware because of the inefficiency of the kiln, stoneware was out of the question. With two painters at the helm, decoration was a given. Jugs and plates and cups carried exuberant designs and high-keyed colour. Whereas many of Perceval's pieces were full to brimming with continuous design, Arthur treated a great deal of his work as though he was sitting behind his easel. In many instances subjects were lifted straight from his canvas and despite working on curved surfaces, the spatial structure and the perspective of a painting remained.

John Yule was introduced to the pottery by his army connection with Neil Douglas and Martin Smith. It was Smith who first led Yule down the worn and unruly garden path of Open Country. Everything he saw appeared to be "a mess ... the house ... the garden ... the pottery ... the studios: magical, also tawdry".⁵³⁸ Yet, despite the unruliness, he instantly felt at home. The voices from the Brown Room echoing through John Yule's mind down the years were those of Peter Herbst "trying to explain the intent of mainstream philosophy", Max Nicholson "overwhelming the group with mystique and

⁵³⁵ "...a terrifically gentle, nice soul ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁵³⁶ "When Martin Smith took Arthur out ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁵³⁷ "After learning how to throw ..." Neil Douglas interview.

⁵³⁸ "Through the eyes of a self-confessed middle-class man ..." John Yule, 1988. Yule boxes. Manuscripts, SLV.

new era logic and vocabulary” and Bert Tucker “trying to straighten them all out”. Two women became “fiercely necessary” to him: Doris, who gave him the confidence to paint, and a young decorator who also worked in the pottery, Jean Langley. Jean’s “forthrightness of utterance ... her quality of primitive certainty” gave him the kind of reassurance and support he craved.

The day Jean Langley first walked into the AMB pottery remained in her mind.⁵³⁹ She remembered what Arthur was wearing: “a sweater covered in clay and paint, a big woollen sweater like a fisherman’s sweater, and his trousers didn’t fit properly”. She thought him “sweet, but he looked like a mad little bloke”. In contrast Perceval was “stunning”. She was applying for a job as a decorator. They said: ‘If Neil Douglas will take you on, you’re hired’.⁵⁴⁰ Jean got the job and everyone’s attention. Peter Herbst conceded, “she was a pretty girl and that influenced our judgement”. Herbst believed Jean had “strong views on things, but they were hidden; never openly expressed ... similar in so many ways to Arthur”.

In the late forties Jean became involved with Clifton Pugh, a man who would rank as one of Australia’s foremost portrait painters. Pugh had carried home a torment of guilt and grief from his time in the Army: “I was sick with myself for having been a killer”. In this tumultuous state Pugh admitted he fell in love, “completely in love with Jean”. The initial attraction, he said, were the children’s buttons on Jean’s hand-made frock.⁵⁴¹

Jean’s recollection was more pragmatic. When they first met it was across the floor of the Gallery School and there was not a button in sight. Stretched across a dais she was the naked model that Clifton Pugh was sketching. The affair did not last long. They disagreed over the Reeds and Pugh’s rival suitor, the music critic, John Sinclair. Pugh thought the Reeds “sick” and the people surrounding them “sycophantic” but, from the moment Jean met the Reeds, she adored them. She would marry John Sinclair and the marriage would end, but her friendship with the Reeds would not waver. As Jean became a regular at ‘Heide’, her mates in the pottery watched and listened as her generous figure, her broad Aussie vowels and her big healthy laugh all slimmed down to the svelte dimensions and skinny decibels of Sunday. It’s a tribute to John Perceval’s keen appreciation of what made people tick that he discerned something in Jean at their first meeting that prophesied this transformation. As she left her initial interview at the pottery, John observed: “If you’re not careful, you’ll out-Sunday Sunday”. Jean was bemused - she hadn’t yet heard of the Reeds.

⁵³⁹ “The day Jean Langley walked into the AMB pottery remained on her mind”. Interviews with Jean Langley: November 2000, Mornington Peninsula; May 2001, Wimbledon; October 2001, Mornington Peninsula; October 2004, Melbourne; July 2004, Melbourne. All subsequent quotes are derived from these sources and from letters and diary extracts sent to the author.

⁵⁴⁰ “They said: ‘If Neil Douglas will take you on ...’ For a short time Neil Douglas worked from a basement in the city and AMB pottery, in its biscuit state, would be delivered to him in town in the Dodge.

⁵⁴¹ “Pugh had carried home a torment of guilt ...” Barbara Blackman/ Clifton Pugh interview. Oral history. NLA

Clifton Pugh had seen Arthur's paintings just before he turned eighteen: the images of cripples and gargoyles, and *Progression* knocked him sideways. He believed they offered a proper reaction about what was happening at the time, and he had carried them off to war. When he got out of the army, he wanted to meet Arthur and John Perceval. Matcham Skipper was the go-between.

His two rooms became one of the primary meeting places for 'The Drift,' friends drifting in after 6 o'clock when the pubs closed - from The Swanston Family Hotel or the Mitre Tavern, looking for another venue where drinking and camaraderie and argument could continue. Clifton Pugh saw Matcham Skipper as his mentor: "Matcham lived a world of art ... he was naïve ... an innocent, making jewellery, when people couldn't afford jewellery. I used to go to his place and meet all the poets, the writers, the musicians, the composers." This is where Pugh met Arthur and Perceval, and discovered that Murrumbeena was yet another venue where he could meet an interesting crowd.

Albert Tucker looked forward to Open Country weekends. "There were all sorts of other assorted people who would wander in and out ... everyone knew that Arthur was the sort of man who could never say 'no' to anyone or anything." The hospitality extended to Tucker and Joy: "often we'd sleep on the couch overnight". They were never alone: "relatives, friends, anyone caught short in some way would be there, sleeping under the kitchen table or in the corner". Tucker appreciated the "relaxed, free atmosphere of tolerance and love and affection and people putting up with each other's foibles and little personal disasters and tragedies". Haphazard and organic Open Country was always open. Once, when Yvonne had put in a call to Heide to ask if she could drop by, Sunday's response was, "Oh, no Yvonne, we're having *friends*." In contrast to Heide, Arthur likened Open Country to "an aboriginal camp" where "a lot went on".⁵⁴²

After Tucker and Joy moved from Heide to various other accommodations, they kept company with Arthur and Yvonne. Yvonne considered them "close friends, we saw a lot of them". Bert Tucker was generous with his self-taught knowledge. According to Arthur, he was "a big influence."⁵⁴³ One particularly valuable find in the war years, when canvas was desperately expensive, was a book by Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and their Use in Painting*.⁵⁴⁴ It was a sort of Elizabeth David cookbook of traditional European recipes employed by the old masters, involving ingredients, preparations, chemical reactions, and timing and mixing. It described traditional painting techniques that were affordable and it taught the ways and means of producing mediums that didn't wrinkle and didn't crack. Bert Tucker would "go on about it" and Arthur "got onto it".⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² "In contrast to 'Heide' ... Arthur Boyd, Haese interview, 2 December, 1974.

⁵⁴³ "He was, according to Arthur, "a big influence". Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

⁵⁴⁴ *The Materials of the Artist and their Use in Painting* was written by Max Doerner, professor in the academy of fine arts, Munich, in 1921, and translated from the German by Eugen Neuhaus, professor of art in the university of California, Berkeley in 1934. It is highly likely that from this source Arthur discovered the technique required for mural painting - a skill he would soon employ.

⁵⁴⁵ "Bert Tucker would 'go on about it'..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

For all of Joy's earlier counsel to Yvonne, urging her to approach Arthur head on with frank discussion in regard to their problems, Joy had not followed her own advice.⁵⁴⁶ Rather than confronting Bert with her unhappiness, Joy conducted a series of affairs. The sad result of the ongoing affairs was that, when Joy fell pregnant, she was not sure of the child's paternity. Tucker, in mid-1944, had no idea of these events, despite Joy's lack of discretion among her friends. Whether first hand, or through Yvonne, Arthur could not have escaped Joy's intimate and burdensome revelations. Tucker, despite believing his wife was carrying his child, thought the time wasn't right and encouraged Joy's decision to have an abortion. This proved impossible. Joy had contracted an infection and the specialist ruled termination too dangerous.⁵⁴⁷

Among the occasional visitors to Open Country was a middle-aged man who lived in Warrandyte in a stone house he had built with his own hands, taught art at the local school and was possibly the most exotic import in Melbourne. In the first forty years of his life Danila Vassilieff had flung himself through the world with all the flash and fire of the tough Cossack that he was. From Russian peasant, to military cadet, he fought on the Eastern Front during WW1, rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the October Revolution, was captured by the Bolsheviks in 1921, escaped, lived with nomadic Tartars in Azerbaijan and Persia, travelled through India, Burma and Manchuria to China and lived for a time in Shanghai. In 1923 he journeyed on to Australia, where he won a government contract to construct fourteen miles of railway line near Katherine, became a sugar cane and banana grower, and then began to paint. After some years he concluded he would paint "living life, life and nature and people in action and movement". In 1937, he was living in Melbourne's Fitzroy and John Reed had become a close friend and patron. Bert Tucker believed this "unique man" with his "curious splendour" expressed the "pathos and loneliness, the violence and tragedy" of the human condition: like Yosl Bergner, Vassilieff was "a history-laden figure" who informed them all.⁵⁴⁸

All agreed that Vassilieff was an overpowering personality; David Boyd went so far as to believe that "art played second fiddle" to the man himself. While some suggest that Vassilieff's swift renderings influenced the technique of the younger artists, Sidney Nolan found it was the man, not his art, that carried the greatest import. Arthur, too, was attracted on a personal level.⁵⁴⁹ Perhaps, like Tucker, Arthur gained confidence merely

⁵⁴⁶ "...Joy had not followed her own advice" When discussing Joy's letter written to Yvonne in the forties, Yvonne ventured: "Joy meant sex. She was a fine one to talk." Interview Yvonne Boyd.

⁵⁴⁷ "Joy had contracted an infection ..." Burke, Janine. *Australian Gothic*, derived from interview with Pauline McCarthy.

⁵⁴⁸ "...Vassilieff was a history-laden figure ..." Albert Tucker, Tucker papers, SLV.

⁵⁴⁹ "Arthur, too, was attracted on a personal level ..." While art historian Richard Haese insists Vassilieff was "unquestionably a central figure in helping to free young artists from the strictures of art as craft," and connections, particularly of subject matter, can be seen in Vassilieff's paintings of Vitzroy, Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan and David Boyd in later years were not in full accord. David Boyd refuted Felicity St. John Moore's statement (*Vassilieff and his art*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982) that Vassilieff taught Boyd and Perceval "to paint quickly": "Dan may have been a key figure to Tucker and Blackman but I doubt his work influenced Arthur or John or Sid." He went on to deride the idea of disciples sitting at Vassilieff's feet, adding that it would have been more likely John Perceval would have pinched Dan's

from Vassilieff's presence. Tucker admitted that his association with this man from "fairytale Europe" had meant he no longer felt like "some isolated colonial palpitating on a remote fringe of civilization".

Like the Brown Room, Vassilieff's house, Stonygrad, was a regular meeting place. Talk zigzagged between artists and poets and philosophers and builders, and Vassilieff would pour the wine. The sophistication of wine came later to Open Country. But there was never any need for a stimulant: people argued and squabbled, and encouraged and discouraged one another without restraint.⁵⁵⁰ According to Bert Tucker, Max Nicholson's voice was "habitually" in use in the Brown Room. But others remember Tucker "talking all the time ... a beautiful voice droning away in an armchair, ceaselessly talking about organising art exhibitions."⁵⁵¹ Tucker's "indefatigable tongue"⁵⁵² gave Max Nicholson heavy competition and was a major contributor to the powerful and noisy debates heavily punctuated with ex cathedra pronouncements. Arthur thought Tucker "suffered a lot" because "he would argue in an untrained way" and the academic quarter would "take the micky out of him".⁵⁵³ It didn't deter Tucker. He recalled: "Max would read and we would argue and talk about everything". Bert Tucker's 'we' did not include Arthur; he considered Arthur "a non-participant".⁵⁵⁴

From Yvonne's point of view (usually from the perspective of the Brown Room kitchen, according to Tucker's memory)⁵⁵⁵ Bert Tucker was "dynamic ... forceful and didactic ... full of himself ... terribly pompous". She considered John Perceval "dynamic in a different way ... charming but very undisciplined, not like Bert ... John would have great ideas, very sudden ideas and want to sweep Arthur along". David Boyd, on his return from his Queensland posting in May 1944 thought John Perceval and Albert Tucker both "preoccupied with their creative work" and both "busy in combat for the role of dominant cock in the 'Angry Penguin' pecking order".⁵⁵⁶

Tim Burstall, though the youngest of the group, was driven, determined, ambitious and more than qualified to join this opinionated crowd. Burstall seemed larger than his true height; his deep voice and loud personality enhanced this perception. Everything about

chair – David Boyd believed this, despite the fact that John Perceval admitted to Haese that Vassilieff gave both himself and Arthur painting lessons in which "he emphasized that the image should be allowed to flow naturally from the mind through the brush". David Boyd insisted that Arthur "was interested in [Vassilieff] as a type". David Boyd, ABC Archives, Recorded 22 April, 1983, Blue Mountains. Arthur he is quoted by Moore, sourcing a statement made in 1959, the year of Vassilieff's death: "[Vassilieff's] vigor and enthusiasm were infectious and I believe that as a teacher he was of great importance to the modern movement in Australia."

⁵⁵⁰ "But there was never any need for a stimulant ..." Ibid. David Boyd on the atmosphere of the Brown Room: "interesting people arguing and squabbling encouraging and at times discouraging one another".

⁵⁵¹ "But others remember 'Tucker talking all the time ...'" Neil Douglas interview.

⁵⁵² "Tucker's 'indefatigable tongue' ..." Noel Counihan, *Angry Penguins* issue September, 1943.

⁵⁵³ "Arthur thought Tucker 'suffered a lot' ..." Arthur Boyd/ Haese interview.

⁵⁵⁴ "Bert Tucker's 'we' did not include Arthur ..." Albert Tucker/Haese interview.

⁵⁵⁵ "Yvonne and Mary would be in the kitchen producing food and drink, all of us inside, arguing and talking and things going on." Albert Tucker/Haese interview.

⁵⁵⁶ "David Boyd, on return from his Queensland posting ..." David Boyd 'Memoirs to John Yule' Box 58 Correspondence with David Boyd, Yule boxes, SLV.

him strode: sitting, he would still be moving. Even as a thin, lanky young man he would have consumed the space in the room. If he wasn't speaking, he was always on the brink of it: Betty was rarely allowed to finish a sentence. There was nothing Tim Burstall liked better than to be arguing a point, unravelling a thought, or being involved in a competitive situation. For all his high intelligence, his incendiary talk and radical ideas, he had the appeal of an exuberant, naughty child. He would initiate long races in the river at night, wood-chopping events and even stone-throwing contests if there was nothing else to hand. There was much about Burstall (not least an unsettling matriarchal influence) that could be found in Perceval. They became rivals.

When all of these characters gathered in the Brown Room Merric could be relied upon to cut a swath through the mayhem. He might sweep in insisting on a prayer meeting, or leap to his feet if asked to perform on the piano. After a series of wild arpeggios cascading up and down the keyboard, he would then, according to Bert Tucker, modulate into *Green Pastures* and, after a few last flourishes, delight in the shower of praise. On other occasions he could be sitting quietly in a corner drawing, totally absorbed in another world until, for no apparent reason, he would leap up, race out, and not be seen again. Or, at other times, though not appearing to be listening, he would suddenly interrupt, and lecture: "I ... I ... I ... I ... enough of I."⁵⁵⁷ While Bert Tucker considered Merric "a mad figure with flowing white hair and burning eyes," he believed him to be a gentle man who preached "love all living things". Yet Tucker's belief was slightly shaken the day one of the myriad of cats that lay curled around the Brown Room tangled itself about Merric, causing him to almost lose his balance. Suddenly the creature was airborne, flying out of the house, propelled by Merric's rage and the swift force of his boot.⁵⁵⁸ Bert Tucker saw Arthur "as the one who handled his father...he could always talk to him".⁵⁵⁹

Caught in the collision of personalities Arthur must have been holding his breath, particularly worried about the effect on his parents when religion was being scorned. Tim Burstall never heard Arthur open his mouth about his religious views. In retrospect Burstall believed it was because Arthur knew everyone, including Yvonne, took the line 'God is dead,' and would have howled him down. Burstall, a self confessed "heavy, straight-down-the-line atheist" regretted one particular outburst: "I can remember doing a scornful thing in the Brown Room ... reading out passages of Mary Baker Eddy and I talked about them as being 'ads' ... it was a bit hard ... I can remember a crushed wounded look in Arthur's eye". Yet Arthur said nothing, despite knowing his mother would be hurt. A comment made by Tim Burstall years later about the symbol of Arthur's ram seems to curiously connect and offer an insight into Arthur's lack of response: "I think there was empathy for the ram ... saying something about nature ... that there is a force that is monstrous, absolutely unassailable, that has a right to exist". Perhaps Arthur's silence was motivated by acceptance rather than fear of

⁵⁵⁷ "Or, at other times, though not appearing to be listening ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁵⁵⁸ "Suddenly the creature was airborne ..." In later works of Arthur's the image of Merric's boots would often be used as a dominant, sometimes violent, image

⁵⁵⁹ "Bert Tucker saw Arthur ..." Tucker/Haese interview

rejection. He was a pacifist to the core. He had been brought up to accommodate different views and now, living in a time when people were annihilating their fellow man for their ideas to the point of genocide, he desperately clung to his philosophy of peaceable coexistence.

Arthur had, as one Australian historian noted, “grown up in a city in which there was a surfeit of intellectuals who behaved as though they, of course, were not there when those nails were driven in.”⁵⁶⁰ But no doubt some regulars of the Brown Room, The Swanston Family, the Mitre Tavern, Matcham Skipper’s rooms, Heide and Murrumbidgee’s nearby Rosstown pub could recognise their physical mannerisms, even their faces, in Arthur’s crucifixion diptych, *The Mockers* and *The Mourners*. In *The Mockers* forests have been burnt and felled and only a thicket of trees remains between a scene of devastation and the outline of the city of Melbourne, the last metropolis left on earth before the curve and slide into blackness. With this telescopic view of the peninsula, we stand at war’s end, at world’s end, viewing a barbarous, lost civilisation.⁵⁶¹ Authority, both temporal and spiritual, depicted by a God/King, is turning its back on the torment and slaughter of the innocent. Merric, in his other worldliness,⁵⁶² is represented as God the Father.⁵⁶³ His focus is out of the world. He is unaware his gentle son has been nailed fast and left hanging, like bait, for the jeering crowd. The composition spins from a rowdy pub table to loutish revellers, to the throne of God, to the Crucifixion and back to the bottom of the painting, where victims slip into the darkness of a Belsen-like pit. The viewer is on high ground. We have turned the stone over with our foot and, despite the repulsive mass swarming, are compelled to observe, to look hard. When we do, we find a small, leaping figure at the core of the painting, frantically flagging us down. He is the victim, about to be crucified by a firing squad in Goya’s, *Third of May*; he is the alarmed, warning character in Arthur’s 1943 work, *The Baths*; his pose is suggestive of someone sending a semaphore message, an SOS -- ‘Save Our Souls’.

Arthur had thought World War I “ghastly enough ... a frightful blot on humanity, a criminal blot.”⁵⁶⁴ He hadn’t expected it to happen again and it had been “a terrible blow”. To expound his twenty-six-year-old view of the world in *The Mourners*, Arthur used the image of the greatest pacifist, the best-known conscientious objector of the past two thousand years. Then, employing the technique and composition of a medieval painter, he set it down in the oldest landscape on earth. By layering the crucifixion and

⁵⁶⁰ “Arthur had, as one brilliant Australian historian noted ...” Manning Clark, *Occasional writings & speeches*: Fontana books, Melbourne, 1980.

⁵⁶¹ “With this telescopic view of the peninsula ...” Arthur Boyd to Richard Haese “...there is the king-god turning his back – perhaps civilization turning its back on what was happening on the barbarous side of its nature or something like that...some figures would have come out of other pictures.”

⁵⁶² “Authority, both temporal and spiritual ..” While Franz Philipp saw the decapitated head, the Caput Christi, as the head of Pentheus, impaled on his mother’s thyrsus, in later years Arthur revealed its true meaning to Grazia Gunn: “...in one picture I had heads on sticks near my father’s figure like spirits to keep evil away.” This translates to *The Orchard* where the figure riding the horse resembles Merric. He is holding the ‘spirit head’ over the face of the surprised lover.

⁵⁶³ “Merric ... is represent as God the Father” Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

⁵⁶⁴ “Arthur had thought the First World War ...” Arthur Boyd, interview with Jenny Brockie, June 1994. ABC archives.

Brueghel's dark comments on man's indifference and blindness over the landscape of the peninsula, Arthur dragged Australia into the torn heart of Europe, forcing his compatriots to observe that man's inhumanity begins at home.

While the structure of *The Mockers* is a removed overview, mirroring Brueghel's *Road to Calvary*, *The Mourners* is up close and connected. It brings us to the foot of the Cross where, like the photograph of Belsen, the agony becomes apparent. The skin on the tortured torso is stretched paper-thin across the horizontal beam, and on the vertical the body's internal organs sag. There is no loincloth: no human pity has been extended. Face to face with the tragedy, empathy kicks in. There is realisation from the crowd, a collective horror and deep grief. The aggressive arms beating through *The Mockers* now gently reach out to embrace their fellow man. The pointing fingers of derision now form compassionate cradles. People turn towards each other in disbelief, seeking an understanding. A black ram still lurks on the sidelines, but a white ram, foregrounded, is conciliatory, unmoving. Almost hidden, in semi-darkness behind the Cross leaps a small, frantic figure: the horrified, alarm-raising man from *The Mockers*.

Arthur exhibited these radical works in a three-man show at the Rowden White Library at Melbourne University at the end of July 1946 lined up alongside Sidney Nolan and Albert Tucker. Valerie had helped organise the exhibition and had felt the wrath of Bert Tucker when he discovered that the artists had been listed in the catalogue in alphabetical order. Among the works Arthur offered was a portrait of Yvonne in her green wedding dress, a Rembrandt-inspired biblical work titled *David and Saul*, and a couple of works from *The Hunter* series. The majority of critics were short on praise. They seemed bemused that an artist so young and self-taught had the audacity to take on the masters. A few saw it as brave, the majority as foolhardy. The critics were "uncomfortable that the trio moved in the intellectual milieu of the 'Angry Penguins'"'.⁵⁶⁵

While they could recognise prevailing European movements in Tucker and Nolan, Arthur Boyd's original modernism didn't fit, and it eluded them. One critic deemed Tucker "as clever as they come", Nolan as "the most significant of the three painters" and Arthur Boyd "able".⁵⁶⁶ One rare review applauding "Mr. Boyd" found his painting offered "a very striking refutation of this hackneyed generation". They were "thoroughly modern but neither cliquish nor esoteric". Here, the critic found "a compelling unity of vision, one very serious and passionate striving after an articulate and meaningful language, aspects of which shine through all the exhibited works".⁵⁶⁷ The most important critical response for Yvonne came from her father. When he saw *The Mockers*, perched on Arthur's easel at 'Open Country', his reaction was a complete departure from his usual taciturn Glaswegian self. His pronouncement, 'You're a genius boy', bought huge relief and pleasure to Yvonne: "He knew nothing about art". But

⁵⁶⁵ "The critics were 'uncomfortable that ...' *Post* newspaper, 1945.

⁵⁶⁶ "One critic deened Tucker ..." *Herald*, 22 July, 1946

⁵⁶⁷ "One rare review applauding 'Mr. Boyd' ..." *Farrago*, Melbourne University, F.A.P. (the initials indicate Franz Philipp as most probable author)

Yvonne noted her right-wing, militaristic father “recognised that there was something there that he hadn’t seen before.” *The Mockers* healed the breach with her parents and Mr Lennie was “very nice to Arthur ever after”.

Arthur loved praise but never courted it. He followed his own agenda. He had a simple, overwhelming ambition -- to produce a masterpiece on canvas. He was well aware of the mixed reaction his work would receive; as one critic reported:

Boyd laughingly admitted they are not the type of picture most people would want to live with day and night but he points out that painting should not be judged on its attractiveness as a sitting-room decoration. Many of the greatest works in world’s galleries would not be welcome in most suburban homes.

Arthur knew if he were to paint landscapes and seascapes they would sell without difficulty, just as he knew he would be very lucky to find a buyer for his biblical works, paintings he believed to be his finest, each canvas representing Arthur’s personal wailing wall. Working piecemeal at night and on the weekends it was taking around one-hundred-and-fifty hours to complete a work. Just as comparisons can be made to Stanley Spencer’s paintings of that period, Arthur pursued a similar working manner to Spencer, painting from the top down, a couple of inches at a time.⁵⁶⁸ By his own estimation, in mid-1946, he was completing three or four paintings a year. Despite the Melbourne *Herald* critic finding Arthur’s “present phase almost wholly distasteful ... unprofitable and misguided”, he paid no heed.

Arthur considered the sort of subjects that were attracting other painters as: “removed ... not in any way connected ... with other activities in the community”. He listened more intently to his academic friends and looked at “as many prints as I could ... I’d always loved looking at prints of Rembrandt and Brueghel but “they’d never meant as much” until the war changed the world. Titian and Velazquez also ranked high. Arthur was “very aware of their quality” when he began the biblical series.⁵⁶⁹ One important influence was Tim Burstall, who had resumed his university degree. Tim’s lively mind travelled everywhere. Despite his lack of religious belief and skill with a brush or pencil, Burstall was fascinated with the works of the old masters, their mythic and biblical themes and their interpretation of stories that stood the test of time. He collected prints of these paintings (many, to the horror of his friends, by stealth from library books). “I had lots and lots of pictures and I used to draw Arthur’s attention to them and I used to talk about them”.⁵⁷⁰ Burstall supplied Arthur with around thirty subjects connected to great painting, great masters’ themes: *Jonah and the Whale*, *Moses Leading the People*, *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve* among them. Burstall envisaged a jealous God: “Being an atheist I said I liked the idea of God creating Adam & Eve ... watching them get off

⁵⁶⁸ “Just as comparisons can be made to Stanley Spencer’s paintings of that period ...” Arthur Boyd in conversation with Peter Fuller, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 3 No. 2.

⁵⁶⁹ “Arthur was ‘very aware of their quality’ ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes..

⁵⁷⁰ “I had lots and lots of pictures ...” Interview Tim and Betty Burstall. Arthur discusses Burstall’s inspirational suggestions in the Pearce interviews: “Burstall wrote a whole list of subjects ... he was a good socialist ... *Moses Leading the People* was his suggestion I’m not sure [about] *Jacob’s Dream* ... I think that was my own ...”

with each other ... and then being driven into a rage that this was the deal: he was outside." Burstall proposed this to Arthur and he, always empathetic towards the excluded, "thought it was a great idea".⁵⁷¹

Mid-year of 1946 hammering could be heard in the garden at Open Country. Arthur was building a tiny room onto his studio. Yvonne was expecting their first baby in November. Bert Tucker's camera allows us a glimpse of the busiest, most crowded area of the studio. It is Arthur's workspace: a clutter of pots, canvases, brushes and boards and the large easel. Like every house they would ever live in, the prime space would be taken over by Arthur for his work. Out of frame of the photograph, in the opposite corner is the eating area, the small kerosene burner and chairs and table. Taking up the remaining space is a double bed full of scatter cushions to accommodate the crowds. It remained for some time propped up on bricks until Tim Burstall built a proper set of legs. People clustered around while Arthur painted and mixed paints, and Yvonne tried to study.

Sometimes Max would ensconce himself, reading aloud on into the night, ignoring the fact that Yvonne had dragged herself to bed, covered herself in the patchwork quilt she had made out of scrapes of old dresses, and was attempting to sleep in preparation for her 9-5 day. Her firm, O'Brien Publicity, gave her Wednesdays off to attend university lectures. She was studying English A and Philosophy 1 (which included psychology) and reading Freud, Marx, Descartes, Hobbes. In 1945 she passed her first examinations. Around this time Yvonne and Betty joined the East Malvern branch of the Communist Party. It was, according to Tim, "Sister-Hannah-Carry-the-Banner time, the ladies were into the political stuff very heavily." Although Tim Burstall would eventually join, Arthur never did. Instead, after the birth of Polly, he would stay home and babysit. Polly's arrival heralded the end of Yvonne's job and her university course.

1947 began with disruption. In December, Neil Douglas walked out of the pottery after Perceval had used Neil's brushes to clean his boots, informing him he was being "precious" to object.⁵⁷² When Douglas then took a temporary job at a quarry, breaking stones, Arthur was "quite upset"⁵⁷³ but John Perceval was unimpressed. In a letter to Nolan, sarcastically described Douglas's withdrawal as "charitable." According to Perceval, Douglas had walked out at a crucial time, just as they had "a chance before Xmas to catch up". Perceval may have been taking out his frustration on Douglas. Mary was pregnant for the second time, and he was feeling the strain of domestic worries, bad business and simple poverty. The tiff blew over, with Douglas returning to form the Laurel and Hardy duo once again: short John Perceval, all gusto and prevarication alongside the lanky, withdrawn Neil Douglas.

⁵⁷¹ "Burstall proposed this to Arthur ..." Interview Tim and Betty Burstall.

⁵⁷² "In December, Neil Douglas walked out of the pottery ..." Letter from Joy Hester to Bert Tucker: Tucker papers.

⁵⁷³ "Arthur was quite upset..." *ibid*

Around this time Karel Zoubek stepped off the train onto the Murrumbeena station platform, playing his violin. He had toured with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in 1938. Hitler, he maintained, drove him into exile in Tehran. Between 1939 and 1941, he played as soloist at diplomatic soirees at both the German and Italian Embassies, and conducted an overture for a German propaganda film. On the brink of leaving for Prague, he was detained at Police Central in Tehran, jailed and transported to Iraq, from where he was deported to Australia as an internee of the allies. His two-fold defence was ignored by the authorities. His reasons, he maintained, for wanting to return to Prague were familial - "to support my old parents living in distress" - and heroic: "I was promised by the German Embassy that after my return from Persia I would be recommended to be introduced to Hitler ... I cherished the idea of ... an attempt at assassination."⁵⁷⁴

He was interred in Victoria at Tatura with his second wife, Ilona. While lobbying constantly for release he composed a military march ("a bit confused-grotesque but original one") and wrote rambling, pleading, ingratiating letters to the Home Office, in which he wished the recently promoted Lt-Col. Layton, "many other advancements in the earthly life, and also in the Paradisiacal one". He embarrassed other officers by bringing along his violin and offering to play it during his interviews. His ultimate defence was he possessed "a Czechoslovakian authentic head huddled and muddled and fuddled with music," but it failed to impress. His fraternisation with the enemy kept him under suspicion at Tatura camp for three and a half years. It wasn't until June, 1945, that he obtained a release.⁵⁷⁵ At the beginning of 1947, he beat his wife with the hands he had declared too sensitive for manual labour. She left him. Convicted of assault, he opted for seven days in prison rather than paying the two pound fine and entertained the inmates with violin performances.

When Karel Zoubek was ushered into Open Country by Max Nicholson there was instant recognition: Zoubek had been born in Bohemia. A believer in Providence, he moved in. He was forty-five, five feet ten, brown of hair, hazel of eye, stick thin, terrifically energetic, oversexed, a yoga expert, and the least stable of men. Within the Murrumbeena circle some considered him "close to being a Nazi".⁵⁷⁶ All agreed he was a desperate womaniser. So, when Zoubek began proclaiming, "I am eunuch" it created great confusion, until his accent was unscrabbled to reveal that the word he grappled with was "unique".

Few females escaped Zoubek's advances. Lucy politely refused him but, in response to his proposal to Yvonne of "I come to you tonight", he received a flying tomato. When he turned up at 6am on Jean Langley's doorstep clutching a bunch of gladioli, her rejection of his passionate advances was met with "why not, why not, I've had an

⁵⁷⁴ "His reasons, he maintained, for wanting to return to Prague ..." National Archives of Australia Series.

⁵⁷⁵ "His fraternisation with the enemy ..." A drawing of 'Violinist (Carol [sic] Zoubek) by Arthur Boyd, 1942,' referenced plate 88 in 'Arthur Boyd Drawings,' serves as a cautionary note to other works that were post-dated.

⁵⁷⁶ "Within the Murrumbeena circle ..." Tim and Burstall interview.

operation?"⁵⁷⁷ But Doris fell for him. Yvonne admitted "he was dynamic" and Betty thought it may have been Zoubek's energy that had attracted Doris. David Boyd could see that, although Zoubek had "an overdose of eccentricity" and was "quite nuts ... Doris found Karel fascinating ... he had an exotic effect ... attraction on people."⁵⁷⁸

Perhaps there was something in Zoubek's great intensity that was reminiscent of Merric in his prime. Amidst the wild young ones and the aged fragile Merric, Doris must have been intensely lonely. Mary saw her mother as having "modern thought" although "she didn't physically carry it out".⁵⁷⁹ Zoubek brought wonderful music to the house and people would dance in the garden under the fruit trees to Dvorak's Slavonic Dances, the Rosenkavalier Waltz or the Six Dances of Bartok. And Zoubek paid great attention to Doris. He was aware of the burden created by so many people in such close quarters. Even though he was contributing to the problem, he'd say, while gesturing to something that should have been done in the house or cleared away in the garden: "Oh your poor mother ... she sees that, and ..." then theatrically mime Doris's slumped shoulders.⁵⁸⁰ Doris appreciated his concern and began accompanying Zoubek to town.⁵⁸¹ Outings would become concerts, with Zoubek playing *Ode to Autumn* to the passers-by in Collins Street⁵⁸²

It was very unusual for Doris to leave home and Merric became distressed. He would walk up and down through the Murrumbidgee streets, striding backwards and forwards by the railway station, waiting for "mummy" to return. Arthur could see his father's lonely watch through the windows of the pottery. Perhaps the scene prompted the memory of his mother's letter, written to Rosebud a decade previously, when she happily recounted how his father had patiently waited for her return by the station gates. The image that had been conjured in Arthur's mind then, of his father's vigil resembling that of a faithful dog, applied now.

Merric's anxiety grew. He became more and more disturbed, asking, "What's happening ...?" and "That fellow Zoubek ... what's he doing here so much ...?"⁵⁸³ The Burstalls were surprised at Doris's behaviour, and believed Arthur was too. Neil Douglas, on the other hand, saw Doris as "a very healthy girl." Doris's attraction, and no doubt her compassion, coloured her view of Zoubek. David Boyd recalled his mother saying, "Poor Karel, he wields his violin like a club." Karel Zoubek was, in Arthur's summation, "nutty."⁵⁸⁴ He would stop his pulse and go into a sort of trance. Eggs were his constant diet; he ate little else.⁵⁸⁵ He told Mary not to feed her new baby, Tessa,

⁵⁷⁷ "When he turned up at 6am on Jean Langley's doorstep ..." Jean Langley interview.

⁵⁷⁸ "David Boy could see that ... Zoubek ... was 'quite nuts ...'" David Boyd, ABC Archives, Recorded 22 April, 1983, Blue Mountains.

⁵⁷⁹ "Mary saw her mother as having 'modern thought' ..." Mary Nolan interview.

⁵⁸⁰ "Even though he was contributing to the problem..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁵⁸¹ "Doris appreciated his concern ..." Jean Langley interview. "Doris and Karel were often in town together, at Risties, etcetera., the relationship was pretty intense."

⁵⁸² "Outings would become concerts ..." Neil Douglas interview.

⁵⁸³ "He became more and more disturbed ..." Tim and Burstall interview.

⁵⁸⁴ "Karel Zoubek was, in Arthur's summation, 'nutty'." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁵⁸⁵ "He would stop his pulse ..." David Boyd, ABC interview, op cit.

instructing her that she could produce the world's first "pure" child. He rearranged the whole of the Brown Room – cups, saucers, chairs, tables -- into the shape of a gigantic cross. He would talk, literally for hours, and if anyone tried to escape he'd rush over, grab them, sit them back down again and nail them fast with his eyes.

In April 1947, Zoubek was seeking naturalisation and his application was refereed by Senior Constable Healy at Murrumbidgee Police station. Perhaps it was the spectre of Zoubek's permanency that finally prompted Arthur to impose his will. He insisted Zoubek leave. His mother's reaction - "If he goes, I'll go with him"⁵⁸⁶ - was "completely out of character".⁵⁸⁷

Arthur, convinced that his family was in danger, conspired with Peter Herbst and Neil Douglas to have Zoubek committed. Herbst and Douglas arranged for a psychiatrist to assess Zoubek. The meeting went well - too well. Zoubek was unusually normal and it began to seem that the psychiatrist might wonder why he had been summoned. But, as the interview was concluding, Zoubek leant across to the doctor and opined: "The trouble with you is you fuck too much."⁵⁸⁸ The necessary papers were drawn up and arrangements made for Zoubek to be certified. On that day over lunch, Neil Douglas, John Perceval and Arthur told Zoubek they were going to a party. Just before they bundled him into a cab, Zoubek realised the ploy and turned to Douglas and said "Some party. I'm surprised at you, Neil." Zoubek travelled, sandwiched between Arthur and Neil Douglas in the backseat, with John Perceval riding up front. The authorities – or, as Yvonne described them, "the men in white coats" who had been waiting at a discreet distance, ready to lend assistance if needed, followed in a separate car.⁵⁸⁹

This was not the first crisis in Arthur's life where he displayed a cold resolve. Depicting John Perceval as a cripple went straight to the jugular. One man who knew Perceval well was Peter Herbst. Herbst believed Perceval suffered greatly from his limp: "he was very proud and a little vain and it bothered him that he couldn't move around as freely as other people and that society might regard him as a cripple".⁵⁹⁰ In 1943-44, when Arthur's family was abused and threatened, he had taken John Perceval's frailty and hung him out in oil to dry.

While Arthur may have sought retribution through his paintings, holding them up like a mirror to reflect the nature of those around him, he did not disguise his hard line on Zoubek. His judgemental behaviour came as a shock to many. Tim Burstall's recollection was "everybody thought Arthur had gone a bit over the top...we saw the end of a struggle and Zoubek being sent away ... a physical struggle ... we all thought that Zoubek was a lunatic but we didn't really think he was madhouse material...he was let out shortly after." In fact, by the end of 1947, Karel Zoubek, having avoided

⁵⁸⁶ "If he goes, I'll go with him..." Yvonne Boyd interview. "She staggered us by saying firmly "I'll go with him" but she really wouldn't have".

⁵⁸⁷ "...was completely out of character". Interview Lucy Beck.

⁵⁸⁸ "But, as the interview was concluding, Zoubek ..." Neil Douglas interview.

⁵⁸⁹ "The authorities ..." Neil Douglas interview.

⁵⁹⁰ "Herbst believed Perceval suffered greatly from his limp ..." Peter Herbst, Oral History, NLA.

deportation, had found a wealthy benefactress, was living at her house in Toorak and giving recitals in Hobart, Launceston and Melbourne, with the critics using the words "master" and "virtuoso" to herald his name. Yvonne's recollection of that day earlier in the year was: "it had been arranged ... Arthur hated the idea, it was a horrible thing to do to anyone ... but it was getting too much for his mother". That was Arthur's official line on the incident: the deed had been done for Doris: "When he stayed with us my mother was so exhausted he'd keep her up all night talking to her." In later years Arthur cast Karel Zoubek as a hypnotist and drew and painted him with mad fierce eyes: "he'd try and fix your gaze ... he was so awful ... so bad at it ... he'd hypnotise you with his absolute madness".⁵⁹¹

In April 1947, Albert Tucker returned from Japan after several months recording the devastation wrought by American bombing. He was greeted with news that his wife had Hodgkin's Disease, with a prognosis of two years to live, and that she was leaving him for Gray Smith, the brother of Martin. It was a complete shock to Tucker. Joy's letters had been domestic and happy.⁵⁹² Tucker was "out of his mind"⁵⁹³ and begged Sidney Nolan and the Reeds to convince Joy not to leave him. Joy fled the Reeds in an attempt to hide from Tucker. When he found her, he slapped her to the ground. Again she ran away. She would live for another thirteen years but Bert Tucker would never set eyes on her again. After receiving instructions, in a letter from Joy dated 14 April, that he leave their son in the care of the Reeds, he bundled Sweeney up and took him to Heide.

Mary and Yvonne had been constant friends with Joy, often visiting each other's houses for tea and lunches with their babies in tow. But at Open Country Joy's behaviour was an anathema. The welfare of children was of primary importance in the ethos of the Boyd family, and from this point both women withdrew from Joy's company.

To escape confrontation withdrawal had always been Arthur's weapon, but when forced to confront an uncomfortable situation he used laughter as a shield. He found that by being a clown it made it "easier to deal with the world".⁵⁹⁴ Even in his mid-twenties, on

⁵⁹¹ "In later years Arthur cast Karel Zoubek as a hypnotist ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁵⁹² In January, Hester wrote: "John Percival, (sic) Mary, Mathew Lucy & Robert came Mary & John stayed to tea." In February "Mary stayed bringing her cot & high chair & seems to be enjoying herself being away from the crowd - David & John brought her down in the car." Joy was the first to admit she was a terrible mother, not cut out for it and not interested in the job, but she recognised the vocation in others. Mary Perceval, she told Bert, was "a really lovely mother her attention is the 24 hour sort and really it's her treatment and gentleness and protectiveness which makes (Mathew) what he is." Mid-February Joy stayed the night with the Boyds and regaled Bert with a detailed account of the following day: "Carol Lennie drove me home & Yvon and Polly came too & had a day on the beach... Mary's mother minded Mathew & she went to dentist and then came on here and my mother came round & they all stayed for tea - mother too & it all went off quite cheerfully." On another occasion Arthur and Yvonne visit, "bringing their own steak to cook." They arrive with eleven-week old Polly, who, Joy tells Bert, "is a superb example of Australian womanhood. She now is as big as a 7-month baby ..." - this detailed homely dispatch from the pen of the woman who would leave her husband holding the baby within little over a month's time.

⁵⁹³ "Tucker was "out of his mind ..." Albert Tucker to Barbara Blackman, Oral History, NGA. Much of the detail concerning the break up of Tucker and Hester is gain from this source.

⁵⁹⁴ "Arthur knew how to use laughter as a shield..." Gunn tapes.

his own turf and as leader of the pottery, he could not escape the judgement of the group. It was a crowd that coined the epithets 'big head' and 'little head' as a rating for intellectualism (according to Neil Douglas, Tim Burstall held the title of "big head")⁵⁹⁵ The pressure is apparent in a one-liner from Arthur: "It was unheard of in those days for anyone to even *think* if he wasn't an academic".⁵⁹⁶ The big voices were prime candidates for the 'big head' title. Arthur wasn't in the race. Tim Burstall believed Arthur played the part of the clown socially so "he'd be the one nobody could humiliate ...it was Arthur's way of dealing with aggression". According to Neil Douglas "everyone used to make fun of Arthur ... anyone who didn't know who he was... he'd just shake his head and look like a dog". Peter Herbst saw Arthur's use of irony as "a weapon ...Arthur was protected by it; if anything untoward was said he would deliberately misunderstand it ... turn the whole thing over. We all agreed he was ironical and couldn't be judged by the ordinary rules of discourse. Every remark, every question was half-way to a joke, that he could disown if necessary".⁵⁹⁷

By mid-1947, Arthur must have felt there was much he wanted to disown. He was wandering through the middle of a Bosch landscape. All that was safe and solid was dissolving. The Boyd belief that if people were nurtured within a loving acceptance they would know how to behave, was being shattered.

Betty Burstall thought Arthur must have suspected. The pottery was a small space: "We worked all day together, Arthur observed certain things". But it wasn't until Arthur gave Betty a lift home in the Dodge that it was confirmed. In the rear vision mirror Arthur saw the lovers kissing. John Perceval was riding in the backseat with Betty. Arthur, with his sister at home, pregnant with her second child, for once did not disguise his feelings. Betty recalled, "Arthur said something, he seemed miffed". 'Miffed' is not the word to describe the fury Arthur would soon unleash in a painting based on Tim Burstall's suggestion. *The Expulsion* shows a fierce angel driving a naked couple out of the garden; as Arthur described it, "whipping them out into the city ... out of a nice rich piece of Australian bush."⁵⁹⁸ Eve, some ventured, was Betty Burstall⁵⁹⁹ and the furious angel does not look unlike the patriarch of Open Country, Merric.

At least Arthur had an outlet for his anger: Betty had none for her guilt. Close as the group was, no one spoke about their intimate concerns. It was a psychologically crippling trait that continued down through the years. Betty knew she was "breaking all the rules". While she could not contemplate discussing her dilemma, she considered suicide. "I was terrifically worried by my adultery with Perceval ... I wasn't prepared to deny myself but I was doing something I thought was awful".⁶⁰⁰ The rams would

⁵⁹⁵ "It was a crowd that coined the epithets 'big head' and 'little head' ..." Interview Neil Douglas.

⁵⁹⁶ "It was unheard of in those days ..." Arthur Boyd, Haese interview

⁵⁹⁷ "Every remark, every question was half-way to a joke ..." Peter Herbst, Oral History, NLC

⁵⁹⁸ "whipping them out into the city ..." Arthur Boyd, Peace interview.

⁵⁹⁹ "Eve, some ventured, was Betty Burstall ..." "The female figure in 'Expulsion' looks like Betty Burstall - her face, her body." Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁶⁰⁰ "I was terrifically worried ..." Interview Tim and Betty Burstall.

multiply on Arthur's pottery, encircling and encroaching upon the image of Betty Burstall.

Arthur considered red the colour of passion and "authority ... leadership".⁶⁰¹ Perhaps the angel clad in red in *Angel spying on Adam and Eve* is a combination of Arthur's judgemental stance and his father's uneasy watchfulness. Both angel and God, like Merric, display Blakean extremes: both passive and active. Eve is similar in both works. Perhaps she is a composite of both Betty and Doris. Both Eves have apple-red hair. Later in life Arthur would tell Brian O'Shaughnessy that his mother's hair was red when she was young.⁶⁰² Adam is similar in both works. He is extremely thin. "A very emaciated character" was how Arthur described Karel Zoubek. The ram appearing in *Angel Spying on Adam and Eve* is docile and white, suggesting an innocence of sorts: humankind controlled by nature.

If these works helped Arthur "paint it out", *The Money Lenders* and *Melbourne Burning* helped remove him from what he saw as "life held together by a jumble rather than a plan the general chaotic business of life as a whole".⁶⁰³ Through his virtuosity Arthur could, with a sweep of his brush, be above it all -- out of Murrumbidgee and post-war Melbourne society. He could paint a picture that would "act as a novel might act". With the power of the omniscient author, Arthur could construct a "God's eye view"⁶⁰⁴ of life -- from Open Country all the way to Port Phillip.

The Money Lenders shows a world shackled to the false god, Mammon. In the pursuit of money, man has harnessed nature and abused it; greed has created havoc. The world is off-balance: tipping, tripping, tumbling. The greyhounds, muzzled to make money, pull against their leash. The harnessed workhorse bridles against the whip. The earth, scarred by gold prospecting, erupts in fire. From the baby in the forefront of the painting in its coffin-like crib, neglected by its Hogarth-style mother, to the cripples and the coffin falling from the hearse in the background -- all life, from birth to death, is confined yet abandoned, contained yet chaotic, restrained but uncontrollable. According to Arthur, only a small corner of this absurd, irrational existence is redeemed in a "tranquil area" where we see "the man digging his garden ... the little sheep grazing ... and the lovers on the bench ... encased in a world of their own..."⁶⁰⁵

In *Melbourne Burning* the overview resembles an aerial photograph that had run on the front page of the *Argus* in 1945 showing Formosan docks burning, with the heading

⁶⁰¹ "Perhaps the angel clad in red ..." Boyd, Arthur. Pearce tapes: "God Spying on Adam and Eve ... the original idea was God in the red cloak of authority ... Moses ... is also red." Note: "Moses Leading the People" stemmed from Tim Burstall's list of suggested subjects: "I think we talked about the socialist, strong leader thing...that's when [Tim] was a good socialist."

⁶⁰² "Later in life Arthur would tell Brian O'Shaughnessy that his mother's hair was red ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁶⁰³ "If these works helped Arthur 'paint it out'... Arthur Boyd, *The Australian Eye Series*

⁶⁰⁴ "He could paint a picture that would 'act as a novel might act'. Ibid

⁶⁰⁵ "According to Arthur, only a small corner of this absurd, irrational existence is redeemed ..." Ibid

'Four more warned cities burnt'.⁶⁰⁶ The photo caption for this image boasted: "one of the most graphic pictures of the Pacific war." It is difficult, over half a century later, to imagine the impact of this image at the time, but photographs of mass destruction were only just appearing on the front pages of daily newspapers. There is every reason to suppose that this painting was prompted by that photograph, particularly as Arthur described *Melbourne Burning* as a scene created by "a minor atom bomb".⁶⁰⁷ The painting insists we reverse our way of seeing: by flipping the perspective from front to back, from air to earth, and from enemy territory to home ground. Arthur lifts the smoke screen and shows the result of war: the scene behind the removed view, a connecting grief that can't be obscured by the blur of foreignness.

Melbourne Burning and *The Money Lenders* have always been viewed as separate paintings. However, in yet another juggling of perspective, Arthur links the painting like chapters in a book. It is a continuing story. We pass through the cemetery gates to see what lies behind the town: an apocalyptic scene of destruction, torment and despair, in which the black ram cavorts, and the roundel of careless figures from the South Melbourne paintings dance. Arthur had taken the coffin falling from the hearse in *The Money Lenders* from a scene in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and both paintings follow Joyce's lead, weaving a tapestry of psychological associations: geographical, mythical and epic images mixed in with historical fact and personal minutiae. They form one day and all of life. The hill in Brueghel's *Road to Calvary* becomes a Bendigo mullock heap standing amid the Port Melbourne gasworks, the Oakleigh brickworks, the Frogmore landscape, the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the railway yard, the botanical gardens, the local market gardens, the docks and cattle crossing the Yarra before the bridge was built. In this "mix up"⁶⁰⁸ of time, memories of Emma Minnie's "terrible" giant bible illustrations collide with recollections of family tragedy and nature's wrath -- possibly Tim Burstall cradling his dead baby, Doris supporting Merric, the Victorian bushfire of 1944 that claimed hundreds of lives, scenes from Murrumbidgee's streets and the warning, arm-waving figure from *The Baths* and *The Mockers*, centred this time in the middle of the fire. The furnaces of furious production (mining gold/uranium) spiralling into ghostly emissions from the crematorium smoke stack. The lurching dangerous speed, propelling us to pursue wealth and might, only serving to quicken our inevitable journey on the road to the slag heap. The crumbling of Brueghel's Tower of Babel, the fall of Wall Street, the bombing of Hiroshima, the threat of the atomic bomb, are all suggested in the everyday circumstances of a single town.

The intricate composition of these works escaped many. Surprisingly, Robert Hughes believed that Arthur Boyd was "not an inventive draughtsman".⁶⁰⁹ The Reeds criticised

⁶⁰⁶ "In *Melbourne Burning*..." *The Argus*, 7 August, 1945. The photo showed the devastation of Formosa's docks.

⁶⁰⁷ "There is every reason to suppose ..." Arthur Boyd, Haese interview. "*Melbourne Burning* ...now that was a direct thing, that was a minor atom bomb".

⁶⁰⁸ Arthur Boyd, *Australian Eye Series*. In this interview Arthur names the various locations in *The Mining Town*.

⁶⁰⁹ "Surprisingly, Robert Hughes believed that Arthur Boyd was "not an inventive draughtsman". Robert Hughes, *Nation*, 4 April, 1964.

Arthur's change of technique and choice of subject matter finding these complicated and crowded works "relatively empty, devoid of that very emotional quality they would seem to imply ..."⁶¹⁰ They accused him of looking backwards and withdrew their custom. Arthur knew that his work was almost as avant garde as what he had done in the Reed and Tucker and Perceval group. Arthur's biblical paintings were exceedingly modern, but the Reeds missed that. By referencing the past and drawing on shared associations, Arthur Boyd was doing what James Joyce and T.S. Eliot had done. And, by focusing intensely on his own habitat, he followed those other modernists, Robert Frost and William Faulkner, who had so intimately expressed the universal.

It was not until 1948 that Betty told her husband about her affair with Perceval. When she did, it triggered a response that would promote further turmoil within marriages and partnerships. Tim Burstall took himself off to Canberra and returned with a new type of marriage contract, "a sexual theory" that could have been cribbed from a John Updike novel. He established a few naive requirements: "It couldn't be casual, and it couldn't be a threat. You couldn't have an affair with a woman unless you would have taken her for a wife. You would have to respect her *highly*. If they were the wives of your close friends you couldn't suddenly blow it up and be treacherous and say 'Let's shoot through on the other two' ... that wasn't allowed". The sixties had arrived early. "We didn't look on ourselves as promiscuous. We looked on ourselves as free people". When someone asked Burstall, "What do you think about sex?" he responded like an astrophysicist dedicated to solving the mystery of the universe, "I think about nothing else". "That" said Yvonne "was the mood".

They became a forceful group of free-thinkers, bucking the system of Lawrence's "beastly bourgeois". Arthur was no libertine, nor would he ever be. He believed in exclusivity: lovers "encased in a world of their own" safe from "the chaotic world ... going on outside"⁶¹¹ But the times contrived against his dream. Years later, his view had darkened to the extent that he believed that "the zoo would be a good place to have lovers".⁶¹²

Unable to separate sex from love he stood on the lonely sideline. Burdened by visions of his father, the dethroned king, Arthur, in an oedipal rage, his home no longer his castle and surrounded by intrigues and betrayals, resembled that famously distracted young man caught on the threshold of action and inaction, the thought and the deed. He was a Hamlet, recounting a time out of joint: not with a voice, but an eye.

⁶¹⁰ "The Reeds criticised Arthur's change of technique ..." John Reed, 'Arthur Boyd. A Personal Reaction to His Painting and Career.' *Ern Malley's Journal*. Vol 1 No 4 November, 1954.

⁶¹¹ Arthur saw "the little lovers on the bench" in *The Mining Town* as "the only strength in the picture."

⁶¹² "Years later, his view had darkened ... Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

CHAPTER TEN

Family: forged and fractured

Everyone has some morbid strain in his nature, but to rush to show it to the public is a more shameful exposure than any that is merely physical, however gross that might be. Surely you have enough evidence of the need of our family to cling to sanity? -
Martin Boyd, extract of letter to Arthur Boyd, 26 December, 1955.

Martin Boyd had so much to say about his uneasy relationship with his elder brother that it filled a book. Martin's cold eye towards Merric reveals itself when he announces to the reader his intent in writing *A Difficult Young Man*. is to discover "what in fact he was": Martin was not discovering a brother, he was dissecting an object.

Merric's pseudonym is Dominic.⁶¹³ Merric is, as the following extract reveals, the black snake in Martin's green garden of childhood:

"When God was filling up Dominic's soul, He'd run out of yellow, so the Holy Ghost said: 'Well, put in some red. It's a nice cheerful colour anyhow.' So God put in a lot of red, and then He said: 'If I'm not careful I'll make him a murderer.' So the Holy Ghost said: 'He ought to have some black with a face like that,' and God said: 'It's very difficult to know what to put in him. Perhaps I'd better just fill him up with black.' So He did and we have to put up with it, like the snakes in the summer"⁶¹⁴

Martin admitted he had used "a bit here and a bit there" in the recreation of his brother.⁶¹⁵ Certainly one fact shines clear and true: while Martin so often bowed to the dictums of the upper classes, other than God himself, there was no authority capable of cowering Merric. In the blur of fiction and fact,⁶¹⁶ we are told it was because Merric romped amorously with the maids, walked naked and barefoot through the bush in the moonlight, rode his horse to death, sensationally threw himself from a landau, failed to complete both agricultural collage and theological college, and romanced his cousin. Yet in the author's full telling of these incidents Merric's 'misdemeanours' fade. The fevered riding of his horse grew from a sense of moral outrage at a false accusation of impropriety. Whether driven by heroism, love or exhibitionism, his leap from the landau was an attempt to rescue his fallen cousin. His failure at both colleges was due in part to his "indifference to class distinctions"; his unwavering belief that all, from the merest fly to the butcher boy or the landed gentry, were "equal in the sight of God". The book, written in 1953, reveals more about Martin's confusion of feelings for his elder brother than about his confusing elder brother. Despite Martin's best and worst efforts, his sibling defied analysis. Merric could not be resolved; he was neither black nor white, and positively not grey.

⁶¹³ "His object in writing the novel ..." As Martin Boyd explained: "*A Difficult Young Man* was written largely to entertain; but more seriously to elucidate the character of my brother Merric, as I saw it in my childhood. I do not think that now it matters admitting that Dominic is drawn from him, but it is only Merric in his youth, and even then his circumstances were different." Martin Boyd quoted in *Southerly*, no 2, 1968.

⁶¹⁴ Quotes used in this chapter from *A Difficult Young Man* from the, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1965.

⁶¹⁵ "Martin, when pressed by an interviewer ..." Martin Boyd, Oral History, NLA, identification Hazel de Berg: Tape 137 Hazel de Berg (Martin Boyd: interviewed by Desmond O'Grady, by permission of Keith Adam, A.B.C.)

⁶¹⁶ "In the blur between fiction and fact..." In Brenda Niall's accounting of Merric's boyhood and schooldays many of Martin's stories - particularly the reason for Merric's removal from school (Niall reasons ill-health) - are debunked. Niall argues "although Martin stated Dominic was based on Merric Boyd it is a simplification to solely credit Dominic as Merric." Niall submits that the "tormented, passionate Dominic was an essential aspect of the author ..."

The last time Martin had set eyes on Arthur he was toddling towards him on chubby, unsteady legs. After twenty-seven years absence his uncle had no inkling of the influence he had wielded on his nephew. As a child never a day went by for Arthur without a family mention of Martin. He had listened to his father's remembrance of his only surviving brother in nightly prayers.⁶¹⁷ As a young boy, Arthur had seen Martin's gas mask from World War I hovering high, like an alien face, on a hook in his grandparents' garden shed at Sandringham. There had been the regular romance of the foreign letters home and, finally, Martin's novel *The Lemon Farm*, the book that had seemed to speak directly to Arthur, altering the way his adolescent eyes viewed himself. On his return in the second half of 1948, Martin would influence the life of the man.

The sight of Merric so diminished must have shaken the trim and vital Martin, rising to the peak of his creative power and elegant always, in his tailored linens and silks. For a man who surrounded himself with antique furniture, delicate china and ornate silver and shipped them, like family, from country to country, Martin's dismay would have only deepened when he observed the chaotic conditions of life at Open Country. The families living in little more than one-room huts in the garden; the main house - a meeting place for left-wingers, bohemians and renegades of every hue - would have astounded him. He was aghast when he observed the state of the few valuable pieces of inherited furniture. He memorably bemoaned the fact that the family did not *use* furniture ... they *used it up*. It was beyond him. He had no idea of how, or where, to begin to restore life as he knew it. The fact that the kitchen roof leaked to the extent that the cereal packets were continuously sodden escaped Martin's attention. Instead, he bought a lawn mower: an anathema to a family who cultivated an uncultivated garden.

Appearances were important to Martin. The first piece of business on his return to Australia was to change the façade of the Grange, his childhood home. Rather than restoring, he reformed. His alterations and decorations to the house made his life plan manifest - he would "sort out" Australian culture.⁶¹⁸ Part of Martin's charm was his acute assessment of himself, as well as others. He was the first to admit he was anglicised, that he was inclined to *folie de grandeur*, going so far as to describe himself as a "precious ass."⁶¹⁹ The venue he longed for was not the Grange but Penleigh House a classic English three-storeyed manor in Wiltshire that had, centuries before, belonged to the a'Becketts. Its purchase was made possible (although Martin would never publicly acknowledge the fact) by the Magwich touch of his great grandfather; a British convict turned Melbourne brewer who left his fortune to Martin's grandmother, Emma.⁶²⁰ Martin would have seen it as yet another ghastly accident of fate that Merric, by dint of

⁶¹⁷ "He had listed to his father's ..." Interview Lucy Beck.

⁶¹⁸ "His alterations and decorations to the house ..." In a letter dated 25 September, 1948, written just before moving to the Grange Martin confides to Alan Chadwick: "...There are many nice people and no absence of 'culture', but you have to sort it out." Niall, op cit..

⁶¹⁹ "He was the first to admit he was anglicised" See Niall, op cit. pg 144

⁶²⁰ "The venue he longed for ..." Although it was Emma who financed the glorious return to the mother country for his husband W.A.C a Beckett, reclaiming the house that had once belonged to the family. Nevertheless John Mills's life, nor his legacy, would ever be acknowledge by the a'Becketts.

primogeniture, had experienced life under this fine British roof years before Martin was born.⁶²¹

Penleigh House could never rise from the simple, corrugated-iron-roofed Grange yet Martin insisted his dream upon it. Down came the large wrap-around colonial veranda and in went the Georgian door with its fanlight, the portico with Doric columns and the bay window. Down came the wild blackberry bushes and in went the Grecian urns and a swath of croquet-flat lawn. The old iron water tank, an indigenous and crucial fixture, now appeared unnecessary and incongruous. Arthur would always believe Uncle Martin "ruined" the old Australian farmhouse.⁶²²

Martin, kitted out in Wellington boots, with Dudley Davenport his golden Labrador by his side, walking stick in hand, and hacking jacket neatly buttoned managed to look every inch the English squire. But standing proudly for the camera in the grounds of his gentrified creation he squints against the sun: the sun that will bleach the grass, beat against the unshaded walls, glint blindingly against the chandeliers and fade the Aubusson carpet. Nothing suited the climate, including Martin. He was, by his own admission, "like a piece of old lace that has been washed in weak coffee to retain its antique colouring".⁶²³

Arthur's confidence must have swelled enormously when his sophisticated, civilised uncle appreciated his work to the extent that, after seeing *The Mockers* and *The Mourners*, he offered him a commission to paint a mural around his dining-room walls. It was a kind and generous offer. Martin's payment of five hundred pounds gave Arthur the opportunity to leave the pottery; his invitation to bring the family to live at the Grange allowed Arthur the freedom and peace to paint full-time.⁶²⁴ To Arthur, amid his struggle with the pottery and with the abundance of fiery personalities clashing and copulating around him, Martin's extended hand must have seemed like a dream, pulling him out of Murrumbena and up to higher ground ... to real open country. It was, he

⁶²¹ "Martin would have seen it ..." Emma and W.A.C a'Beckett led the glorious return to the mother country, taking a large number of family with them, including Emma Minne and Arthur Merric and Gilbert and Merric. The youngest son, born that year, would declare the family's pride in progeny and property by bearing the name Penleigh. In 1893 a severe commercial recession in Australia reduced cash flow and the family headed home. The journey back was luxurious (two nannies for three boys) and circuitous (traveling through France and Italy) heading for Switzerland where a boy, and not the longed-for girl, was born in a pensione in Lucerne and christened Martin.

⁶²² "Arthur would always believe ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁶²³ "He was, by his own admission ..." *A Difficult Young Man* op cit.

⁶²⁴ "Martin's payment of five hundred pounds ..." In a letter with post-date, 10 February, 1949, Max Nicholson writes from London: "I'm terribly glad that Martin is doing this for you: you eminently deserve it and I am positive it will produce wonderful results. Discipline yourself to the maximum: be ruthless with yourself and if necessary, others so that the greatest time is at your disposal". The date of this letter helps to place when Arthur works on the mural. It takes around three months of work, is it is recorded to be complete in May, 1949.

would later admit, “a lever to get out”.⁶²⁵ History was repeating itself. This was a repetition of his last rescue, when Martin’s father had offered Arthur a way out, both from a tedious job and the trials of Open Country. Harkaway had all the echoes of another Rosebud, and it would herald a return to landscape painting.

Does the last painting of the biblical series, the luminous, jewel-like *Jacob’s Dream*,⁶²⁶ illustrate this period of change in Arthur’s life? Jacob’s dream, as related in Genesis, threads around the promise: “thou mayest inherit the land... to thee will I give it, and to thy seed”.⁶²⁷ Arthur’s son, Jamie, was born November 1948 and delighting in the expanding dynasty Martin not only put his great-nephew down for Eton but made it clear that he saw Arthur as heir-apparent to the Grange. In an earlier biblical painting, *The Golden Calf*, there is a similar rise of hill and stark white tree. Below, amid the swarming manic crowd, can be found a triangular composition cutting across the width of the work. It is composed of lovers, copulating beasts and the expulsion. Removed from the chaos, a figure lies gently curled on a plateau. Above him a white bird of peace (his grandfather, The Holy Ghost?) hovers, promising, like the birds luring the man skywards in the *Hunter* series, the possibility of flight from earthly folly and fear. In *Berwick Landscape* the tree and hill appear again. Compare the paintings and the suggestion is that the Grange, a place of escape and peace, may be the setting for *Jacob’s Dream*.

However, *Jacob’s Dream*, like most of Arthur’s works, insists on multiple readings. Arthur, though well aware of the original text (his grandmother’s bible boasted a large colour plate and she would read the text aloud), altered the story, deleting the ladder: And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it; And behold, the Lord stood above it...

The only definite reference to the biblical story in Arthur’s re-telling is the earthly – the ‘ladder’ to heaven assuming the shape of a life-giving windmill, and Jacob sleeping upon the bosom of the ground, using stones for pillows. There is no vision of multiple angels, no shining ladder rising to a glorious Lord God. Instead, emanating from the head of the sleeping Jacob, a brownish-red mound rises.

Is Jacob’s dream full of promise, or dread? Is the mound the mullock heap of *The Mining Town* (a Brueghelesque Calvary) or the firebombing in *Melbourne Burning*? Is this the pottery fire, or an Australian bushfire? Is the figure clad in red (Arthur’s colour for authority) pulling Jacob into the fire, or is Jacob pulling the figure out? Is the ram, racing up from the valley towards the sleeping figure, a symbol of chaos approaching? Despite these uneasy notions, the humanistic feel of the work prompts, as one critic

⁶²⁵ “It was, he would later admit, “a lever to get out”. Arthur Boyd, Haese interview.

⁶²⁶ “Does the last painting of the biblical series” This work unsigned and undated has been presented as being completed in 1947 and 1949. The painting was not exhibited until 1951. There is every possibility it occurred after Arthur learnt of Martin’s wish that he inherit the Grange.

⁶²⁷ “Jacob’s dream, as related in Genesis ...” *Holy Bible, King James Version*, Cambridge University Press.

suggests, a sense of “rightness”.⁶²⁸ The symbols of destruction, the fire and the ram, can be regenerative. The windmill and the steer show nature can be contained, the wind reaped. Jacob, cushioned by a patch of Australian bush, is physically at peace.

Since his early days in Rosebud, Arthur had always hankered after bigger and bigger canvases. *Jacob's Dream*, measuring three-and-a-half feet by four feet, was large by conventional standards, but the four blank white walls at the Grange, measuring sixty-seven feet wide and ten feet high, might have prompted Arthur to think he should have been less ambitious about what he wished for. It was daunting: a huge canvas, a huge commission, huge expectations. In 1949 it was a turning point.

The only thing Arthur had painted close to a mural was the frieze around his mother's bedroom at Open Country. But this new work would take around two months to complete. After preparing the walls, Arthur outlined his compositions in charcoal, “fairly precisely.” His uncle made only one choice, requesting a rendering of *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*,⁶²⁹ but doubtless it was with a twinkle in Arthur's eye that he sited the Virgin Mary above the chimney breast so she would rise like a smoky vision from the fire below. Arthur had carte blanche for the remaining walls, and he submitted around five separate subjects for his uncle's approval. The stories of *Susannah and the Elders* and *The Prodigal Son*, both inspired by Rembrandt's work, received Martin's blessing. The European influences introduced into the Australian landscape appealed to Martin. Angels flew with possums. Martin requested a few minor changes. A woman, preparing to kill the fatted calf, had the knife removed from her hand “because it was a dining room”. And lovers were banned. Arthur had queried, jokingly, if the sight of naked bodies in the bush might affect digestion. “Yes”, replied his uncle, “you had better take it out. The bishop might come to dinner”.⁶³⁰ Although Martin had not grown into his father's nickname “the little bishop”, he still relished the pomp of the purple-cloaked clergy.

Arthur's choice of biblical subjects serves to repeat what were now on the way to becoming signature themes: the watcher and the watched, and the supplicant receiving loving forgiveness. Cleaning all the old paint off the walls right down to the plaster, Arthur used an old Doerner recipe: a casein and egg tempera mixed with powder colours, and enveloped the room in deep yellows, reds, blues, browns and greens. Inspired by Tintoretto as well as Rembrandt, the composition employs figurative groups and distant vistas, both domestic and formal. Dominating all this with its incongruity is an antique land. The strange primitive shapes of the Australian bush entwining and clinging around the classic myths, propping and pulling them at the same time, like the sands engulfing Ozymandias' statue.

⁶²⁸ “Despite these uneasy notions” Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia*, Penguin Books, Victoria, 1981 pg 158

⁶²⁹ “His uncle made only one choice ...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁶³⁰ “Arthur had queried, jokingly, if the sight of naked bodies ...” Arthur Boyd, ABC sound archives, Sydney. Broadcast 7 September, 1978

Arthur found it “very hard work”. While he toiled on the mural, Yvonne and the children were still living at Murrumbeena; Uncle Martin was absent while work continued on the house. Arthur’s solitary existence, fuelled by the adrenaline rush of a new challenge, plus alcohol and Beethoven’s Seventh playing “very loud”, took its toll. He succumbed to Albert Tucker’s and Joy Hester’s belief in poltergeists. Both Bert and Joy regularly regaled Arthur with stories of things going bump in the night; “bangings, lights going on and off.”⁶³¹ Tucker got a lifetime’s laugh out of putting his hand lightly on the back of Arthur’s neck one time at the crucial moment in a horror film called, *The Cat People*, and watching his friend’s leaping, high-strung, response.⁶³² Arthur was superstitious, and would have been very aware that the road leading to the Grange was the scene of his father’s eldest brother’s death.

It was here that Gilbert Boyd at the age of nine, fell, fatally, from his horse. At the Grange on one dark quiet night Arthur, alone in the spare room and surrounded by memories of generations of his blood, suspected that the house was haunted: “... the bed started to move at the speed of a heartbeat”. Eventually he realised it was his own palpitating heart, “... beating and putting into motion this loosely attached bed.” He had been helping himself to Martin’s whisky, drinking it neat and then watering the remainder down, but by the time of this event, Arthur recalled, “the drink was well and truly gone”. He was, by his own admission, “exhausted”. By mere dint of Arthur retelling this event, it suggests it was a time of deep emotional turmoil, manifesting itself physically in the form of a panic attack. Work saved him. When Arthur stood back and surveyed his work as a whole, he felt “great satisfaction”.

In the late 1940’s Perceval’s work, like Arthur’s, pursued biblical themes and followed the influences of Tintoretto and Brueghel, but the easygoing gentle paintings of Perceval and the furious frantic works of Arthur were the antithesis to the personalities each man displayed.

John Perceval appears to have recorded the birth in a painting titled *Nativity 11*,⁶³³ in which the ecstatic father jumps for joy at the sight of the newborn baby cradled in his arms. This figure bears a strong resemblance to many of the wildly gesticulating, leaping subjects in Arthur’s own paintings: figures that, Tim and Betty Burstall believed, “were Arthur”. The Virgin resembles Yvonne. The holy stable, Open Country and the Neerim Road pottery are one and the same: furious engines of domestic production and husbandry. The potter is the creator: life is formed from balls of clay. The madonna sits high on a pedestal, on a pottery worktable that doubles as a birthing stool, looking down on her child; removed, amazed. Teapots, jugs, children, babies, cats, a well-stocked dresser, food and wine all abound in a familial, creative, celebratory sanctuary. It is the home Perceval had always longed for.

⁶³¹ “Both Bert and Joy regularly regaled Arthur ...” In conversation with Grazia Gunn, Arthur conveys a sense he believes in the supernatural. He says of Bert Tucker: used to tell “some terrific stories ... that used to petrify Joy and me.” Grazia asks: “Was the house haunted?” “Not Murrumbeena” Arthur replied.

⁶³² “Tucker got a lifetime’s laugh ...” Interview Barbara Tucker, 2005, Melbourne.

⁶³³ “John Perceval appears to have recorded the birth ...” *Nativity 1* was executed in the year of the birth of John Perceval’s second child.

While Arthur painted what he wished he did not see, many of Perceval's biblical paintings reveal what he wished he did. However, the Grange mural released Arthur from his long cycle of disturbing images and John Perceval lauded it. Maybe Perceval thought he had influenced Arthur towards Tintoretto; certainly the dark influences of Bosch and Brueghel had all but disappeared. Arthur found Perceval's comments "terrifically encouraging" believing them to be "worth more than anything".⁶³⁴ Arthur's positive response highlights Perceval's negative side. Praise from Perceval was simply a revelation in itself: "Perceval wasn't given to compliments at all", Arthur admitted.⁶³⁵ If, however, "John coming up and saying something congratulatory, was the best part of it",⁶³⁶ perhaps Arthur saw a stripping away of Perceval's competitiveness and insecurity.

Arthur would have been aware how tough it was for Perceval.⁶³⁷ Despite all efforts, Perceval could not take control. In the emotional ring with Arthur he was shadow boxing. Each time he laid claim to something precious to Arthur's heart, Arthur would step aside and allow him through. Yet Arthur continued to hold the trophies. He would always be the beloved first son, the adored elder brother, the older man who won the beautiful girl. He would always be the artist with a lineage, brought up within a talented family and given every encouragement since his hands could wrap around clay or hold a pencil or brush. Perceval admitted to John Yule that wherever he was he had to have "centre stage always" and that he "expected it and demanded it".⁶³⁸ Yet Arthur held primary position so long as he was in residence at Open Country. No matter how Perceval behaved, he could not puncture the family ethos of loving acceptance: it was an impenetrable force field.

As time went by, Arthur became an increasingly hard act to follow.⁶³⁹ Even at this early stage in Arthur's career, those in his circle were touting the word the critics were hinting at 'genius' Peter Herbst was of the opinion Perceval felt himself in an "inferior position" simply by dint of not being a Boyd; that he thought he "could never be taken seriously in a family with such extensive artistic tradition".⁶⁴⁰ Bert Tucker believed Perceval "felt

⁶³⁴ "Arthur found Perceval's comments ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

⁶³⁵ "...Perceval wasn't given to compliments ..." Ibid

⁶³⁶ "...John coming up and saying something congratulatory ..." Ibid

⁶³⁷ "Arthur would have been aware ..." Several years before, John had expressed his frustration in a letter to Sidney Nolan: "Well myself – the most important member of a patriarchle – I have painted a great deal since you were here that is in time measurement and have done good works 'in the Arthur Boyd style' allow me to be a little fatuous because Sun and John said I had lost all my own personal qualities which of course is untrue but have only developed more sound aspects of my own character but which is more important than 'personality' in painting ..." John Perceval to Sidney Nolan (written approx. September/October, 1947) Reed Papers, SLV.

⁶³⁸ "Perceval admitted to John Yule ..." John Yule, John Yule papers, Manuscripts, SLV.

⁶³⁹ Perceval would exhibit his bible paintings a year after Arthur, to little critical notice. In December of 1944, Perceval, despite a year's start exhibiting with the CAS while Arthur languished in Bendigo, was ranked by John Reed behind Arthur and described as *another* extremely gifted young painter. Letter from John Reed to Director of Exhibitions at 'The Museum of Modern Art,' NYC, December 4, 1944. Reed letters

⁶⁴⁰ "Peter Herbst was of the opinion Perceval felt ..." Peter Herbst to Stewart Harries. Dept. Oral History. NLA, 1994.

himself a bit of an outsider ..." and that he leaned "very heavily, particularly, on Arthur ..." ⁶⁴¹ John Yule observed that Perceval became "more disturbed ... within the bosom of [the] family". ⁶⁴²

The Boyd family was growing. After Polly's difficult birth (she had been a 10lb baby), Jamie's birth was far from textbook. The race to the hospital had been fraught. It was a long drive across Melbourne but Yvonne, well into her "communistic phase", a card-carrying member of the party, had insisted she go to a public hospital. "Don't stop! Go through it ... Go on!" Yvonne screamed in anxiety and pain every time Arthur slowed for a red light. In the early hours of the morning, the road was virtually deserted; yet Arthur's extremely cautious, if not stubborn, nature shone through the gloom. He came down on the side of civil, not natural, law: "I wasn't going to go through a red light even if she was in labour. I stopped at all the red lights and this made her cross, terribly cross, which is not good for you". ⁶⁴³ In the retelling of the story, all Yvonne had to say was, "Poor Arthur".

Neither the Dodge nor Arthur had the speed of Jamie. As Arthur disappeared into the hospital searching for help, Jamie's head appeared. A passer-by, hearing Yvonne's screams ringing through the car park, ran into the hospital shouting to anyone who would listen that "there was a woman out there in a bad way". Yvonne, in her shocked state, wondered why the man was running. By the time the nurse appeared, rattling a tray shimmering with instruments, Yvonne had gathered her newborn up off the grimy old floor of the Dodge and was cradling "a perfectly good baby". The redundant Matron had nothing to offer but questions: "Where's the cord... where's the cord?" Yvonne had no idea. Neither did she have a polite answer for: "Why don't you girls get to the hospital on time?" When Yvonne had sufficiently recovered from her trauma, she had a question of her own: "Could you tell me if it is a boy or a girl?" She remembers the reply coming as "a great relief ... a strange anti-feminist thing".

Yvonne considered herself "one of the first feminists", but in the late forties there was little support for women, either publicly or privately. Jobs were being handed back to the returning soldiers and, weary of war, the world was making babies. Yet the men could escape to the pottery. And even though it was a five-minute walk home, they opted for meat-pie lunches and the relative peace of their own company. After work, with the sweaters hand-knitted by their wives covered in clay dust, they'd jump in the Dodge and head off to the Carnegie pub, or the pub at Frogmore. Immediately after dinner, Arthur would position himself in front of the easel and work into the morning. On Friday or Monday nights, if the men went into The Swanston Family Hotel, they went alone.

John Yule, a friend of the family and a regular member of the group, observed "you were not supposed to take women seriously in those days". ⁶⁴⁴ The majority of men, Yule

⁶⁴¹ "Bert Tucker believed Perceval "felt himself ..." Bert Tucker, Hasese interview

⁶⁴² "John Yule observed", op cit.

⁶⁴³ "He came down on the side of civil, not natural, law ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁶⁴⁴ "John Yule, a friend of the family ..." John Yule, Yule papers, SLV.

believed, did not consider women “worthy of much conversational effort...their remarks verged on put down...‘don’t talk such nonsense Pricilla,’ was the general tone”. Over the years Yule watched as “several very talented minds got crucified on the kitchen sink”.

Yvonne was a talented painter. On her honeymoon in Apollo Bay in 1945, she had had the ambition to produce a work for a C.A.S exhibition and the confidence to put a high price on it. An acclaimed painting of Mary’s, a compelling study of hands, was also included. Over the years Yvonne fitted her urge to paint around Arthur and the children, until it disappeared. Her explanation: “I found something more important to do”.

Pregnant with Polly, working at O’Brien Publicity every day and going to university a couple of afternoons a week she felt she “just couldn’t cope”, that she was “out of her depth”. The day she intended to ask for an extension on an essay, another student beat her to the punch. The tutor’s reply, “no more time”, voiced the end of her university life. She did not attempt to query his decision, offer excuses, make a special plea; instead, she walked out through the gates of the university that day knowing she would never return. She walked and walked, all the miles from Melbourne University, down through Carlton to Flinders Street Station, “bellowing all the way”. Her distress was such that a driver of a newspaper van pulled up alongside her to see if he could help. For a woman who rarely cried, this was bitter realisation made manifest.

The domestic set-up was far from ideal and certainly unrecognisable as the idyll described by the art historian Ursula Hoff after a visit to Open Country, where she reported a “picturesque artists’ colony” decorated with “cheerful small children” who played under trees. It was certainly not written the day Mary and Yvonne shook the leaves off the trees and the air turned blue in a terrible row about the responsibility of looking after their girls, Tess and Polly. The children had wandered out through the open front gate and crossed a busy main road. Yvonne, believing Mary to be in charge, attacked her. “My children are as valuable as yours”, Mary yelled back.⁶⁴⁵ Yvonne found it “difficult ... not living [her] own life, and also having brother-in-law John Perceval and Mary and all her children ...there were times I didn’t like the idea of living with my in-laws ...”

During the twelve years that Yvonne lived at Open Country, she rarely asked Doris to babysit. Mary, coerced by John Perceval, was often away, leaving her mother to look after the children. Breaks for Yvonne and Arthur were few and usually planned by the Burstalls. The Burstalls were the catalysts: “they were so intrepid ... they actually made Arthur and I do things that were more daring than we would have thought of doing ourselves.” Most trips were in the Dodge, with Arthur behind the wheel. The first family trip planned was to Phillip Island, to watch the penguins come in. Yvonne, with no portable cradle, had fretted over how to transport Polly but Tim resourcefully removed the wheels off the large wicker pram and Polly became portable. These mini-holidays were not vaguely luxurious. Yvonne remembered being anxious about finding clean

⁶⁴⁵ “My children are as valuable as yours” Yvonne Boyd interview.

water to boil for Polly. The Burstalls thought the Boyds “extremely overprotective, conservative parents”. However, over the years their anxieties were placated to the extent that on a trip to the Dandenongs, both Polly and Jamie slept in the back of the car, while their parents watched Cocteau’s *La Belle et la Bête* at Melbourne’s first film festival, at Olinda in the Dandenongs, the event organised by Tim Burstall himself.

By 1948 space at Open Country was at a premium. The little connecting room to the studio that Arthur had built for the arrival of Polly had become a shared bedroom, but it could not accommodate the arrival of a fourth member of the family. To make room, Yvonne and Arthur moved their double mattress back into the studio. David - after several years away, potting and tuning pianos on the Pacific Island of Noumea, and working at a pottery established by Guy in Sydney, was returning home to Open Country and bringing Hermia, his teenage bride, and their baby Amanda with him. Guy was staying on in Sydney. A year earlier Doris had written asking him to come home, but he replied he’d “had Murrumbeena”.⁶⁴⁶ Although all the brothers had fled from the spectre of Perceval taking over Open Country during the war years, it was now only Guy who remained a hold-out.⁶⁴⁷

Around this time, John Perceval commissioned Martin Smith to build a studio under the old pear tree in the garden, between the communal toilet and Arthur and Yvonne’s house, without consensus. Yvonne recalls feeling “quite indignant”. Within her circle, Yvonne never shrank from expressing her views, even if they were at odds with the status quo. She would argue with Arthur. She was pro capital punishment (an anathema to Arthur, and in later years to Yvonne herself) a communist (not of passionate interest to Arthur) and an advocate of women’s autonomy (Arthur made no public comment). In assessing Australian womanhood, Martin Boyd’s acid test was to imagine if the female in question was capable of gracing the drawing rooms of England’s finest. Yvonne looked the part. Initially, Martin was either unaware of Yvonne’s beliefs, or willing to overlook them. She knew he stood in opposition because he once confided to her that he could not stand Doris’s mother, Evelyn Gough, because of her strident ideas on women’s emancipation.

When the Boyds moved into the Grange, Arthur found the well-furnished, self-contained apartment the most luxurious accommodation he had ever experienced. There were several bedrooms, a lovely dining room decorated with an enormous tapestry, a big kitchen. Arthur had managed little improvement to the studio since they had moved back from Fitzroy. After Yvonne learnt of her second pregnancy, Arthur had installed a stainless steel sink “with a tap over it and all”.⁶⁴⁸ This facility was short-lived. Arthur could not connect to the sewage, which resulted in the Board of Works inspector insisting he remove his handiwork. They made do with the outside tap that drained, legally, into a neighbouring easement. Arthur eventually had total success with a small

⁶⁴⁶ “A year earlier Doris had written ...” Extract from letter written by Joy Hester to Reeds, 27 January, 1947. Reed papers, SLV.

⁶⁴⁷ “Although all the brothers had fled ...” David Boyd interview.

⁶⁴⁸ “After Yvonne learnt of her second pregnancy ...” Extract of letter to Bert Tucker from Arthur Boyd. Tucker papers, SLV.

electric stove, about 18 inches square, bought to replace the twin tin kerosene burners. It had arrived without the required lid. Arthur, dazed after the birth of Jamie, on his return from the Women's Hospital had walked up to the village ironmonger and collected the missing lid. He then walked back home with it, holding it like an important object, a trophy, an offering of sorts, to his wife and new-born son.

Cooking for the family had always been difficult yet every Sunday Yvonne would invite Doris and Merric over for lunch. They would walk up the winding brick path from the main house to the studio, arm in arm, and dressed for the occasion. It was their only outing, and Doris would ensure Merric was looking neat, wearing a tie. Each week the vegetarian conscience of Merric needed to be appeased but, once Doris had convinced her husband that the meat served was not really meat, everyone enjoyed the Sunday roast. If the weather was good they would dine in the garden from a trestle table, sitting on upturned empty oil cans and eating from pottery thrown and decorated by their own hands.

At the Grange Yvonne could entertain in a way she had never had the opportunity to do before, and invite friends to stay. Camo Jackson, the philosopher and lecturer at Melbourne University, who was wellknown to Arthur and a new-found hero of Yvonne came with his wife Anne and their four children. A trail of interesting, usually radical, friends were all dutifully introduced to Uncle Martin. After a short time of living in close proximity, however, the obvious differences in beliefs and life style between Martin and Arthur and Yvonne caused friction. Yvonne saw Martin as coming from "the a'Beckett side of the family ... the cranky side". Cranky though Martin may have been, he stood firmly by Merric's tribe.

Pat Boyd, the talented artist who taught Arthur to use the palette knife and introduced him to modern painters, the great hero of Arthur's childhood and teenage years, his adored cousin, had never taken his new wife, Anne, to Open Country. Although Pat was fond of Arthur (Anne would later affirm that, apart from Robin, Arthur was "the one person in his family he felt close to")⁶⁴⁹ he had not made any attempt to visit Open Country, even though they lived relatively close by in the suburb of North Balwyn. Pat told Anne little about Merric, other than that he was "pretty queer and pretty odd". Eventually Anne asked Pat if his uncle was still alive. Initially Pat responded with "no" then, after some time, chillingly altered his reply to: "He is, but he shouldn't be".⁶⁵⁰

When Anne eventually met Arthur and Yvonne, it was by accident as they crossed on the road from the Grange after a lunch with Uncle Martin. They stopped their cars, got out, and stood on the road and talked. Pat, a decorated World War II test and fighter pilot, had become a commercial pilot. Anne was an air hostess. In the 1940s, Anne's occupation was highly glamorous, and being attractive was the main qualification for the job. Anne, fully versed in the attributes of the presentable woman, recalled being

⁶⁴⁹ "Although Pat was fond of Arthur ..." Letter from Anne Boyd to Yvonne Boyd, 10 September 10, (no year) from Penleigh Farm, Chidlow.

⁶⁵⁰ "Initially Pat responded with "no" ..." Anne Boyd interview

"impressed" by Yvonne, "her looks, her demeanour." Yet Yvonne failed to impress Uncle Martin. In mutual irritation they ploughed on. Yvonne continued to cause Martin embarrassment by having her communist paper delivered to the local post office; meantime Martin coached Polly in the art of the curtsy.

When it came to the children, Yvonne admitted she "didn't have the will to keep them looking the part ... I was terribly lazy about things like that". When it came to placating Martin's notions of propriety, Yvonne "wouldn't play ball". Martin would later report to the family that Yvonne "neither knew, nor wished to learn, how to live in a civilised house".⁶⁵¹ A letter, written over a year later, from John Reed to Bert Tucker, relates the version of events doing the rounds at that time. "Martin", Reed reports, was "the rich uncle coming out from England intent on making Arthur his heir. All might have gone well but for the fact that Yvonne is not only a commo but a very aggressive and tactless one as well and was altogether too much for uncle".⁶⁵² Although Martin criticised Arthur's lack of directness and his habit of telling the truth aslant, deeming it "Chinese politeness", it would seem to have hereditary origins. At no point, during what was obviously a difficult period, did Yvonne recall Martin ever voicing his disapproval first hand.

Family recollections place the falling out between Merric and his brother on the day Martin flung open the doors to the restored Grange for a celebratory party. On that crisp autumn day in May 1949, close to a hundred distant relatives and old friends wound their way through the country roads of Berwick to be 'received' by Martin at, as he liked to describe it, his "country seat": to reacquaint themselves with the wanderer, to admire his restoration and delight in his nephew's mural.

Crisp white damask from the grand old days of Penleigh House fluttered on the laden, flower-decked trestle table; stiff-backed men and women, with feathers in hats and flowers in buttonholes, all perfectly presentable, all powdered and primped, formed discreet groups on the ready-for-croquet, manicured lawn. Then, rudely cutting through the gentle mumblings, the polite toasts, the tinkling of sherry glasses, came the rusty rattling and beastly banging of the old Dodge, struggling up the hill, labouring under the weight of Merric and his progeny. After spluttering to a stop, out tumbled the blond-haired blue-eyed Percevals, the darkly handsome David, the fair Hermia and the elegant Yvonne -- an ensemble classically formed, but not formally attired. Among the chaos of babies and toddlers, Arthur ducked and weaved, and the stooped, gentle figure of Doris guided her husband. As always, Merric's carriage and demeanour heralded the gentleman, which was confusing, no doubt, to those who might consider the use of safety pins a highly irregular mode of battening the hatches.

⁶⁵¹ "Martin would later report to the family ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes. "David Boyd I think ... also spoke of Uncle Martin tearing up [Jamie's] entrance submission to Eton ... quel damage!" Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁶⁵² "All might have gone well but for the fact ..." Extract of letter from John Reed to Albert Tucker 23 July 1951. *The Letters of John Reed*, op cit.

During the proceedings, Martin drew his brother to one side and led him to a quiet bench in the garden. There Martin nattered on about the grand personages and important families he had the privilege to know in England, Sir this and Lady that, dropping names like leaves from the autumn trees under which they sat. Merric having listened quietly, finally queried, "Tell me, in all your travels, did you come across someone I once knew called Martin Boyd?"⁶⁵³ Humour or frailty, there is no way to know; at this point in his life, Merric was often mistaking strangers for family, but Martin took this riposte like a glove across his cheek. Whether it was this occasion or another, whether it was Martin's decision or Merric's, the upshot was that shortly after this Martin never ventured into Open Country again. Mary, perhaps affectionately attributing more conscious behaviour to Merric than he was capable of expressing, believed her father was "completely unwilling to play the role of the eldest son, which Martin felt was necessary".⁶⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Martin and Doris remained close. When Martin visited Doris, they would chat as they walked up and down Wahroonga Crescent, outside the low wire fence that represented the final dividing line between the two brothers. Martin would later say that Doris deserved the Victoria Cross.

Perhaps Arthur could have put up with his idiosyncratic uncle. Was there anyone better schooled? But Yvonne admitted she had been a "thorn in the side" of "the temperamental old boy". Some forty years on, Arthur's summation of the situation was: "we wouldn't conform or perform".⁶⁵⁵ Yet Arthur would have loved the family continuity and the comforts of the Grange. And Arthur did perform. Friends recalled how he would mumble appreciatively over the wines at Martin's table, always obligingly saying the expected thing. A press photograph, taken after the mural was completed, proves Arthur a chameleon. The props would have helped - his suit, the surroundings - but it took more than a wardrobe change to transform a shy young man in baggy pants into the sophisticate, leaning nonchalantly against the grand marbled mantle. Arthur could assume all sorts of shapes. In reviewing his whole life, one major question would be: when was he not on stage and safely hiding behind a part?

Without doubt, Martin's "grand ideas", as Arthur put it, did go against the grain. Arthur had wanted to call Jamie 'Ben', but Uncle Martin had kicked up a fuss. The famous whaler Ben Boyd was a distant but dubious relative - a reputed slave trader. Arthur simply admired the name, not the man, and believed that Uncle Martin "got his priorities wrong".⁶⁵⁶ Whatever control Martin may have imposed, the peace and beauty of Harkaway were compelling, as Arthur's paintings confirm. Gentle hills, sowed and fallow paddocks and copses and dams, all offered an English sense of cultivation and containment while the views spread wide; north to the mountain ranges and west, twenty miles across to the bay. These landscapes, tinged with blues and golds in the morning and evening light, lay just outside the door and Arthur responded with great energy and

⁶⁵³ "Merric having listened quietly" Yvonne Boyd interview. David Boyd interview.

⁶⁵⁴ "Mary, perhaps affectionately attributing ..." Mary Nolan interview.

⁶⁵⁵ "Forty years on ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁶⁵⁶ "Whatever control Martin may have imposed ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

skill, creating works that he admitted, “were good”. After just six months they returned to Murrumbidgee because, Yvonne reported, “we were missing our own life”.⁶⁵⁷

By June 1951, with attempts at re-establishing family bonds and friendships failing to meet his expectations⁶⁵⁸, his career on hold,⁶⁵⁹ Martin returned to England and Europe to take “a long holiday” from the disappointment of his homeland.⁶⁶⁰ The holiday lasted twenty-one years, until his death.

Martin took little with him, believing he would return. His much-loved possessions would eventually be shipped back and the remaining furniture sold. But he had packed a small clutch of books that would furnish his working life for most of the decade. The Grange had contained treasure in an old trunk, a series of diaries belonging to Martin’s a’Beckett grandparents. Thwarted in present time, Martin investigated the past and at last found the family he had been looking for; one he could mould into an aesthetic, agreeable pattern. *A Difficult Young Man* would be described by *The Times Literary Supplement* as, “urbane and witty and eminently civilised ... a subtle and beautifully observed social comedy”.

The remove, Martin allowed, gave him the freedom to speak his mind and draw on family for his characters: “...one reason I may have been rather reckless ... was when you are on this side of the world it all seems far away and you think they won’t mind!”⁶⁶¹ Did Martin truly believe that his sister-in-law and his nephews and nieces wouldn’t “mind”⁶⁶² when he stated not once but twice within the book that his intention in writing was to discover if his brother was “mad”.⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁷ “After just six months ...” Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁶⁵⁸ “...with attempts at re-establishing family bonds ...” After Yvonne and Arthur moved back to the studio Martin invited Mary to live at the Grange. According to Yvonne, Uncle Martin “tolerated John, but not very well”. (Yvonne Boyd interview) David Boyd believed Martin had initially cast an accepting eye towards Perceval because of his surname, but that withered when it was ‘Perceval’ with an ‘e’ and not an ‘i’ that spelt out the socially prominent family Martin had imagined. (David Boyd interview). Certainly Martin began spending more time at the club but his affection for Mary never wavered.

⁶⁵⁹ “...his career on hold ...” While *Lucinda Brayford* had been described by the British literary critic and one-time President of Royal Society of Literature, as “one of the three great novels of the century, and while it sold half-a-million copies in the USA, it was ignored by the Australian press due to a publishing blunder involving an inadequate print run and possibly no review copies being sent to Australia. Australia at this time was a country so lacking in cultural confidence that when a famous author returned home he was ignored. ‘Australian literature’ was an oxymoron, so disparaged and neglected that it was not considered worthy of academic and scholarly attention until 1953 when a full university course was established.

⁶⁶⁰ Brenda Niall, *The Boyds* The Miegunyah Press at Melbourne University Press, 2002, Victoria.

⁶⁶¹ “Martin allowed that when drawing on people ...” Martin Boyd, Oral History Section, op cit

⁶⁶² “...his nieces wouldn’t mind ...” Mary believed that by the time Martin came to write *When Blackbirds Sing* “his attitude to Dominic was more understanding ... he realised he’d been undeservedly jealous”. (Mary Nolan interview).

⁶⁶³ “This suggest that he was already mad, if he ever was, which we are trying to discover”. “One of the objects of this book is to discover if Dominic was really mad, as they said at the end”. *A Difficult Young Man*..

Given time, and a complete change in fortune, Arthur will reject Martin's assertion.. In the years to come all of Arthur's embarrassment over his eccentric father will fall away. He will revere Merric's life by painting his image, and his images. He will pay homage to his father's talent by protecting and publishing his work. He will strive to give Merric Boyd the honourable place in the world denied him in his lifetime.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶⁴ "He will strive to give Merric Boyd ..." "At Bundanon Arthur's every thought was about Merric getting his due ..." Interview Beryl Reid. Interviews conducted in London 16 March, 17 July, 17 August, 2000.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“It’s a hard life”
– Arthur Boyd

“You are able to endure everything in silence, you have no need to share things with other people ...” From Olga Knipper to her husband, Chekhov, in a note written after their wedding.

As schoolgirls, be-gloved and be-hatted and primly uniformed, Yvonne Lennie and Betty Bennett would think it a jolly jape calling each other 'Len and Ben'. After they left school they kept in touch. In 1943, when Yvonne brought Arthur to meet Betty, she was surprised. "I expected Yvonne would have some really neatly turned out person because she was so elegant herself... really beautiful, with beautiful skin and such poise".⁶⁶⁵ Betty had believed her friend would settle for someone like Murray, or one of the young men working at the bank, "decent lads, sharp dressers". But instead, there stood Arthur, in a sweater with cuffs to his fingertips, saying: "I don't know what to do about this jumper you knitted me, Yvonne. Does it go above, or below, the knees"? Betty's lasting first impression was Arthur attempting to lean against the doorpost and missing it: "No one said anything ... we just went on with the conversation". Betty could not understand how Arthur passed muster with Yvonne's family. When Mr. Lennie and Betty's father got together their conversations were ripe with "ho-ho-ho-isms... Mr Lennie was fond of saying his favourite sport would be killing Germans". Betty couldn't imagine Yvonne daring to bring home a pacifist, particularly "one like Arthur" who was "so gormless, with such an apologetic, bumbling approach".

Betty had got married a year earlier to Jack Stevenson, a full-time schoolteacher like herself and a part-time poet. They were living in Joy Hester's old home patch of Elwood when Yvonne and Arthur turned up one night with Joy and Bert Tucker in tow. Despite Arthur's ungainliness, despite his floppy attire, at the end of the evening Arthur had won Betty's vote. She thought he was "great ... so appreciative of life".

Betty would travel from Elwood down to the pottery to buy seconds, pieces she thought were "delicate and lovely". As he did with everyone, Arthur encouraged Betty and her sister to try their hand at decorating, and gave them paints and blanks to work on. He would always be encouraging, always say, "keep it up, keep it up". Visits to Open Country became less frequent when the Stevensons moved to Horsham, a town north-west of Melbourne, around two hundred miles from the city, in an area known as the Wimmera. But whenever the family travelled down to Melbourne, they would visit Murrumbeena. Betty's memories of the place conjure scenes of Doris, frail, like something out of a Victorian novel, sitting in the rampant grass, sketching while her grandson Mathew Perceval toddled around the garden, tethered by a long rope, and Merric pushed a toy penguin on wheels at the end of a stick, down the pathways, through the trees and the long grasses, the sound of flapping and clanking wings indicating the progress of both bird and ageing potter.

On a visit in the autumn of 1950, Betty made an off-the-cuff suggestion that the Boyds come and paint in Horsham. The acceptance was immediate, with Yvonne bundling both herself and the family into the Stevensons' car that very day.⁶⁶⁶ The car was loaded to

⁶⁶⁵ "In 1943, when Yvonne brought Arthur to meet Betty ..." Interview Betty Lawson, Melbourne, 1 November, 2001, March 2005. Yvonne's dismayed response to this memory was: "... my father was in the Signal Corps, never even had a gun, I think."

⁶⁶⁶ "On a visit in the autumn of 1950 ..." This date has been a moveable feast in past publications. Some authors place it as early as 1948. In fact the trip occurred after the family had only just moved back to Murrumbeena from the Grange. Betty Stevenson recalls Arthur and Yvonne speaking about life at the

screeching point, with five children under the age of six. Arthur conveniently declined that journey, insisting he needed to garner necessary art supplies. He puttered up, separately and quietly, a day or so later in the increasingly decrepit Dodge, its doors now tied up with wool-baling twine. For the next month he painted the landscapes of the Wimmera.⁶⁶⁷

During the Boyds' break in Horsham, the general rule was that Arthur would go out in the car with his gear and stay out all day painting. Each evening he would bring home one or two new paintings. He would then repeat an old ritual and prop his paintings up against the wall to invite general comment. Yvonne's response was something Arthur always required. Betty recalls Yvonne: "tense, but always honest, completely honest, really straightforward". Betty admired Yvonne for that, but admitted she would have "tempered the wind a bit". But Yvonne was not Betty; more importantly, she could never be Doris. Many friends would comment that Arthur tried to mould Yvonne into the comforting, all-embracing shape of his mother. Yvonne could see the wished-for comparison in some of Arthur's Bendigo love letters. John Yule believed that "Arthur always needed Doris". Yule would watch Arthur, when he had completed a canvas, immediately implore Yvonne to tell him what she thought of it. By that, Yule reasoned, Arthur meant: "explain me to myself and the world". Yule believed Yvonne "wasn't up to it".⁶⁶⁸

Neighbours would drift through the Stevensons' house and offer up their comments. With his usual good humour, Arthur would let any offending comments go over his head. "Is that a pig, or a dog?" a child would ask. Arthur, always wanting everyone to see anything they wished to see in his paintings, would reply, "It's a pigdog". Two or three shows were held at the house in the hope of sales. The audience was composed of students and teachers from Jack Stevenson's school, plus friends and locals. The reaction was muted. Most of the locals, Betty recalled, "looked a bit askance". Only one work sold and that was a painting by Yvonne.

Grange and Jamie, who was born November 1948, did not move to the Grange until he was around a year old. It was mushroom season in the Wimmera, and picking mushrooms was "an industry" in the Stephenson family. Betty recalls Arthur commenting on her béchamel sauce as she was cooking a batch and she thinking it a "rather up market ... sophisticated" comment.

Arthur was producing around two paintings a day and he took back partially completed canvases and many sketches. After seeing the Grampians Yvonne recalled Arthur executing "little pencil sketches, straight from his head." This quantity of work would have allowed him time to present complete works well before the David Jones Gallery retrospective of September, 1950, in which the Wimmera landscapes were shown.

⁶⁶⁷ "For the next month Arthur painted the landscapes of the Wimmera". It is interesting to note how Arthur in every interview given on this period spent in the Wimmera refers to Jack Stevenson not as a teacher, but as a poet, and credits the trip to visiting his poet friend. Are we witnessing a rare instance of Arthur's male chauvinism, or is it a display of PR acumen? By making Jack the reason for the trip he is not simply the husband who tagged along, and by creating a single job description for Jack of 'poet' he sharpens up the story.

⁶⁶⁸ "Yule believed Yvonne "wasn't up to it". Yule papers, SLV.

During her stay with the Stevensons, Yvonne had little time to paint; but occasionally she would accompany Arthur on an expedition, taking the children along too. Jamie was fractious, screaming in the night, and Yvonne would get up looking very haggard in the morning. Although Betty thought Yvonne was happy, she was "tense -- she had a way of smiling when she spoke, a nervous smile..." It was a disposition stretching back to school days. Betty remembered Yvonne turning white and fainting in the middle of a debate. In Horsham, Betty thought Yvonne seemed "very much on the edge of things". On the other hand, Arthur, freed from any activity other than producing landscapes, was on "a picnic"⁶⁶⁹ and felt a sense of release. When Arthur was painting landscapes, he felt "tranquil" and "became one ... began to be part of what [he] was painting".⁶⁷⁰

Once, out on a picnic with Perceval in a beautiful part of the bush, during the time both artists were working on biblical paintings, Perceval had said, "It's a shame we can't do landscape any more, isn't it," Yvonne countered, "Why can't you ... it's still there?". Yvonne remembers Arthur just nodding away. Arthur never argued: not with Bergner, nor the Reeds, Perceval, or any of his peer group. Yvonne realised later that Arthur "hadn't really given up landscapes ... perhaps just for the time being ... he was more involved with doing things that he felt inside ... and getting them out".

But Arthur had not given up landscape painting, not even for the time being. He would later admit that the single most formative part of his experience, both spiritually and artistically, was the time in Rosebud where he had experienced "pure contact with the landscape".⁶⁷¹ The concrete emptiness of the South Melbourne paintings describe Cyril Connolly's vision of the world at war: "closing time in the gardens of the west". In these works, where man's nature is frustrated and thwarted, the very lack of landscape suggests its importance. In *The Hunter* series, not only does landscape form the very core of the commentary but its wild tangle was claimed by Robert Hughes to be "one of the few original visions of landscape ever seen in Australia".⁶⁷² In the biblical series the expulsion from paradise is, in Arthur's own words, the expulsion from the Australian bush. In these three phases, humankind is exiled to the city, spewed out of the wild woods, and expelled from Eden. Nature can be punishing, yet man can struggle out of the primordial ooze of lust and greed, and avoid the precipitous cliff of vanity and ego by "tending his own garden" in "a nice rich piece of Australian bush".⁶⁷³ Martin Boyd believed that "the moral law is only the natural law repeated an octave higher",⁶⁷⁴ and in most of these early works the natural world promises salvation. In many it appears as a land, sea or sky on a far horizon. In others it is embodied in the good shepherd and the gentle gardener.

⁶⁶⁹ "....Arthur, freed from any activity other than producing landscapes ..." ABC archives Disc90/cde/1394 Discs 1-5 date of broadcast 7 September, 1978.

⁶⁷⁰ "When Arthur was painting landscapes, he felt ..." 2BL interview Jenny Brockie, 1 June, 1994. ABC radio archives, Sydney.

⁶⁷¹ "He would later admit ..." Boyd, Arthur. *The Age*, interview by Sally White, 28 November, 1984.

⁶⁷² "In *The Hunter* series ..." Robert Hughes, 'Art in Australia,' Penguin, Australia, 1940.

⁶⁷³ "Nature can be punishing ..." 2BL interview, *ibid*.

⁶⁷⁴ "Martin Boyd believed "the moral law is only the natural law ..." Letter to Arthur Boyd from Martin Boyd, Bundanon archives

In 1948-1949, still under the influence of Brueghel, Arthur painted *The Boat Builders*, depicting a small, but busy, community set in Eden, a coastal town in New South Wales that Arthur had visited on a camping trip with Wilfred McCulloch before the war, and later with Carl Cooper and Barry Gordon. It is an accomplished work, leaning on the style and technique of the past. The exhibition, held at Kozminsky's in December of 1949, had been a mix of Brueghel-inspired landscapes overlapping those of Berwick. The critical response was, like Arthur's changing style, on the cusp. Some applauded Brueghel as a godfather-guide; others felt the younger artist emulated the old master a little too intensely. Most believed the show achieved something remarkable, admitting that, while homage to Brueghel was apparent, the quality of Arthur Boyd's work was singular. One critic observed Arthur's new road as it cut through Berwick on its way to the Wimmera: "in two or three of his bush and river pictures, he has re-interpreted the Australian scene with daring, skill and real originality".⁶⁷⁵

John Reed was a naysayer. Early in 1950, shortly after the December 1949 Kozminsky exhibition, he took Arthur out for a New Year's lunch and a lecture. John harangued Arthur about what seemed to be happening in the world, about painting in general, and about Arthur's painting in particular. Listening to his own voice, and watching Arthur nod, John found the experience "quite pleasant".⁶⁷⁶ Nothing positive was said about Arthur's work, but John concluded that "in spite of everything", Arthur had agreed with his views. Yet, the lawyer in John was uneasy: was Arthur "genuine", he pondered. Had he really won his case?

For the Reeds there was no one "except Nolan", the only artist painting anything "fit to be put up on a wall". John confided to Bert: "the paintings which Arthur appeared to like best in his last exhibition were the very ones which Sun and I both thought were far and away the worst". John Reed assumed that the reason was that Arthur needed to put bread on his table: "It is partly the old story, which is easy enough to sympathise with, of painting bad pictures in order to make money in order to paint good pictures".

After their lunch Reed learned that Arthur had gone his own, quiet, determined way and was busy preparing a retrospective exhibition for the David Jones Gallery in Sydney. He was sending biblical works and a mix of landscapes: *Cyanide Tanks*, *Eroded Creek Bed*, *Camel Back Mountain*, *Broken Falls*, *The Grampians*. Reed wrote to Bert Tucker saying he believed Arthur's coming exhibition at David Jones "promises to be even worse than his last one!"⁶⁷⁷ The Reeds had not been on the same wavelength with Arthur for some time. Despite an invitation from Arthur to come and visit him at the Grange and view his mural, they could not find the time to make the trip. John Reed's view of the young art community he had championed was bleak. He told Tucker "all the lovely promise of ten years ago" had either "died" or was "so wilted or dormant" it filled him with

⁶⁷⁵ "On critic observed Arthur's new road as it cut through Berwick on its way to the Wimmera ..." tbs

⁶⁷⁶ "Listening to his own voice ..." Letter to Bert Tucker from John Reed, Heide, 6 February, 1950. Tucker papers, SLV

⁶⁷⁷ "Reed wrote to Bert Tucker ..." Extract of letter from Reed to Tucker, dated 1950. Tucker papers. SLV.

“despair”.⁶⁷⁸ Reeds opinion differed wildly from the artist and critic reviewing the David Jones exhibition, James Gleeson. He hailed Arthur’s “directness of approach” his “subtlety of observation” and insisted he be regarded as “one of the most talented of the younger painters in Australia”.⁶⁷⁹

In June 1950 Arthur had submitted several works in the Dunlop Australian Art Contest, which had a field of 800 entries. Nolan took first prize and Arthur came in, after two equal seconds, a crowded equal third with his old friend Keith Nichols. For this he earned himself seventy-five pounds prize money and a ticking off from John Reed, who described the work, *Moby Dick Hill*, as “horrible” and suggested Arthur had “blatantly set out to cash in on Nolan’s success” with “blue sky, horizons, windmills, wheat field, puff puffs and goodness knows what”.⁶⁸⁰ The accusation was unfounded. *Moby Dick Hill* owed nothing to Nolan. Reed rounded off his rant to Bert Tucker in a colluding tone, “as you say, a painter needs other things beside a native talent and sensibility.”

When Arthur returns to *en plein air* landscapes, he refocuses. Telescopic visions disappear. There is no distortion, no veil of metaphor, no long looks back through time. Nightmares dissolve under brilliant light and, as claustrophobic crowds disperse and human activity lessens, the view widens. While these landscapes have openness they contain a suggestion of menace. On the road to the Wimmera, in the environs of Bendigo, Arthur saw a battle for survival going on: the earth being ground down, cyanide tanks slowly leaking poison into the soil, animals sinking into swamps created by mining.⁶⁸¹ Amid this attempt at containment, just as in *The Money Lenders*, once again nature is out of kilter: the horse bridles, the squirm, swooping crows agitate and man struggles.

Although Arthur was in Nolan’s territory when he set up his boards on the plains of the Wimmera, if he attempted to extract anything from Nolan’s vision, it would appear to be Nolan’s quest for that “flashbulb ... of Australian light”.⁶⁸² To capture the high-pitched heat of the Wimmera, Arthur turned to the luminous medium of tempera. Light appears to shine from within these works. They are both serene and unsettling. Softly they whisper of a deadly desert waiting just over the next ridge: gently they suggest that the heat misting the distant mountains in a soft purple haze can toast the earth to a hard crust under foot; as all the while the wind pump prophesises that drought is but a dying breath of wind away.

⁶⁷⁸ “He told Tucker, “all the lovely promise ...” *ibid*

⁶⁷⁹ “Reeds opinion differed wildly from ...” *Sun*, James Gleeson, 4 September, 1950.

⁶⁸⁰ “For this he earned himself seventy-five pounds ...” Extract of letter from John Reed to Albert Tucker, June 25, 1950. *The Letters of John Reed*, *op cit.* David Jones archives

⁶⁸¹ “On the road to Wimmera ...” While discussing Bendigo mining country Arthur mentions the cyanide tanks for gold extraction, a horse being pulled out of a swamp ...and adds “that’s what I’d see everyday.” Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

⁶⁸² “Although Arthur was in Nolan’s territory ...” Sidney Nolan, 1942 letter from Wimmera. *Nolan’s Nolans: A reputation reassessed*. Thos. Agnew and Sons Ltd., London. 1997.

These works are “both matter-of-fact and poetical”.⁶⁸³ There is lyricism of composition and colour and there is the language of the poet, threading personal images so subtly they belong to the everyday vision of the land. As Arthur explained, *Irrigation Lake, Wimmera* referred back to the top left-hand corner of *The Mining Town*, both “in its technique and also a bit in the atmosphere ...the funny shape of the pig-like cattle and the weird little horse and buggy thing”.⁶⁸⁴ Is this the indelible memory of a father’s seizure while driving his jinker? Are the strange animal forms conjured from the deformed calves and kittens that Arthur witnessed as a child in the paddocks of Open Country? Are we in a Hardy landscape? Is the artist reminding us that nature ultimately rules, that she can be calamitous? As for ‘fact’, the citizens of Horsham, those who had trundled around the Stevenson’s house looking “askance” at Arthur’s work had not truly seen what lay beyond their boundaries of fibro, tile and brick. They had not noticed the underlying pink in the dry grasses, the wheaten-gold in the dry earth, the particular rise of a hill, or fall of a swale, or shape of a lake. Arthur was showing Australians where they lived, mapping it, writing it home with his brush.

If John Reed thought Arthur’s landscapes insignificant, the Art Gallery of New South Wales did not, purchasing in 1949 *Mid-day, the Wimmera*. And if Reed believed Nolan’s and Boyd’s landscapes poles apart in excellence, the National Gallery of Victoria did not, purchasing in 1950 both Boyd’s *Irrigation Lake, Wimmera* and Nolan’s *Durack Range*.

Arthur’s outback is set midway between Australia’s red-raw heart and her lacy edges. Nolan’s interior is a place of limitless rock -- flat, peaked, pummelled, cratered, ridged, furrowed, stretching on and out into space from where it seems to have fallen. Arthur’s perspective is on a pecking level with the crows, Nolan’s is from the eye of an eagle.⁶⁸⁵ In Arthur’s landscape man struggles to survive. In Nolan’s man hasn’t got a chance, he isn’t even in the picture. Two distinct views, two distinctive painters; neither of whom now listened to the Reeds, if indeed they ever did.

Before Arthur left Horsham he told Betty not to fret over the late payment of her Myer bill, because Myer still hadn’t paid his. The department store had accepted a consignment of pottery over a year ago and the cheque was still in the post. Money was desperately tight. Yet, having made the decision to leave the pottery in 1949, Arthur held fast. An article in a glossy magazine, in 1948, had described Arthur as a decorator, and

⁶⁸³ “These works are “both mater-of-fact and poetical.” *Arthur Boyd Franz Philipp*, pg 64, op cit

⁶⁸⁴ “As Arthur explained, *Irrigation Lake, Wimmera* referred back ...” Arthur Boyd, interview, *Australian Eye Series*.

⁶⁸⁵ “Nolan’s interior is a place of limitless rock ...” Nolan’s journey took him through Arnhem Land and the Kimberley. With his wife, Cynthia, accompanying him he flew on mail planes ending up on the coast of Western Australia at Broome.

presented both him and John as “artists before they became potters”.⁶⁸⁶ He would not spend his days making tiles for coffee tables.

The pottery was failing Arthur on every level; it produced neither money nor satisfaction. In that same year Arthur had a rare outburst, telling Bert Tucker (who was being subsidised by the Reeds on his European sojourn to the tune of one hundred and forty four pounds a year)⁶⁸⁷ “I have my troubles, what with trying to make a living out of pottery and trying to paint at the same time ... it’s a hard life...”⁶⁸⁸ On the same day, 22 June 1948, aided by Yvonne as typist and spell checker, Arthur continued to dictate in a soft rant. To Denison Deasey, now travelling on an extended tour of Europe, financed by a large inheritance from his father’s estate, Arthur wrote of his clipped wings: “I’ve just come back from Sydney (purely business) I was after clay and pottery colours. Sydney is a pretty place. Not a patch on Paris eh?” He touched on lack of inspiration: “Why don’t you send me prints of some good pictures. Are there any good painters there apart from Picasso?” And he spoke of his frustration with work: “I’m still working at the pottery instead of painting; not entirely, really, but I spend far too much time potting.” And, as usual, there was the ongoing restriction of money: “We have had a referendum for prices here; everybody voted to have price control lifted and now it costs about four times as much to live and its getting worse. – ten pound – a week goes nowhere... needless to say I don’t make that much”.⁶⁸⁹ With Yvonne four months pregnant with her second child and no longer bringing in a salary, being sole provider put Arthur under extra pressure; not only was he the father of two small children but, as the eldest and only son still living at home, the struggle of his parents was an ongoing concern. Arthur’s old friend, Yosl Bergner, branded a ‘P’ on the back of works painted in the hope of a ready market: it stood for ‘Provide’. After completing the first collection of Wimmera landscapes, Arthur continued to pursue landscape painting but also began to juggle another ball in the air.

After months of experimentation, Arthur invented a medium new to Australia. Making use of the equipment available, he became the first Australian artist to use tile as a canvas. Casting clay on a large flat slab of plaster, and while it was still in the wet state, he used both brush and palette knife to apply ceramic paint mixed with clay. This mix was innovative, giving a raised surface similar to the texture of oils. His painting was then glazed and in the heat of the kiln fused into the clay. The rich, bold colours glowed deep and reflective,, like stained-glass struck permanently with perfect light.

⁶⁸⁶ “An article in a glossy magazine, in 1948 ...” *Australian Home Beautiful*, January 1948.

⁶⁸⁷ “The Pottery was failing Arthur on every level ...” By 24 November, 1953, the Reeds patronage would cease. That month Reed (both he and Sunday now Sweeny’s legal guardians) writes to Tucker in response to a critical communication. Reed explains he and Sunday are withdrawing the “144 pounds a year help” because “...the demands on Sun over a long period have greatly increased and now far far exceed our income, both spiritually and financially so to speak, involving all sorts of personal issues and conflicts to which there does not seem to be any answer, other than to continue to try to live in the best way we know how...” Tucker papers, SLV.

⁶⁸⁸ “I have my troubles, what with try to make a living ...” Tucker papers, letter from Arthur Boyd to Albert Tucker, 22 June, 1948.

⁶⁸⁹ “And, as usual, there was the ongoing restriction of money ...” Written on Arthur Merric Boyd Potteries notepaper dated 22 June, 1948. Denison Deasey papers, Manuscripts, SLV.

Back from the isolation of the Grange and the Wimmera, re-established in the studio at Open Country, Arthur reverted to introspection and the cloak of myth and symbol. Images from the past reappear, as disturbing as ever. The ram rampages once again, and beset and tortured partnerships become the overriding theme. Two by two they pour off Arthur's brush: *The Lovers*, *The Fall*, *The Expulsion* (Adam and Eve), *Venus and Adonis*, *Jacob Wrestling with an Angel*, *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*, *Daniel in the Lion's Den*, *Leda and the Swan*, *The Lion Tamer*, *Europa and the Bull*, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, *Elijah and the Lions*, *Tobit and the Goat*, *Tobit and the Angel*, *Elijah and the Ravens*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Ruth and Boas*.⁶⁹⁰

Like the Ancient Mariner, Arthur was looking for an audience: he had a story to tell, over and over. The audience, like the watching bird, must see what he sees. The reductive quality and space of the medium (on average one foot square) compressed forms dramatically, giving added intensity and intimacy. The ceramic paintings resemble flash cards that prompt associations – opposing couples, mismatched mates, star-crossed lovers; images of man at odds with woman and man at odds with nature. The largest work of this period (composed of nine tiles), *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, contains ongoing key symbols: a female temptress, a ram (metamorphosing into a bull) and a watcher (a red-eyed black bird). The saint throws up his hands in a gesture of defeat, while the ram's hands and horns reach forward to caress and penetrate the naked woman as she swings, unconstrained, from the tree branch by her legs. She is the true Eve, born of a primate. Other works speak of betrayal and the fallen: *Icarus*, *The Entombment*, *Judas and Woman Taken in Adultery*. The few which deal with domestic life are moody (portrait of Polly), angry (woman peeling potatoes), fractious (child being fed, woman with crying baby), unflattering and uncomfortable (woman sewing, woman bathing in bath tub).

The surrealist Sydney artist and critic, James Gleeson, likened Arthur's tile exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries, to a "good pantomime" where "action is related with clear sighted understanding of the really important things and a complete dismissal of incidentals." Gleeson could have been describing the artist himself: the outer layer comedic; the core fierce, strong, and enduring. Sidney Nolan, during the war years, saw it in Arthur's eyes: "his innocent, yet knowing look".⁶⁹¹ Neil Douglas discerned it in Arthur's work: "some thought there was nothing there because he had no presence, but when Arthur did a painting it was part of his realisation ... part of his hate, love, part of his desperation".⁶⁹²

Alan McCulloch, now art critic for the Melbourne *Herald*, at last pardoned what he believed to be Arthur's crudity in depicting human and animal form. Mistaking Arthur's expressionism he had previously labelled it a deficiency. Now, because of the technical difficulties of tile painting, McCulloch excused it. He found Arthur's invention a "most

⁶⁹⁰ "Two by two they pour off Arthur's brush ..." These works were shown at the Peter Bray Galleries, 26 August – 14 September, 1952.

⁶⁹¹ "Gleeson could have been describing the artist himself ..." Sidney Nolan to Gavin Fry, 'Nolan's Gallipoli,' Rigby, Adelaide, 1983.

⁶⁹² "Neil Douglas discerned it in Arthur's work ..." Neil Douglas interview.

stimulating and exciting ... ornamental art-craft".⁶⁹³ Arthur would have baulked at the words "ornamental" and "craft," yet he needed to sell his wares. He told a reporter that, although he intended his tiles primarily to be hung as pictures, he suggested other uses for home decoration. The story listed:

- * Setting the tiles into the wall as a mural, or into the walls of a garden or courtyard like Italian mosaics;
- * As decorative and practical surfaces around fireplaces;
- * Because they are heat-proof, as a fireplace back, in the style of 17th century Dutch houses.

It sounded like a blurb for *Home Beautiful*, and no one was more aware of it than Arthur. He was deeply wounded by a Sydney critic who:

wrote them up in a very nasty way ... I was extremely disappointed because I had simply thought them new, colourful and interesting ... I'd done these things not to be great, naturally they couldn't be, the medium itself wouldn't allow them... still I had put a lot of physical effort and time into these ceramics.⁶⁹⁴

Tom Sanders, who was sharing the Neerim Road pottery with John Perceval at the time, remembered Arthur bringing up the "enormously fragile" tiles from his studio to be fired. After great patience, spending as much as a month on a tile, Arthur would reveal his flip side. When the firing was finished, after a temperature of around 900 degrees, Arthur would be as anxious as a child on Christmas morning to explore his stocking, beside himself to see what gift the kiln held. Arthur's impatience with the cooling period would more often get the better of him and Sanders would watch with horror as "Arthur would go up with the lid ... a crazy ... hand-made lid ... and the whole place you thought was on fire ..."

Obviously the tiles were not simply thrown off as money spinners but, as usual, Arthur was disinclined to reveal his efforts and hopes to anyone. Journalists, particularly, had little chance of peeling away his protective cover. A year later a newspaper reported that, although Arthur has turned his hand to pottery and hand-baked tile work, he didn't enjoy it. Arthur Boyd was "a serious artist and hated to be diverted".⁶⁹⁵ No doubt what Arthur hated was laying his soul down on the tiles and then being forced to suggest the result was slight and unimportant.

Although many of the images on the tiles were repeated in paintings, patrons for paintings were few and far between. In 1949, Uncle Martin had underwritten the expenses of the Kozminsky exhibition by buying three pictures totalling one hundred and twenty pounds. By blazoning a few red dots around the show he had hoped to stir "the half-witted second-rate public" who didn't understand "a painter who sees anything more in the Australian landscape than a pretty surface". His letter to Arthur, written

⁶⁹³ "He found Arthur's invention ..." "Art Review" *Herald*, August, 1952.

⁶⁹⁴ "He was deeply wounded by a Sydney critic ..." Arthur Boyd to Franz Philipp, Melbourne University Library.

⁶⁹⁵ "A year later a newspaper reported ..." *The Argus*, Friday, 22 May, 1953.

from the Melbourne Club, continued to bolster his nephew, urging him not to be depressed by the lack of public response, applauding him for putting in "such splendid work" and promising success: "You are bound in due course to receive the full recognition your work deserves". He concluded by dismissing the Kozminsky exhibition simply as "a financial disappointment (troublesome enough God knows) but nothing more".⁶⁹⁶ In 1951, the Reeds partially had their faith restored. Finding "a glimmering of hope" in Arthur's work, they "plucked up courage" to buy "a small painting of Christ walking on the water because [they] liked the figure of Christ a lot".⁶⁹⁷ In 1953 they thought Arthur's ceramic paintings "exciting ... a positive delight"; they invested in several tiles and became believers once again.⁶⁹⁸

In the middle of 1952, Guy returned from Sydney. As the years went by and Guy's finances went from strength to strength, he became known as "the white sheep of the family". To be a businessman separated you from the Boyd herd. Guy had closed his business in Sydney, the 'Martin Boyd Pottery', and arrived in Murrumbidgee with savings, possessions and Phyllis Nairn, a twenty-six-year-old Adelaide girl he had met at the end of 1950, a year after his first marriage, which had lasted less than a year. Guy's proposal carried a caveat: "If you're going to marry me, you'll have to get on well with my family." Once Phyllis became thoroughly immersed within the family group she felt as if she was "living in a Balzac novel".⁶⁹⁹

The day Phyllis arrived, Merric suffered a seizure. Arthur bundled his father up and removed him from sight. Perhaps the family had believed the truth might frighten Phyllis away, for it was only then that Guy sat her down with a cup of tea and explained Merric's condition. The next morning Phyllis woke to witness how her sister-in-law approached the task of living in 'the sort of house' she too hadn't been 'used to'. Through the chill, early-morning air, Yvonne marched down the connecting path from the studio to the house, clad in a large overcoat and heavy boots. She was carrying a breakfast tray to the ailing Merric and exhausted Doris. For the entire week Yvonne continued to deliver meals.

Yvonne had first met Phyllis in Sydney on one of the few breaks she and Arthur took alone together. It had been a multi-task trip: to deliver tiles to the gallery and attend a rally of the Peace Council, "an idealistic thing" both husband and wife were involved in.⁷⁰⁰ Travelling up in Perceval's Renault, they unloaded the tiles at night and camped in

⁶⁹⁶ "He concluded by dismissing the Kozminsky exhibition ..." Brenda Niall, *Martin Boyd. A Life*, Melbourne University Press, 1988. Melbourne.

⁶⁹⁷ "In 1951 the Reeds partially had their faith restored ..." Extract from letter of John Reed to Albert Tucker October/November 1951. *Letters of John Reed*, op cit

⁶⁹⁸ "In 1953 they thought Arthur's ceramic paintings ..." John Reed to Albert Tucker, 23 July, 1953. Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ "Guy's proposal carried a caveat ..." Phyllis Boyd interview. Apart from several telephone interviews, two extended interviews were conducted at Sandringham, 8 December, 1999, and November 29, 2000.

⁷⁰⁰ "...an idealistic thing ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

the car by the side of the Hume Highway. Despite the luxury of a 'real' car, progress was considered and slow. Arthur drove with extreme, if not undue, caution. Whether as driver or pedestrian, he was equally fraught. His children never forgot their father's vice-like grip every time they crossed a road. He would cling onto them, his head swivelling left and right and left, until the coast was completely clear. Arthur lived life imagining accidents about to happen. Rarely allowing himself the release of outwardly expressing anger, and constantly worrying over his family and loved ones coming to harm, Arthur's panacea was a brush in his hand. "While you are painting you don't have fear ... you could be depressed, or annoyed, but the one thing you don't have is fear".⁷⁰¹

When the two sisters-in-law first met in Sydney, Yvonne recalled: "Phyllis knew we had to agree to differ, and disagree we did." While Yvonne argued from her communist corner, Phyllis led a conservative battle. Doris was inclined towards Phyllis's views and once asked her to intercede to stop Mary sending Mathew to Preshil School, fearing it was too progressive. Lucy confirmed that her mother approved of the matter-of-fact way Phyllis raised her children, keeping them well clothed and presentable. Doris also agreed with Phyllis on her stay-at-home attitude. Doris had grown up missing her mother's presence. As the youngest child, she had been left in the care of her oldest sister while Evelyn Gough edited her newspaper and pursued reforms, at one stage travelling as far a field as Canada. Doris would not have approved when Yvonne took a part-time job as art teacher at the local St Peter's School.

Phyllis relished debate. Driven by a fierce belief she was right, both in argument and politics, Phyllis would pump up the volume among the ardent leftists. There were private politics too. About seven months after Phyllis and Guy arrived, Mary and John left. Uncle Martin had generously offered a loan to Mary. Although John insisted he would not shift from Open Country, Phyllis helped Mary house-hunt and eventually the Perceval family moved to Canterbury. With the pottery going begging, Guy immediately took over the space and spread his work out further: installing a throwing wheel and a business telephone. Arthur and Yvonne objected, believing it would be too much of a strain on Merric and Doris. Phyllis was taken aback, particularly when Arthur expressed his views. The "little tiff" that followed firmed her resolve to "[get] out as fast as we could".⁷⁰² However, Arthur and Yvonne were proved right. The noise and human traffic and the sight of other potters usurping his old working space, became too much for Merric. One day, as Harry, an employee of Guy's, sat decorating pottery, Merric rushed at him wielding an axe. Guy managed to rescue Harry and placate his father, but not before Merric's axe had hacked into the door.

When Guy arrived back home he would have seen an enormous change in his father. Merric was producing only a very small amount of pottery, and by hand, while sitting in the Brown Room under the skylight. His time was mostly spent sketching and walking. Arthur would keep his father supplied with pencils and Spirex notepads and large cheap children's sketch pads bought from the local newsagency, and Merric would fill them –

⁷⁰¹ "While you are painting you don't have fear ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁷⁰² "The 'little tiff' that followed firmed her resolve ... Phyllis Boyd interview.

hundreds of them, full of local scenes and people and dogs and trees and cow after cow, with fat udders. Merric's journeys would often turn into wanderings; a four or five mile walkabout was not uncommon.

Frantic times would occur when he didn't come home. Arthur would be beside himself, leaping around the Brown Room and heading out in the Dodge, scouring the surrounding area. When Tom Sanders observed Arthur's desperate concern, rushing to give his father "succour", he saw "Arthur's humanity".⁷⁰³ Phyllis believed Arthur's anxiety was triggered by the worry Doris would suffer. But, given Arthur's experience of his father's seizures, and his imagination, he would have lived with the constant fear of Merric lying prone on a suburban street, alone, injured, a long way from home. On the occasions Arthur failed to find Merric, eventually someone would call. Often Merric had walked miles to the homes of relatives and friends who owned a piano, to ask if he could play. One occasion he knocked on the door of a girl's school and applied for a job. Eventually they received a call from the headmistress: "There is a very charming man here called Merric Boyd. We had tea. Would someone like to come and pick him up"?

During the 1940's Merric's attacks became more frequent. Some time in the mid-forties Yvonne had met up with Doris and Merric on the way home from a trip to the city. Doris and Merric had been journeying around town all day with a suitcase of pottery. At the end of the day it was as full as when they had set out, not one piece sold. Yvonne tried to be consoling, but made the mistake of acknowledging the reality of the situation in Merric's presence. Her phrase "times are hard" triggered a seizure. In the middle of the little tea shop by the South Yarra railway station, Merric quietly muttered the distressing warning: "I'm going to have a whopper". In an instant Doris was on her feet and by Merric's side, bending over him, talking quietly, calmly but relentlessly. Just as she so often managed to do, she fended off the attack. On another occasion Merric's health was so dire there was talk of a doctor being called out. Constrained to his bed, his white hair flowing around his pillow, his patriarchal face like an El Greco portrait, Merric was not an easy patient. To guard him from the cold, a brick, warmed by the fire, had been wrapped in fabric and placed between the sheets. When Merric heard news of a doctor's impending visit, he issued an ultimatum: "If he comes, I'll hit that man with this brick".⁷⁰⁴ By the mid-fifties Merric would become so befuddled that on one occasion he slapped his grandchild of eight months (Phyllis's and Guy's daughter, Sally) on the face when she refused to kiss him.⁷⁰⁵ Phyllis's pragmatic belief that Merric should be certified (in the parlance of the fifties, "placed") initially horrified the group. Later, "he should be placed" became a humorous catch-cry directed at anyone creating a ruckus.⁷⁰⁶

When Mary and John left it was just another example of friends and family changing and moving on, while Yvonne and Arthur remained fixed and living in exactly the same circumstances as they had a decade before. Tim and Betty Burstall had moved to

⁷⁰³ "When Tom Sanders observed Arthur's desperate concern ..." Tom Sanders interview.

⁷⁰⁴ "When Merric heard news of a doctor's impending visit ..." Len French interview

⁷⁰⁵ "By the mid-fifties Merric would become so befuddled ..." Phyllis Boyd interview.

⁷⁰⁶ "Later, 'he should be placed...' Tim and Betty Burstall interview.

Eltham. Aunt Beryl was working in Fleet Street and Yvonne's mother had visited her sister in London in 1950. Uncle Martin was cloistered in Cambridge. Denison Deasey was exploring Ireland, England and Switzerland. John Yule was in London. Peter Herbst had set up a pottery in South Africa. Stasha Halpern was painting in Paris. Brian O'Shaughnessy was studying at Oxford. Max Nicholson was touring and teaching in Europe. David Boyd and Hermia after living in London had set up a pottery in Tourrettes-sur-Loup, in the hills above Nice. Sidney Nolan had been based in England since 1950. And Bert Tucker after camping in Paris in his hand-made caravan by the banks of the Seine had moved onto Rome.

For six years Bert Tucker's books had been stacked in the studio waiting to be reclaimed. At the age of thirty-three, Yvonne must have been wondering if she would only ever know the world through second-hand books, and second-hand reports. In April of 1953, she wrote to Tucker:

News filters through occasionally through our friends abroad... Arthur has been painting solidly (no pottery) for about 3 years now – much happier and we've managed to live "off" it. He seems to have made at least a niche on the art ladder here, at last. Tho' its very limited, how far you can get – even with the best of intentions from all sides. So at the beginning of this year he conceived the idea of going overseas – This idea has met with acclaim from all friends & relatives over there in various parts – with the proviso "don't bring Yvonne!" (& the kids). They mean well of course, I see their points, but still it would hardly be an enormous economy for me to be left behind with the children ... anyway mad as it may sound we intend to come (all 4) as soon as we can save the return fares. I have Beryl in London to stay with & Arthur has David so its not impossible to lay our heads somewhere for awhile if we ever do raise the fares ...⁷⁰⁷

Yvonne sat down to write this letter buoyed by the news that Arthur's work would be seen overseas, even if the family wouldn't. In July 1953 the first "official" exhibition of modern Australian painting was held at the New Burlington Galleries, London.⁷⁰⁸ The Arts Council of Great Britain shouldered the responsibility for staging, and the Australian Government for sponsoring. It was pragmatically titled 'Twelve Australian Artists' and was unequally weighted, with ten Dobells, ten Drysdales, nine Nolans, and six Boyds out of a total of fifty-seven entries.⁷⁰⁹ The critic from *The New Statesman and Nation* announced that the exhibition demonstrated "very clearly what is meant by a proper 'national tradition'". He believed the landscapes of Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, Arthur Boyd and Lloyd Rees all embodied "a character of subject and a way

⁷⁰⁷ "In April of 1953 she wrote to Tucker ..." Tucker papers, SLV.

⁷⁰⁸ "In July, 1953, the first "official" exhibition of modern Australian painting" The artists invited were: William Dobell, Justin O'Brien, Frank Hinder, Lloyd Rees, Jean Bellette, Constance Stokes, Godfrey Miller, Donald Friend, Russell Drysdale, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and Ralph Balson.

⁷⁰⁹ It was pragmatically titled, 'Twelve Australian Artists' ... "Arthur's exhibited works were: *Jacob's Dream, The Golden Calf, The Mockers, Clay Pan Country, Irrigation Lake, Wimmera, and Burnt Wheat Stubble.*

of looking and feeling which is essentially Australian".⁷¹⁰ That said, he went on to compare Rees to Courbet, Drysdale to Rubens, and Boyd to Stanley Spencer. *The Times* critic appreciated the antipodean attempt at articulating a national style while, at the same time, trying to keep pace with contemporary art movements.⁷¹¹ Dryly, he suggested that this explained why the deserts of Australia were strewn with Henry Moore rocks and Graham Sutherland trees. His description of a Dobell portrait as "robust and sometimes rather overemphatic" nudged and winked at the British reader's preconceived notions of the Australian character. Another critic puzzled over Nolan's Kelly: "Did he always get around in that kind of contraption?" All in all, despite the few cold fronts, the welcome was warm. Strange places attracted the British eye. One critic selected Nolan, Drysdale, Rees and Boyd as the picks of the bunch⁷¹² and another named Arthur Boyd as the artist with "the most poetic view of the Australian scene".⁷¹³

In September, the Peter Bray Gallery in Melbourne held a retrospective of Arthur's work. In galleries throughout Australia, between 1952 and 1953, Arthur continued creating and exhibiting his tile paintings, selling them for ten to twenty guineas. He placed a lot of hope on Peter Bray retrospective, trusting it would provide the balance necessary for a trip to Europe. Only three paintings sold. On the 24 November, 1953, John Reed broke the news of Arthur's disappointment to Tucker: "...he has certainly battled more than any of the others to live by his painting and it is a tragedy he cannot get away"..⁷¹⁴ Reed reported that Arthur, directly following the disappointing exhibition, had given himself a "consolation trip to Central Australia" and was "now just back".⁷¹⁵

Arthur's selection for the Burlington Galleries had been a fifty-fifty split between his biblical paintings and Wimmera landscapes. There had been little comment on his Brueghelesque works; the British critics' fascination had been caught by the image of the outback: the "toughness and poetry ...bright, uneventful light ...wide distances ...sun-dried vegetation ...dried-up corpses of cattle". Perhaps it was the London reviews that spurred Arthur's journey to the interior, the wide-eyed British interest that edged him on to discover the vast strangeness that lay beyond the mountain ranges.

On his month-long lone trip, Arthur missed Yvonne. He said so, in his pen and ink scrawl in a letter he laboured over in the crowded, dusty Alice Springs post office. It was a brief letter, but not by Arthur's standards. He expressed concern over Yvonne's cold

⁷¹⁰ "He believed the landscapes of Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale" Reviewer, 'J.B', *The New Statesman & Nation*, 8 August, 1953.

⁷¹¹ "The *Times* critic appreciated ..." *The Times*, Friday July 24, 1953.

⁷¹² One critic selected Nolan, Drysdale ..." *The New Statesman & Nation*, op cit

⁷¹³ "...and another named Arthur Boyd ..." F.M. Godfrey, 'John O'London's Weekly Vol. LX11 No 1,518, 14 August, 1953.

⁷¹⁴ "On 24 November, 1953 ..." Tucker papers, SLV

⁷¹⁵ "Reed reported ... Arthur ...had given himself a 'consolation trip'..." Franz Philipp incorrectly reported this crucial journey took place in 1951. Since Philipp's biography in the 60s it has, without exception, been mistakenly repeated. Reed's letter places the month of Arthur's trip between the Peter Bray exhibition September 15-24 and the date of Reed's letter, the 24 November, 1953. A letter from Arthur to Yvonne was posted from Alice Springs on 2 November. An entry in Tim Burstall's diary of 14 November, 1953, states Arthur had "only just come back from Central Australia the day before".

and hoped she was feeling better and looking after herself, told her he missed her, and signed off the few paragraphs: 'Your ever loving husband Arthur.' By Yvonne's admission, these were the years involving "endless fights and discussions".⁷¹⁶ Arthur's temper was only induced, according to Yvonne, by "people behaving in an anti-social, anti-family, anti-domestic way". His anger was so rare that family and friends believed they could count the times they had witnessed it.

Living at Open Country meant living outside the conventional. Although Yvonne realised that "conformity would have had its comforts" nevertheless she liked "living by our own rules". But peace became an idealistic notion when it crashed into concepts of personal rights. The philosophy of 'love governs' could create a confusion of ideas and ideals. It certainly failed on the extraordinary day that Arthur's hand struck Yvonne across the face. Given the temperament of the man, this could only have been the most desperate kind of fury. Considering the incident as an eighty-four year old woman, Yvonne blamed herself. "I was full of myself and my tortured feelings. It was all about my absorption ... my need ... I was provoking ... God I was a trial".

Truth was an overriding factor. Although Yvonne and Arthur were discreet within the circle of family and friends, they kept nothing from each other. There was an issue on which they would differ throughout their life together. As Yvonne explained: "I believe sex can be separated from love – Arthur didn't think so".⁷¹⁷ Despite her sense of this time being fraught with "lots of thorns ... difficulties ...", in great part fuelled by their conflicting notions of individual freedom, "there was no real desire to break away". That sentiment would seem to be underscored by Arthur in the few simple lines he wrote from Alice Springs. A quote from Arthur that he made in his later years on the subject of possession sounds an echo here: "If you give something you've got to lose something ... that's what I reckon the whole thing is about".⁷¹⁸

He had travelled out in search of landscape, but ultimately it would be the people, not the place, that affected him. He journeyed on The Ghan, a train that took three days to travel from Port Augusta in South Australia to Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. Arthur had not seen an aborigine until his mid-teens, and then the image had been surreal: here was a character of the Melbourne streets who entertained by playing tunes on a gum leaf. Despite Yosl Bergner directing attention to the plight of the urban Aborigine, Arthur persisted with his idea of a 'noble savage' with tribal rites and dances, living apart, happily separated. Now, after nursing this comforting image into his mid-thirties, it was shocked out of him. He found a people not only segregated, but relegated to the level of animals – travelling in the back of the train in cattle trucks. From the hot dusty centre he journeyed by Jeep another hundred miles into the Simpson Desert. In Arltunga, a former mining community, he found communities of Aborigines living

⁷¹⁶ "By Yvonne's admission, these were the years involving 'endless fights and discussions.'" Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁷¹⁷ "There was an issue on which they would differ ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd. Arthur Boyd to Sandra McGrath: "The sex act must involve a love relationship. If it doesn't it is diminished in value." Sandra McGrath, *The Artist & the River*, Bay Books, Sydney, 1982.

⁷¹⁸ "If you give something you've got to lose something ..." Arthur Boyd, *Testament of a Painter*, op cit

among derelict machines and equipment, under bits and pieces of corrugated iron and discarded fencing, in structures so makeshift and haphazard they looked like the aftermath of a hurricane. He didn't see Drysdale's Aborigines "standing under tents, quite classic... with great dignity". He saw broken tribes, broken families, scattered among the debris of the past hundred years: "They weren't poor whites, they were something else". This was a long, ongoing, and forgotten war. Arthur saw it, and concluded: "We had mucked it up".⁷¹⁹

The day after his return from the Simpson Desert, Arthur drove Perceval's Renault up to Tim Burstall's house in Eltham. The car was full of moulded ash-trays ready for decoration. It was a business arrangement, a hopeful money spinner: Tim would decorate and Arthur would arrange the firing. Arthur told Tim he had made one hundred and fifty pencil sketches while he was away and reckoned if he painted fifty pictures he ought to get ten good ones. Having assured Tim he would never overcrowd an exhibition again, he produced a small number of tempera landscapes - many based on these swiftly realised sketches of Central Australia, usually executed from the window of the train or the passing jeep. But the displacement of the Australian aborigine lodged deep. Arthur could not forget the faces of the mired and the trapped, those "forced, pushed into a position".⁷²⁰ There is every possibility that Arthur expressed these images of disconnected family through his sculpture series exhibited at the end of 1954. However, in 1954, he produced only one painting that symbolised this experience. Although the work owes much to the technique and composition of Chagall, Arthur was attempting to "do something different". *Half Caste Wedding* is the precursor to what would become his most famous series.⁷²¹

This first work, by drawing heavily on Chagall, offers an immediate association with the European - ancient villages with their steeples and churches peopled by exotically costumed inhabitants. This uneasy dream of the foreign settles over the desert like a mirage. The church (topped by half hoops) resembles a doll's house and looms like a prison. A minister casts a half-look towards embracing couples. The women are half-castes: they vacillate, belonging to neither one world nor the other. Unanchored, they float above firm ground. The symbol of marriage, the white gown, is fragile and has begun to tear apart. A black man, caught between the two couples, is the victim. His palm print (his art, his identity) the signature of his past presence, marks the church building. Is this where his body was pressed tight up against the wall as his eyes gazed through the pair of eye-shaped windows? Was he 'forced, pushed into a position,' of the outsider, desperately looking in? And what did he see? Is this why he now lies splayed on the ground, trampled by bounding nature? Like Nolan, Arthur would lay a black mask over the landscape. But the story of *The Blackman and His Bride* would be

⁷¹⁹ "He didn't see Drysdale's aborigines ... we had mucked it up". Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁷²⁰ "Arthur could not forget the faces ..." Ibid

⁷²¹ "*Half Caste Wedding* is the precursor ..." Robert Rooney, 22-23 November, 1986, writing for 'The Weekend Australian Magazine,' recalled this painting exhibited, but not catalogued, in the 1955 Contemporary Art Society annual exhibition, in which he, too, exhibited work.

inextricably linked to the personal. Soon, and at a point of immense crisis in his life, Arthur's empathy for the fringe dweller would "kick home".⁷²²

The day Neil Douglas took Merric's axe to the old peppercorn tree was the day he was seared by Yvonne's wrath. Phyllis, for all her stridency, was impressed with Yvonne in white heat: "When she lost her temper it was something to be seen".

As the axe struck, Yvonne came rushing out, crying, "You terrible tree destroyer, you horrible man ... you haven't got Doris's permission". Douglas's reply was met with "Slimy liar!" Ten minutes later Douglas appeared at the door of the studio asking Yvonne: "Is the kettle on yet?" Preparing the tea, Yvonne replied: "I get so cross at you boys, I say the wrong things". Douglas explained: "She blew up - that's why they called her Bomb".⁷²³ Gentle Douglas usually managed to keep out of Yvonne's hair but knew if John Perceval was around there would be explosions: "To put Bomb with John there were arguments". The animosity had been going on for years. Tim and Betty Burstall were aware that there had always been a "prickly thing" between the two. Towards the end of 1947, John Perceval had admitted that his only contact with Yvonne was a monthly fight.⁷²⁴ Charles Blackman, a young Sydney painter who was bludgeoning clay at the pottery with Perceval and Douglas, saw the friction and believed that "when Yvonne was 'being proper' it would annoy John. He'd say 'get screwed, or something like that'".⁷²⁵ During these brouhahas Neil Douglas never saw Arthur respond: "He'd look the other way and shake himself like a dog." It horrified Phyllis, who flared against Perceval like flint to steel. "He would be so rude to Yvonne ... treat her terribly ... and Arthur would sit there and take it ... wouldn't object. I saw her with tears in her eyes".

While Neil Douglas was aware of Perceval's "great argumentative power ... the sharpest man, a powerful man"; he learnt that Arthur had his own way of dealing with things. "Arthur never talked ... he'd say nothing and *do*...and don't mistake it, it would be original." Perceval continued to decorate tiles for coffee tables with whimsical images of cavorting maids and Charlie Chaplin, Arthur built an enormous brick kiln in the garden. Its design captured Len French's imagination: "I was very interested in it ... it was a crazy sort of thing, but it worked".⁷²⁶ It was oil-fired, using sump oil delivered in forty-four gallon drums. A fine-tuning of oil and water mixed together created the heat. From this oven emerged Arthur's large and powerful ceramic sculptures.

⁷²² "Soon, and at a point of immense crisis in his life ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn Interview: "I had done the drawings as a traveller, and the thing didn't really kick home".

⁷²³ "Douglas explained: 'She blew up ... 'Bomb', Yvonne's nickname, was also believed to have been the result of a child's incorrect pronunciation.

⁷²⁴ "Towards the end of 1947, John Perceval had admitted ..." Extract of letter from John Perceval to Sidney Nolan. Reed papers, SLV.

⁷²⁵ "Charles Blackman, a young Sydney painter ..." Interview Charles Blackman, Woollahra, Sydney, 17 November, 2001. All quotes originate from this source.

⁷²⁶ "Its design captured Len French's imagination ..." Len French interview.

Arthur and Peter Herbst had left the pottery. Perhaps the building of the kiln had two purposes. One accommodation and efficiency, the other to escape debate with Perceval when Arthur applied for 'grace-and-favour' use of the kiln. Around this time Arthur wrote to Alan McCulloch apologising for not being able to get down to Shoreham to help with the building of his kitchen. He explained: "I am flat out with the pottery not only for the Queen's visit but other stuff as well, it seems I have become a full time potter again. It doesn't seem like the old days when I could walk-in and out of the pottery when I pleased, the others don't like it much so I have to stick to a rigid time table".⁷²⁷

Charles Blackman helped Arthur build the kiln. Prior to this he'd been sandpapering Arthur's boards for Wimmera paintings. Blackman had an ego to match the best the Brown Room had to offer. When Perceval bounded up on their first meeting, hand outstretched, and introduced himself as, "John Perceval, the greatest painter in Australia," Blackman responded with, "How's it feel to meet Charles Blackman, who's going to be even greater?" There was no such banter with Arthur. Charles quickly learnt that, although Arthur "avoided saying anything ... when he said it, he meant it", and that, although Arthur appeared to go about things in "a weird way ... an unusual way", it "turned out alright". The two men would become good friends. Blackman had qualities Arthur admired: an engaging quick wit and great energy.

The painter, Len French, a regular at The Swanston Family, was a man who never shrank from a skirmish. While most of his peer group had been against the War, French threw himself into creating propaganda posters. Sign-writing and now art teaching supported his painting. Propped up at the bar in January of 1954, he dived into a conversation with John Perceval, Tim Burstall and Arthur. French rated Burstall "boisterous, a ladies man, very insecure", and Arthur he saw as "distant, withdrawn". With the Queen about to alight in Melbourne the following month (the first reigning monarch to visit Australia), Arthur had been producing 'Royal' ashtrays, but they had proved a commercial flop. With a grin, Arthur put it down to the fact that "people just aren't loyal anymore".⁷²⁸ When Burstall responded with "Serve you right, you corrupt bastard", a discussion, led by Len French, on the nature of corruption ensued. French rated Arthur a "pure artist", and "Tim and John buggers who had sold out".⁷²⁹ French believed that while Burstall and Perceval were "on the defensive" and required him to be "tactful", he didn't need to hold anything back with Arthur. Arthur interpreted French's approval of him by interjecting: "I'm a eunuch? (Zoubek's mispronunciation of 'unique' had become a long standing joke within the group). No one's afraid of me? I'm not

⁷²⁷ "Around this time Arthur wrote to Alan McCulloch". Archives of Susan McCulloch.

⁷²⁸ "With a grin, Arthur put it down to the fact that 'people just aren't loyal anymore'". Interview Tim Burstall. Diary extract dated 15 January, 1954.

⁷²⁹ "... 'Tim and John buggers who had sold out ...'" Perhaps French was criticising Perceval for giving up painting in favour of running the pottery for profit. Perceval did little painting from 1950 to 1954, abandoning art pottery in favour of making money. His disenchantment had been fuelled to some extent by the Reeds' criticism of his religious works and the lack of interest by Sir Kenneth Clark on his visit to Australia in 1947.

worldly? I don't earn enough money?"⁷³⁰ Arthur was aware of how others saw him, but had the strength and courage not to respond, other than by turning it into a joke. Throughout the years Yvonne came to understand that "if Arthur had decided to fight, he would have used all the dirty tricks in the world...but he never decided to fight".

All Arthur's anger and brutal honesty he saved for his work. Refusing to interfere in the way others chose to live their lives, he fashioned his responses through his clay. He used brick clay, bought in big slabs and flattened out to about an inch and a half with a mallet. Arthur would "whack the clay ... and twist it into shapes". The whacking and twisting was a release: "I didn't for a minute think I was doing sculptures ... what came out was something that happened to be something I wanted to express, a feeling, an idea".⁷³¹

If Arthur over-kneaded the clay, it would become too soft and fall apart. Like making pastry, timing was everything. After he had formed the piece he would incise it, creating a beard here, a jacket there. If all went according to plan the piece would stand with its arms and toes intact, drying to a hardness that would eventually enable Arthur to cart his terracotta creation to the kiln.

The occasions when Merric opened his kiln door and found to his delight that the results were good were some of Arthur's earliest and happiest memories of childhood. Now, as he opened the large door to the new oil kiln, he experienced a similar rush of excitement and wonder. Inside the brick walls loomed *David and Saul*, standing over three feet high and weighing near a hundredweight. The sculpture was complete and uncracked, its colours shining under a high, perfect glaze. Arthur had taken his painterly expression of *David and Saul* and made it flesh. The figures, as in the painting, press claustrophobically tight and, despite the gentle hand gestures and compassionate postures, they appear emotionally isolated - two mournful creatures cleaved by a harp in the shape of a triangle; according to the biblical story, united by beauty and divided by jealousy.

This was the first sculpture Arthur had done of any size. Large ceramic sculpture was a very old craft; he knew that, but he'd never seen anything like this done in Australia. Like a father at the birth of his child, he was impatient to hold this unique creation that owed much to the womb of the kiln itself. He never forgot the "marvellous feeling" of holding *Saul and David* while it was "still hot". He rejoiced in the process of "pulling something out that has been almost purged by being through a fire ..." ⁷³² and seeing something happening "that you weren't really having anything to do with - by proxy - and at the end there was some kind of art work".⁷³³

⁷³⁰ "Arthur interpreted French's approval of him by interjecting ..." Burstall interview.

⁷³¹ "The whacking and twisting was a release ..." Arthur Boyd to Deborah Edwards, interview Bundanon, March, 1993.

⁷³² "He never forgot ... purged by being through a fire". Arthur Boyd to Deborah Edwards, op cit

⁷³³ "...and seeing something happening ... 'some kind of art work". Arthur Boyd to Franz Philipp. Philipp papers, Melbourne University archives.

In the first week of December 1954, Arthur exhibited sixteen sculptures at The Peter Bray Gallery. Around sixty people attended the opening. Arthur's old art teacher from Murrumbidgee School made an introductory speech. Bechavaise, having long observed the progress of his precocious pupil, spoke of Arthur's innate talent, his undeniable artistic instinct and likened it to riding a horse with knees, not with reins. Yvonne recalled finding the banter "embarrassing ...semi-sexual." Albert Monk, then president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), presided over the occasion and his unglamorous, no-nonsense presence seemed appropriate. The sculptures stood solid and strong. Shoulder to shoulder, back to back, arm around arm, they are citizens that at first glance display solidarity. But despite the closeness, the pressing together of flesh, there is no true unity. Instead, they twist, turn, collide and collude, ultimately revealing disjointedness, both in form and theme. The domestic and the familial are addressed under the guise of biblical themes. The triangle remains an ongoing motif, to the extent that the underlying clay supporting the forms has been shaped into triangles. A holy, or unholy, trinity - or both?⁷³⁴ In *The Deposition*, *Judas Kissing Christ* and *The Tribute Money*, love and betrayal is the theme. One critic believed he could hear "Arthur muttering to himself"⁷³⁵ while another sensed "underlying feelings of hysteria".⁷³⁶

The critics were befuddled. What, in the name of art, did they have here? Hollowed vessels glazed and fired in a kiln: ok, that's pottery. But in conception and scale, well, it was sculpture. And, to complicate it further, there was the matter of the visible brushstrokes and the oxide glazes. Wasn't this painting reproduced in a three-dimensional form? How to describe these works? To a man they echoed an influence easily spotted. The sculptures were, "Picasso-like", "Picasso excursions", "via Picasso", "Picasso ...inspired". But from there, where? Some relegated the works to "garden statues" and "doodles in clay". Others sensed the "unique" and "vital". Finally, after much head scratching, Arnold Shore, writing for the *Argus*, allowed the artist's "courage and technical resource".⁷³⁷ The *Age* critic noted "artistry and creative ingenuity"⁷³⁸ while Alan McCulloch, at the *Herald*, found "enterprise and vigor (and all the courage) that a cultivated visitor might hope to find in the new art of a new country".⁷³⁹

The show, so undeniably 'modern,' sent John Reed rushing to his writing desk:

⁷³⁴ "The triangle remains an ongoing motif ..." Arthur Boyd in conversation with curator of Australian Art at NGA, Tim Fischer, July, 1993. Arthur doesn't volunteer the information regarding the internal triangular shapes, but when Fisher asks, "Arthur, it looks to have been built [from] triangular clay forms underneath ... and then the legs have been sort of wrapped around the corners of those triangles..." Arthur confirms this is so: "You'll find they were hollow, those triangles would be hollow". This triangular motif continues throughout Arthur's oeuvre.

⁷³⁵ "One critic believed he could hear "Arthur muttering to himself" Alan Warren, *The Sun*, December 7, 1954.

⁷³⁶ "...while another sensed 'underlying feelings of hysteria.'" Alan McCulloch, *Herald*, December 8, 1954.

⁷³⁷ "Finally, after much head scratching ..." Arnold Shore, *Argus*, 7 December, 1954.

⁷³⁸ "...The *Age* critic noted" *The Age* art critic, 7 December, 1954.

⁷³⁹ "Alan McCulloch, at the *Herald* ..." Alan McCulloch, *Herald*, 8 December, 1954.

9 December, 1954.

Dear Bert, I am enclosing McCulloch's review of Arthur's miraculous Ceramic Sculpture exhibition. McCulloch does his best but in doing so only shows his hopeless limitations. Instead of going straight to the point and telling people that they are here confronted with masterpieces of contemporary art, he doodles around with words as though he were writing in a school magazine.

All your faith in Arthur, all ours, is now beautifully realized in work which could be confidently placed anywhere in the world... When one enters the show one has that immediate feeling of monumentality, both in concept and execution, which one associates inevitably with the word 'master'. This time there is no compromise and Arthur has finally reached a peak of creative activity, logically lead up to by his lovely series of big painted Tiles, which he has been consistently producing for about the last two years. *The Tribute Money*, which McCulloch reproduces, is about 2'6" high, but others are even bigger, *The Deposition* being about 4'. They are mostly richly painted and it is really hard to understand how anyone with a grain of sensitivity can fail to be bowled over by the force of their immediate impact.⁷⁴⁰

The Reeds, now as lavish in praise as they had been in criticism, purchased *The Tribute Money* the day of the opening. Yvonne recalled that "they seemed as surprised and delighted with themselves as we were with them ... it was rare that the Reeds would buy a work at gallery price". That very night the Reeds arranged for the sculpture to be placed as centrepiece on the table at Mirka's Café, to be waiting for Arthur when he walked in for a celebratory dinner. Years later the sculpture was damaged and, according to Arthur, Reed was going to throw it out. Arthur's reaction? "I think I suggested he didn't".⁷⁴¹

In March 1955 *Judas Kissing Christ* and *Ned Kelly* were exhibited in the Herald Outdoor Art Show, along with *Mother and Children*, which was described in the catalogue as "one of the more startling entries".⁷⁴² For over a month, the citizens of South Australia had been circling the most controversial purchase made by the National Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide for some years. It was an Arthur Boyd sculpture titled *The Sisters*. The press stirred a reactionary pot, reporting that only "crepe-soled intellectual types" feigned appreciation of the work. Speaking for the regular folk, one reporter confessed it left them asking: "What's it supposed to be ... What's it mean?" In answer to his own trumped-up questions, the hack offered: "Siamese Twins with Myxomatosis" and "A pair of lovebirds, one with an eye knocked almost out, joined together at the waist, and standing a-tiptoe on what looked vaguely like two pairs of elephants' hind legs". Unable to illuminate the public further, he supplied a quote from the artist himself: "Boyd said: 'It's not a tranquil, ordinary piece. Its name, *The Sisters*,

⁷⁴⁰ "The show, so undeniable modern ..." Letter from John Reed to Albert Tucker, Tucker papers, SLV.

⁷⁴¹ "Years later the sculpture was damaged ..." Arthur Boyd: Fischer McKenzie interview., NGA, op cit

⁷⁴² "In March, 1955 *Judas Kissing Christ* and *Ned Kelly* ..." *The Sun*, 10 March, 1955.

implies a family or some co-operative sort of thing... They are far apart and broken up in some ways, which just expresses of sort of disjointedness. It could be a family or world disjointedness'''.⁷⁴³ Since the biblical series a decade earlier nothing appears to have calmed Arthur's distress: his world is still lurching on the same disconnected axis.

When Uncle Martin, now living in England, finally received press cuttings and photographs from a friend, he sat down and wrote to Arthur. A full head of steam drove his pen.

As I made considerable effort, both financially and in nervous energy to help you and your family, I feel that I have the right to comment on what you do. I have been sent a photograph of your group 'Mother and Child' by a friend who asks: 'Is it a leg-pull?' Even if it were intended as a joke, this would not excuse its offence which is deeper than a mere surface vulgarity. The moral law is only the natural law repeated an octave higher, and your work flouts both ...Do you not see that it is a public insult to your own mother, which no doubt is why some of its admirers viewed it at first sight 'with repulsion'? Then they were overcome by the hypnosis which dopes modern criticism, and to which their moral cowardice and absence of any real values lays them open.

A failing of our family is that they have little self-criticism and must show everything. Everyone has some morbid strain in his nature, but to rush to show it to the public is a more shameful exposure than any that is merely physical, however gross that might be. Surely you have enough evidence of the need of our family to cling to sanity? There is a certain pleasure in slapping the public in the face, but it should be done from above, not from below the level of bourgeois mediocrity. Otherwise one just becomes a guttersnipe.

You have real genius and if you misuse it in this way you will be far more to blame than some nonentity who has to shriek discordantly to attract attention.

Picasso and most of the fungus of 'modern art' is beginning to fade out. It was almost entirely a commercial racket, and you may do yourself a great deal of harm by copying these grotesque leg-pulls. It would give you a reputation which would make it far more difficult to obtain recognition of your genuine brilliant gifts.

There are ways in which you *can* come to terms with the public without losing your integrity. Hoping that you will see what I have been trying to explain, and with all good wishes for your success in the New Year from Martin Boyd.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴³ The press stirred a reactionary pot ...''*Melbourne Herald*' 5 February, 1955.

⁷⁴⁴ "When Uncle Martin, now living in England, finally received press cuttings ..." Bundanon archives. Also *Martin Boyd: A Life*. Op cit

Success? Between the backslapping and the backbiting, the approval and admonishment, Arthur must have wondered if he'd recognise it, if it ever came.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Where the roads dip and where the roads rise

– T.S. Eliot Landscapes: 111. Usk

“How can we understand each other if the words I use have the sense and the value I expect them to have, but whoever is listening to me inevitably thinks that those words have a different sense and value, because of the private world he has inside himself too. We think we understand each other: but we never do.”

Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, 1921.

In late autumn of 1954 Arthur went knocking on the door of Phyllis Boyd's new house in a state of extreme agitation. Although he and Yvonne had managed to save their return fare to England, for some reason their long-discussed plan had been dropped. Yvonne, Arthur explained to Phyllis, was "putting on a bit of a scene" because she wanted a home of her own. Phyllis wasn't surprised. After less than two years at Open Country she and Guy had managed to move out. "Yvonne had lived there the longest ... everyone had gone." At some point around this time Yvonne had had a fierce row with Doris and Arthur had come to ask for a loan to help buy a house. Phyllis said, "No, Arthur we won't lend you money, but we will buy your paintings".

Phyllis's offer wasn't rash: there was the promise of a good investment. State art galleries all around Australia were buying Arthur's work,⁷⁴⁵ and he now had a handful of dedicated patrons. But, although his stocks were rising, money was still only trickling in. The manner of purchase, in most cases, was slow and erratic. Works were bought on time payment and, while doctors waited for patients to pay and musicians for fame, Arthur queued at the end of the food chain. In a moment of feeling flush, John Perceval had put his marker on *Moses Leading the People* but his payments were fitful. Gerd Buchdahl, Peter Herbst's old friend from the *Dunera*, purchased *The Mourners* for ninety-pounds and, in June of 1954, Arthur received a fifteen-pound cheque in part-payment.

Arthur's paintings appealed to Buchdahl, they reminded him of German Expressionists. He had bought several works but one he was to lose in a limerick competition.⁷⁴⁶ Gerd and Nancy Buchdahl had, together with two other families, entered a contest staged to raise money for the Melbourne Hospital. First prize was a Ford Zephyr. When the trio of couples won, it created a King Solomon dilemma particularly as Dr. Alan McBriar, an historian from Melbourne University, had been the major creative force within the group. A decision was taken to sell the car and share the proceeds. However, McBriar didn't want money; he wanted a painting of Arthur's that hung on the Buchdahls' wall, and so *David and Saul* was exchanged for a limerick.

In 1954 no bank would do business with Arthur: a mortgage was out of the question. He found financial assistance at the pub, around the table where his friends, fellow potters and painters, met regularly every day after work. No one in the group needed more than a few seconds to add up their net worth, but most were better off than Arthur. It was proposed (by Guy, according to Phyllis) to put in a pound each and every week, to bolster his brother's finances. The vote carried a unanimous 'yes.' Tom Sanders recalled the arrangement, but not the details. Whether or not the payments were exchanged for paintings, or how long the good intentions lasted, is clouded. Phyllis said that eventually it became "all hot air" and everyone fell away, except Guy, who continued to make payments of thirty shillings a week for years.

⁷⁴⁵ In 1954, The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, purchased, *A'Beckett Rd., Harkway*. The National Gallery of Victoria purchased *The Waterhole*. The National Gallery of South Australia purchased *Cyanide Tanks*. The Art Gallery of Western Australia purchased *Creek Near Rosebud*.

⁷⁴⁶ "Arthur's work appealed to Buchdahl ..." Interview, Nancy Buchdahl, England, January, 2004.

It was through these gatherings that Arthur found his house. Stacha Halpern had been doing well in France, expanding from potter to abstract painter and accumulating fans. He now needed a studio in Paris and urgently instructed his brother to sell his seaside cottage. The house was similar in many ways to Open Country. It was weatherboard with a tin roof, and a bathroom and kitchen that were primitive. A small sitting-room led to a tiny internal bedroom and a sleep-out just big enough for a double bed. This room, with windows of flywire, was open to the cold but also to the sound of the sea. The area not only boasted the bay but, in the mid-fifties, swathes of heath land. The large garden provided a home to friendly possums and tea-trees screened the house from the avenue.

Surf Avenue was a sandy track which led across a coastal artery road to the beach. In 1954 few cars sped down this long flat road that linked, like a time-line for Arthur, Beaumaris, Sandringham and Rosebud. The Moorings, as the house had been called, came complete with Halpern's old kiln and a garage studio. The timing was perfect. Halpern needed a quick sale and the price of one thousand four hundred pounds was extremely reasonable. By selling his land at Hastings, plus the money saved for the fare to England,⁷⁴⁷ plus proceeds from two Wimmera and one Alice Springs landscape, plus a loan from Yvonne's mother and her purchase of a painting, together with various other money-box rattling schemes, Arthur scratched up the purchase price for 26 Surf Avenue, Beaumaris. By June he had signed the contract of sale organised by a solicitor, William Lasica and on the brink of thirty-five, Arthur was finally leaving home.

Tim Burstall, when he moved to Eltham, had been inspired by Open Country to envision establishing a rural Bloomsbury. He had been busy for years energetically pursuing this grandiose plan of "helping the Eltham community become the socio-aesthetic centre of Melbourne".⁷⁴⁸ According to Barbara Blackman, "Tim was always rallying people...endlessly trying to talk us and Arthur Boyd and people into coming up and building our own houses".⁷⁴⁹ Eltham valley, as late as 1945, was real bush country populated by peppermints, stringy barks, yellow box, candle barks, wattle and myriads of bird life and when the mudbrick houses began to sprout they were cradled, like nests, inside the greenery. Burstall saw it as "a great adventure ... there were tracts of land for forty pounds a block". Arthur declined Eltham but helped Burstall with the building of his house, hauling the bluestone footings out in the Dodge and laying the floor.

Cliff Pugh, the Boyds and Percevals, Len French, Matchem Skipper, Charles Blackman, Tom Sanders, and Hal Hattam (a gynaecologist and painter) and his wife Kate were constant visitors at the Burstalls' home. Barry Humphries experimented with early sketches there; the actor Peter O'Shaughnessy (Brian's brother) put on theatrical turns; and the philosophers, David Armstrong, Don Gunner and Camo Jackson debated. Denison Deasey, having spent his inheritance on his long European sabbatical, was now

⁷⁴⁷ "By selling his land at Hastings, plus the money saved for the fare to England ..." Letter from David Boyd, 12 June, 1954: "Brian tell me that you have already saved your return fares".

⁷⁴⁸ "He had been busy ... 'helping the Eltham community become' Alistair Knox, 'Valley Features', *The Valley Voice*, 1978.

⁷⁴⁹ "According to Barbara Blackman ..." Knox, Blackman interview. Oral History, NLA.

back, studying and teaching. He watched, as “Tim led a strange, half-loopy blonde” up to his bedroom and was stopped in his tracks by Betty with the instruction: “I don’t mind, you know that, but not in front of the children, Tim...out in the bush while they’re awake”.⁷⁵⁰

Bill Haley was in full swing at Eltham, his 45-RPM record *Rock Around the Clock* spinning non-stop as nights were danced away. Women in shirt-maker shirts, tucked into skirts designed with cinched waistbands and enough fabric to form a parachute, twirled like colourful tops around the wild bush gardens lit by candles and firelight. A keg of beer and a lamb on a spit were general party fare. It was the season of misrule. Men caroused and behaved, according to, like “absolute rogues”. As Pugh confirmed, “everything was on ... there used to be a lot of wife-swapping, a hell of a lot of it used to go on”.⁷⁵¹ The energy, the force of character and the broad philosophies that helped raise the mud brick walls of Eltham, would bring many of them down. Marriages would break up, people move away.

Arthur needed the company of individualists, with interesting and stimulating ideas; he needed their talk, their response to the world. But he never bought the package. Arthur saw the chaos born of the neat theories of existentialism. When Mirka Mora first came to Melbourne from Paris, she was amazed to find “every married couple were adulterers ... but they never spoke about it”. Among the group, Mirka saw Arthur was a stand-out: “Arthur was not a philanderer”.⁷⁵²

Arthur had found a semi-retreat in the quiet suburb that Tim christened with pursed lips: ‘Beau Maurie’. But on one weekend the Boyds spent with the Burstalls at Eltham around the time of their move to Beaumaris, Tim Burstall’s considerable will finally triumphed, leaving Arthur and Betty dearly wishing that his competitive sexual jousting, much like his wood chopping, stone throwing or swimming contests, had left their strong friendship alone.⁷⁵³ After a long dinner, late in the evening, Arthur stood at the foot of the stairs while Tim Burstall bantered away at the top, throwing down challenges to Arthur. Betty’s call from their upstairs bedroom, “Come to bed, Tim”, and Yvonne’s from the downstairs bedroom “this will be the end of a beautiful friendship”, were both ignored.⁷⁵⁴ Eventually the two men passed on the stairs. From that very night the exchange between Arthur and Betty didn’t work, it couldn’t: Arthur wasn’t in love with Betty.

⁷⁵⁰ “He was skeptical ... he watched, as ‘Tim led a strange, half-loopy blonde’ ...” Deasy papers, Manuscripts, SLV.

⁷⁵¹ “As Pugh confirmed ...” Pugh/Blackman interview

⁷⁵² Ibid

⁷⁵³ “But on one weekend the Boyds spent ...” Interview Yvonne Boyd. “The arrangement wasn’t particularly successful.”

⁷⁵⁴ “After a long dinner, late in the evening ...” Interview Yvonne Boyd. Interview Tim & Betty Burstall. Extracts read aloud by Tim Burstall from his diary. This diary filled several large volumes and was kept religiously during the fifties, with much detail expounded on Burstall’s amorous ‘Tom Jones’ style adventures.

Several more occasions were instigated by Tim Burstall and each time they resulted in failure for Arthur, leaving him more distraught and Betty more rejected. When Arthur and Betty called it quits, the arrangement became lopsided. Almost immediately Tim Burstall's code of chivalry, his charter of behaviour, went out the window: Betty was left at Eltham and Arthur out of the loop as the relationship between Tim and Yvonne continued. It came to a head when Arthur met Burstall for a beer at The Swanston Family and Burstall fudged facts: "I can remember it being difficult to set up a meeting with Yvonne without telling Arthur, and I sort of half fibbed. Arthur said: 'Oh Tim, no need for that for fuck's sake ...'" Arthur needed to know. From then, for around a year, an irregular triangle was formed.⁷⁵⁵

Arthur's move to the new house coincided with a new commission. The architectural firm, Borland, Murphy and McIntyre, had written to Arthur in December of 1954, asking him to submit a design for "a single piece of sculpture in suspension" to relate to the new Melbourne Olympic Swimming Stadium, being erected for the 1956 Olympic Games. The letter concluded "as a basis for expenditure we would like to keep to an amount of four hundred pounds." It brought Robert Hughes, the burgeoning young art critic with an uncensored and brilliant tongue, whom many were already reckoning a larrikin,⁷⁵⁶ bombing down from Sydney to inspect the proceedings. Sculpture was low on most city aldermen's wish-list: like the majority of the public, they preferred a utilitarian object, such as a park bench, to a public statue.⁷⁵⁷ Hughes considered it a big story: "There was no sculpture going on in Australia and Arthur had been commissioned to produce a large piece for a ritual occasion".⁷⁵⁸ Perhaps thoughts of grandeur evaporated slightly when Hughes stepped around the garage cum studio, and through the suburban garden from where the epic piece would rise. But Arthur made Hughes welcome and, using his long-standing ploy to deflect attention from himself, put him to work saying, "You must be pretty bored standing around ... have a go at decorating a tile". During this visit Hughes was amazed at the machine Arthur had developed to grind his own pigment: "It struck me as fantastically exotic ... I had thought pigment was something that came in tubes from Windsor & Newton".

This Olympic commission held grand promise. It was as close to the international stage as any Australian sculptor in the 1950s could have dreamt of being. Not daunted, Arthur took risks, stretching both himself and his pitiful finances. As he had done with the Judeo-Christian bible stories and the Greco-Roman myths, he made the Olympian story of human striving his own. Arthur's initial drawing presents a form that externally resembles a fish and a phallus and, internally, a labia and the arrow shape of a diver. A

⁷⁵⁵ "It came to a head when Arthur met Burstall ..." Interview Tim Burstall.

⁷⁵⁶ 'Larrikin...' as defined in *A Dictionary of Australian Colloquialisms*, G.A. Wilkes, Sydney University Press: Sydney, 1978 a 'larrikin' is "...a young street rowdy, a mischievous or frolicsome youth". Early in Sydney's history a larrikin was considered a "rough[s] of the worst description (1883: *Town Life in Australia*). In today's parlance a larrikin is generally used with affection; a larrikin being authentically 'Australian' - non-conformist, irreverent, imprudent, passionate. In 1974 the Sydney Morning Herald deemed Joan Sutherland: "The heroine with a larrikin streak".

⁷⁵⁷ "Sculpture was low ..." Robert Hughes, introduction, 'Recent Australian Paintings' catalogue, 1961.

⁷⁵⁸ "Hughes considered it a big story ..." Interview Robert Hughes, New York, 30 October, 2002.

large eye, at the head of the sculpture, sits atop a trinity of arms. Viewed horizontally, the third arm forms wide spread legs: both human and the amphibious frog. The one leg wasted and distorted resembles a crippled state. If read vertically, within the triangle of arms, one hand rises to embrace the head of a woman, while a pair of hands covers the genitals. Details would change in the completed work. But the eye would remain. A decade later Arthur would present a beautiful young mother, living through difficult times, with her portrait. In it he depicted one eye extended and doubled in size. Arthur explained: "That's your seeing eye ...that's all the pain you see ... you see what goes on ... you know what goes on".⁷⁵⁹ Arthur's public explanation of the sculpture was: "The design was meant to convey the shape of a fish and the male and female figures worked into the design to give the impression of unity".⁷⁶⁰

The plan for the painted and glazed ceramic pylon was bold, elaborate. It would be his most experimental work. Standing thirty-five feet high it required a central column of concreted steel. Arthur was fully aware that technically it would be tricky: "It was a complex thing ...and I had to do it in the cheapest way I could". He needed a new kiln, with more space and power. Although he hoped for extra financial assistance, he knew he ultimately risked making a loss on the commission; but the opportunity was irresistible. He made a template for the layers of terracotta sections that weighed up to 100 lbs each. As long as he followed the template, it would be an accurate model and he knew he couldn't make a really bad mistake, but he needed help. Jean Langley's young brother, Robert, at that point a weaver of baskets, became Arthur's right-hand man. Both master and apprentice were learning as they went. Robert Hughes remembered Arthur having "a great deal of difficulty with the kiln". But what impressed the young art critic was Arthur's determination and energy, his "extraordinary dedication to work".

Despite Arthur's will and energy there were delays and disappointments.⁷⁶¹ Tim Burstall's diary of 1955 recorded that on July 14 that Arthur finished a six-foot section of the sculpture. However, during the night it collapsed, "like a huge cow turd" and Burstall concluded "he would have to make it in smaller sections".

The finished pylon, composed of 250 glazed terracotta bricks, weighed in at around twelve tons. It needed an engineer to set it tightly into the ground, a crane to lift it and scaffolding to secure the sections in place. The finished piece was not a complete realisation of the initial drawing or the maquette. Arthur agreed that it hadn't worked out as planned, that there was "quite a marked level between the ceramic and the larger scale

⁷⁵⁹ "In it he depicted one eye extended ..."Interview Rosalind Hollinrack nee Tong, Melbourne, November 20, 2000. Arthur painted Rosalind's portrait in London in the sixties. She was one of the youngest within an emotional and volatile group, and struggling through difficult times with her husband, Barry Humphries.

⁷⁶¹ Arthur had realised he needed a new kiln, but delivery was running over two months late. By October, 1955, he quit his first choice of supplier and switched to Electric Furnace, a company recommended by Guy, who had purchased from them over six kilns, both for his Sydney and Melbourne potteries. The cost of the kiln was four hundred and seventy five pounds, a sum exceeding Arthur's commission.

work".⁷⁶² They look entirely different. Intricacy, form and colour had been sacrificed to scale. In the end Arthur saw it as "an engineering feat as much as anything else". When Arthur had first received the commission he was described in the press as the "modernistic artist-sculptor who had been at the centre of several modern art controversies". Despite this threat of continued taunts, once the completed sculpture was unveiled the journalists held the same obliging smile as Dawn Fraser when she posed for the camera in front of Arthur's sculpture. What had previously been called a column and a totem now rose in stature to a 'monolith'.

However, the sculpture provided the material for plenty of jokes among Arthur's friends. One warm spring day, as Arthur supervised the erection of the sculpture, Tom Sanders walked from the city to make a surprise visit to see how Arthur was getting on. When he arrived they had just secured the top section, which prompted Tom to walk up behind Arthur and ask: "What time does it go off, Mister?"⁷⁶³ After the Olympic Games, when the site became a tourist destination, a story was told at the Swanston Family of a guide overheard lecturing his woe-begotten tourist group: "This 'ere is thirty-five feet high and seven feet wide and it describes the swimmer striking onto the finishing post ... and what's more, it was all done by an aborigine!"⁷⁶⁴

Arthur emerged from the job out of pocket.⁷⁶⁵ Alan McCulloch took up Arthur's case, pronouncing the sculpture "a masterpiece ... a major work and as a permanent accent, perhaps the most important in the whole Olympic spectacle". Other stories followed, one with a headline: '400 pounds down – but he's happy.' Arthur was quoted: "Naturally, I'd like to have the four hundred pounds, but I have no claim on it and I certainly won't be pressing the point. You must expect things like this when you set out to do my kind of work. It's like an expensive hobby". Typically, Arthur was making light of a dire situation.⁷⁶⁶

Many saw the tough times from Yvonne's point of view. A neighbour and friend from Beaumaris, Margaret Forster, recalled "hordes of people arriving unannounced on

⁷⁶² "Arthur agreed that it hadn't worked out as planned ..." Arthur Boyd to Deborah Edwards, Bundanon, 11 March, 1993.

⁷⁶³ "One warm spring day ..." Interview Tom Sanders.

⁷⁶⁴ "After the Olympic Games ..." This incident recorded in Denison Deasey's diary, Deasey papers, Manuscripts, SLV.

⁷⁶⁵ "Arthur emerged from the job out of pocket". Just before the Olympic flame was carried into Melbourne's main stadium in November 1956, heralding the beginning of the 16th Olympiad, Arthur wrote to the architects, setting out his expenditure. He had received an extra two hundred pounds on top of the agreed four hundred pounds. However, the final cost had come close to a thousand pounds. Arthur's plea was "it had been extremely difficult to prepare a tender for a piece of sculpture of this nature as there were no previous works upon which any information could be gained

⁷⁶⁶ Any hope was finally buried when solicitor Maurice Nathan replied to Alan McCulloch, in a letter written in March of 1957. "Even at this late date I feel compelled to briefly answer your letter of the 14th November, 1956, relative to Arthur Boyd's symbolic work outside the Olympic Pool. The facts are interesting, remarkable and if I may add extremely unbusinesslike – a small detail to which you subscribe. The Olympic Park Board of Management did not see themselves in the role of philanthropists ... they had no funds and no inclination to dispense largesse. It's a sad story Alan."⁷⁶⁶ Letter supplied by Jock Murphy from family papers.

weekends ... it was ruthless, just turning up and there would be Yvonne, down on the beach picking up cockles".⁷⁶⁷ One particular crowded weekend John Perceval took to directing traffic at the corner of Beach Road and Surf Avenue. Betty Stevenson, now back in Melbourne and teaching humanities at a nearby school, would drop by occasionally if she had a free period in her schedule: "There always seemed to be others there. Arthur would insist people needed feeding and Yvonne would look despairingly into the gas-powered fridge". Barbara Bilcock, years before she would meet Albert Tucker and become his wife, recalls a similar occasion and the "slightly shocked" feeling at Arthur's "not pleasantly put" question to Yvonne: "When are all these people going to get something to eat?"⁷⁶⁸ In May 1955 Clifton Pugh stayed for a week with his wife and two sons. In Pugh's eyes Arthur was the "patriarch," the "carer", the one who "looked after so many people".⁷⁶⁹ Yet it was Yvonne who was expected to multiply the loaves and fishes. Soup was a standby and Yvonne would add all she could to the saucepan in the attempt to feed the weekend throngs. Mirka Mora, always one for the attention-seeking party gesture (throwing her hat in the fire, up-ending her skirt to reveal a bare derriere) peered into the depths of one of Yvonne's simmering soups, then removed her sandal and threw it in, saying: "You seemed to have everything else in there". With children to feed, life was far from easy. Margaret Forster believed, "Yvonne never got any support...Arthur didn't understand".

Phyllis Boyd was always indignant (some said sanctimonious⁷⁷⁰) when it came to the treatment of the Boyd women. She took exception to the way Arthur treated Yvonne. "At Surf Avenue all these people would turn up on a Saturday or a Sunday and if Arthur was getting tired of the conversation he would say 'Sorry, I've just had a great idea, I really have to get back to my painting'". Phyllis felt Yvonne was "left to cope with it all". Since her teens Yvonne had always kept diaries and never gave up on the hope of writing a novel. She was always in search of a pencil, and a scrap of time in which to use it. She never finished reading Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* but she longed for the peace of that promise, aware that "it was as remote as Jack and the Beanstalk's Castle." Margaret Forster concluded that although Yvonne "had a good mind ...Arthur never created conditions for [her] to function". To be allowed a voice in that theatre of big egos, a woman had to be sure and strong, she had to do something that was regarded as really important.⁷⁷¹

Apart from psychological pressures, Yvonne's life was frantic: if not with money worries, simply with motion. When the children were babies she took in typing jobs, working on both Tim Burstall's and Brian O'Shaughnessy's theses. As soon as Polly and Jamie were of school age she resumed part-time teaching, yet she still found time to

⁷⁶⁷ "A neighbour and friend from Beaumaris ..." Margaret Forster later Mrs. Bernard Smith, interview Melbourne, October, 2001.

⁷⁶⁸ "Barbara Bilcock, years before she would meet Albert Tucker ..." Barbara Tucker interview, Melbourne, April, 2004.

⁷⁶⁹ "In May of 1955, Clifton Pugh stayed for a week ..." Clifton Pugh/ Barbara Blackman interview, op cit.

⁷⁷⁰ "Phyllis Boyd was always indignant ..." Helen Brack interview, Melbourne, November 2000.

⁷⁷¹ "To be allowed a voice ..." Interview Phyllis Boyd

decorate tiles which Guy attempted to market. By 1955, she was teaching art to eleven-year olds two days a week at Mentone, and “terribly difficult girls” one day a week at “the great plum”, Melbourne Grammar. Despite the frugal circumstances in which they lived, Yvonne had a plan that lean times could not persuade her to alter. She religiously saved, managing to buy the block of land adjacent to The Moorings that looked directly towards the sea. She had, like Arthur, something to show for her work at the end of the day: it was visible. Yvonne recalled being “very proud of that achievement”.

After the move to Beaumaris the family would drive up to visit Merric and Doris several times a month. The children saw Merric as someone to be avoided. If any of the grandchildren caught his eye, he would insist on them sitting still while he sketched them. Polly never thought it very worthwhile because “he made you look like a monster ...”. Occasionally her grandfather would boom out and, like Jamie, she found him “forbidding”. Jamie didn’t connect with Merric. “He wasn’t recognisable as my father’s father...he was an entity on his own, you had to defer to him; he was fragile .. complex ... a bit volatile”.⁷⁷² Occasionally, throughout the years, Polly would hear her grandfather stamping and groaning from behind a closed door. Once she glimpsed his legs out stiff, stamping and kicking against the ground, while her mother and father tried to hold him and calm him.

Doris had become so stooped and thin, her shoulders and head covered in so many shawls, she had earned the nickname “old Squaw” from her son. They kept in constant touch by telephone. Doris would usually call during the day when Yvonne was teaching and the children were at school. Bob Langley was often instructed by Arthur to “come and just hold this phone for a minute”, to allow him a breather. Finally Arthur would say, “We’ve got to finish now ... I’ll count to three.” But Doris continued to chat way past the countdown and Arthur continued to tease. Bob Langley’s conclusion was “they adored each other”.⁷⁷³

There were summer vacations when the family (Doris, Merric, Hermia, David, Mary, John, Arthur, Yvonne, and all the children) re-formed under a rented roof at Merrick’s North, on the Westernport side of the peninsula. Polly remembers one particular night when the kids were woken by screaming and shouting: Perceval was drunk and “Mary was blaming David ... and David was shouting back that he only had one sister – they had come back from the pub pickled.” Standing at the door of the darkened room, looking into the light of the big kitchen watching Tom Sanders jumping around in the middle of the fracas, Polly, like the other crying children, was scared. “It didn’t happen much or we wouldn’t have been frightened, it wasn’t typical family behaviour, grandpa with ‘love governs all the way’ ... John Perceval was the nut in the batter”. Unable to see her father in the frantic crowd, Polly stood in the door frame, too afraid to go into the room. Then a sudden loud hailstorm beating down on the tin roof and breaking windows

⁷⁷² “Jamie didn’t connect with Merric”. A two-day interview was conducted in Suffolk with Jamie Boyd, 7 February, 2001.

⁷⁷³ “Bob Langley’s conclusion was “they adored each other”. Bob Langley interview, Sandringham, 16 November, 2000. All subsequent quotes from this source.

broke up the fight. Everyone rushed from the house to find it was Arthur, out in the darkness, throwing stones. The group was aghast. Yvonne recalled: "It shut them up". When the day dawned it revealed a house in need of urgent repair.

Only when protecting family did Arthur really let himself go. His general approach to violence was to diffuse it. His favoured method was verbal judo, using humour to unbalance the aggressor. Like the time in Murrumbidgee when young boys had thrown stones at Arthur, yelling "Get your hair cut, mate". "It's only long" he countered "because I've got a rash on my neck". At Beaumaris, when Arthur spotted boys stealing petrol from the Dodge, he opened the window and shouted, "You need any help?" As Jamie watched them make a swift retreat, he learnt how his father "kept himself safe, but kept his self-esteem". Arthur had become a master in the art of self-defence. To celebrate her tenth birthday Polly had invited all her new classmates to a party at Surf Avenue. Her hope exceeded the reality for the children at her new school were "as catty as kids at Murrumbidgee". At the end of the party, worried over their reaction she began to ask if they had had a good time but before she could finish her inquiry, "Dad reached across and pinched me". She was shocked: "He never did anything like that". As she stared at him in surprise, Arthur simply shook his head. Polly would later come to understand: "He didn't want me to be vulnerable. He wanted me to be cool. He wanted me to know you should never ask, never reveal yourself".

As a single family unit, separated at last from Open Country, Yvonne felt "free", Jamie found it "the happiest time", and Polly, despite overhearing arguments between her parents, thought Beaumaris had "a good feeling, everybody happy". Arthur spoke of it as a conscious withdrawal: "we didn't see so much of the rest of the family ... we weren't living on top of anyone". Polly, like her brother, enjoyed the fact that her father spent more time outside of the studio. Before Beaumaris she had little memory of him having time to play - "most of his day was spent painting". But at Surf Avenue there were boat trips, fishing excursions and time for the unexpected. Jamie recalls his father saving a she-oak on the beachside cliff that was about to fall down. They would do things together: build a boat out of corrugated iron with a glass bottom to watch the fish, such as the stingrays, glide by in the bay, or make a slingshot, a kite, a bow and arrow - "he'd do it all, I'd pretend to help". Even if their father was in the middle of work, neither Jamie nor Polly ever remembered being told to go away. He was a father with a great deal of patience, a tight grip, and a very firm hug.

There was little income flow while Arthur worked on the Olympic sculpture, but there was the opportunity for small windfalls. One came courtesy of one of Sydney's greatest painters, Lloyd Rees, in March 1956. A librarian at Sydney University asked Rees (then with the faculty of Architecture) for his advice on a small ceramic memorial plaque. Rees, an admirer of Arthur's ceramic paintings, immediately wrote: "My thoughts turned at once to the beautiful work of this type which you have done and I felt that if

you could accept Miss Wines commission she would obtain something of great and lasting beauty besides setting a new and welcome standard in church memorials".⁷⁷⁴

The financial crisis brought on by the Olympic commission had prompted a radical decision. In November of 1956, Arthur signed a twelve-month contract with a commercial gallery, Australian Galleries, committing himself to exclusive rights to the owners, Anne and Tam Purves, in exchange for a monthly fee. This move created astonishment and censure. The Purves' had run a dress-pattern making factory and converted part of the factory to form the gallery. A small section of the factory still operated as insurance against the gallery collapsing.⁷⁷⁵ The cry went up at the Swanston Family that Anne and Tam were *merchants*! They were in *business*! Despite the shock and horror, artists would soon become part of that business, happy to make the sales and to pay the Purveses their 25 per cent commission. John Perceval, the first to be given a one-man exhibition by them, christened them "carpet floggers".⁷⁷⁶

On the other side of town, John Reed, as president of the resurrected Contemporary Art Society and now director of the Museum of Modern Art and Design of Australia, saw himself as the custodian of "a first class modern gallery ... not just a C.A.S gallery ... a real home for modern art in Australia".⁷⁷⁷ There is every reason to believe that the poetical librarian, Barrett Reid, a vice-president of the 1953 C.A.S, and soon to be on the council of the Reeds' 'national' gallery, may have been expressing the feelings of his mentor when he bumped into Arthur on Collins Street. As Arthur waited by the traffic lights, Barrett Reid stood over him and spat out one word: "Traitor". Neil Douglas was there to observe Arthur's reaction: "Arthur just smiled, shook his head in a dog like way, and went white in the face". Neil was outraged. "I would have gone for him ... but not a word ... that was Arthur's way".

Perhaps it was 'Arthur's way' that held the Burstall and Boyd friendship together. Remarkably, it never cracked. There were hairline fractures. After all four friends had enjoyed a walk in the mountains in the height of the summer, Yvonne had returned home looking rather tense and cross. Yvonne's pique stemmed from the fact that Betty, far younger, had kept offering to carry her knapsack.⁷⁷⁸ Tim Burstall saw Arthur as an intimate: "tough-minded ... wise," a man of "real purity ... great purity". As for Tim's behaviour? "I don't think Arthur would have thought it right or wrong ... I was fond of him and he was fond of me". Yet despite the strong bond between the couples, and despite Arthur making every outward sign that the arrangement with Tim Burstall was

⁷⁷⁴ "One came courtesy of one of Sydney's greatest painters ..." . Letter from Lloyd Rees, 14 March, 1956. Bundanon archives

⁷⁷⁵ "A small section of the factory still operated ..." The Purves's gamble paid off. In 2006 the gallery, still managed by family, operates with five galleries in two states.

⁷⁷⁶ "John Perceval ... christened them "carpet floggers". Neil Douglas interview.

⁷⁷⁷ "On the other side of town ..." Letter to Albert Tucker from John Reed, 15 March, 1956. 'Letters of John Reed' op cit. Note: The Gallery of Contemporary Art on May 12, 1958, while nominally under the CAS/Vic was renamed 'Museum of Modern Art of Australia' (MOMA) and in 1963 altered to the Museum of Modern Art and Design of Australia (MOMADA). In 1962 John Reed resigned from the CAS committee to concentrate on MOMADA. He resigned in 1965.

⁷⁷⁸ "Yvonne's pique stemmed from the fact that Betty ..." Margaret Forster interview.

acceptable, early into 1956 Yvonne knew the situation was becoming untenable. Burstall held the view that Arthur “didn’t believe in the straight and narrow bed”, that he supported the idea that between husband and wife “the deal should be free ... equal”.

But while Arthur appeared to agree in public, he directed censure towards Yvonne in private. Eventually Yvonne told Burstall that the liaison couldn’t continue as it involved too much self-sacrifice on Arthur’s part. Looking back on that time Burstall believed it was Arthur, six and a half years older, who “ultimately controlled the situation”. If Tim Burstall’s perspective was skewed, if he’d lost focus, the time was coming when Arthur would show him just how out of control he felt. He’d blow it up so big no one could miss it.

From the mid-1950’s Arthur painted landscapes whenever he could find the time. When friends dropped by on the weekends he would often be crouched by the window, executing small works that most of his friends dismissed as “bread and butter”. Mirka Mora recalled one particular visit when Arthur painted constantly: “He worked with the smallest brush I have ever seen, hardly any hair on the brush ... We used to tease him about his pot-boilers to earn money ... a desert, one tree, two blackbirds and a lake”. They were marketable and soothed both Arthur and anyone who looked at them without a prejudiced eye. The prejudice had been initiated by John Reed’s dismissal of the first Harkaway and Wimmera landscapes, and that opinion had subsequently been taken up by many Heide regulars. It also came from those closer to home. While a letter from Peter Herbst, written in June 1957 and sent from Ghana, is behind the times and speaks of the Olympic fracas, it also expresses a notion held by many in Arthur’s circle: “I am sorry to hear that those good-for-nothing city fathers or organisers (or whoever they were) did not pay you for your labours, but expect that indirectly it was good for business & that you now employ a studio hand to paint pot-boilers to sell to conscience-stricken socialites ...”⁷⁷⁹

The fact that Arthur’s landscapes sold well through Australian Galleries only served to convince those who couldn’t see past Arthur’s expressionist works.⁷⁸⁰ But Arthur paid no heed: landscapes were his pleasure and a lifeline. Franz Philipp believed the landscapes of 1955-59 were works of “finger exercises...” producing “release and relaxation.” They also answered the need of providing. Arthur was ruthlessly realistic. If Tam Purves, when surveying a painting, bemoaned “Ahh! I don’t think I can sell goats”, the goat would be painted out.⁷⁸¹ Arthur needed the sale: “I wouldn’t have been able to

⁷⁷⁹ “I am sorry to hear that those good-for-nothing city fathers” Extract of letter from Peter Herbst to Arthur Boyd. Bundanon archives.

⁷⁸⁰ “The fact that Arthur’s landscapes sold well through Australian Galleries only served ...” Peter Herbst’s gentle nudge was echoed in more strident tones by others at home. Bob Langley recalled: “I’d get stuck into Arthur about why the hell do you put your work into that Australian Galleries... I’d blast him ... what a cheek. He’d say I’ve got to have the money ... or just ignore me”. Interview Bob Langley, op cit.

⁷⁸¹ If Tam Purves, when surveying a painting, bemoaned ...”. Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

do anything unless I painted landscapes ... I wouldn't have been able to even buy paint".⁷⁸²

Through the latter half of the 1950's Arthur sat side by side at Williamstown with Perceval and Blackman on weekends. He travelled back to Bendigo. He stayed with the Purveses at their rented beach house at Sorrento; often alone, sometimes with Perceval, and painted Portsea and Sorrento. On another occasion, he joined a big party of painters, including Perceval and Williams, at Gaffney's Creek. Various locations produced various outcomes. They ranged from shimmering and tranquil to threatening and brooding; nature, with or without the figurative, but always as an inescapable controlling presence. Art historian, Barry Pearce, observed of Arthur's landscapes in this period: "He was in such command of his powers that he could choose to paint in any key and in any mood he desired".⁷⁸³

Together with Fred Williams, Arthur journeyed to the Barmah Forest and the nearby town of Echuca on the Murray River. Williams was seven years younger than Arthur and had always struggled to paint. His parents had fought his decision from the beginning and, although he longed to live the artist's life, like Arthur, he still needed a day job as a picture framer to survive. Williams respected Arthur; he thought him shrewd and observant, never forgetting how he astutely pinpointed a major difference between them: "The trouble for you Freddy ... when you go and paint a picture, your family despair ... my family celebrate".⁷⁸⁴

In the 1950's few women of thirty-six thought about enlarging their family. Yvonne ignored the norm. In July 1957, close to the time Yvonne became pregnant, she found a pen and time enough to write to the editor of the local paper. She spoke out against "the greater horrors that would result from continued H-Bomb tests", and expressed "a growing fear that those with children particularly, must be feeling". Yvonne worked throughout her pregnancy. In the 1950's it was generally expected that pregnant women cloaked themselves in tents and stayed closeted at home. To appease the headmistress of Mentone Girls' Grammar, who was now anxiously looking about for a replacement for Yvonne, she wore stripey smock dresses made by Helen French.

When Bob Holden, an English teacher at Sandringham Technical School, looked through the windows of his classroom on an early winter's day in 1958, he saw a dishevelled man, in a stretched pullover flapping down around his knees, wandering distractedly across the quad towards his classroom. When the man ventured closer, Holden recognised the face of Arthur Boyd. At this point in his career Arthur was

⁷⁸² "Arthur needed the sale ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁷⁸³ "Art historian, Barry Pearce, observed ..." Barry Pearce, *Arthur Boyd retrospective catalogue*, Art Gallery of New South Wales. December, 1993.

⁷⁸⁴ "Williams respected Arthur ..." Interview Lyn Williams, 11 August, 2005.

becoming a celebrated figure; he had just recently been chosen to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale.

All Arthur could manage to say, in his bewildered state, to Holden was: "Where's Betty? ... Where's Betty?"⁷⁸⁵ Arthur was so distressed that eventually Betty Stevenson was dragged from her class. Betty recalled her extreme discomfort at being made to have a conversation outside the Head's door. She had no idea of the seriousness of Arthur's visit. Although it was evident to Betty "Arthur was absolutely distraught", his temperament was such that she had often seen him agitated. All she could think was: "Oh Arthur, go away, I'm so embarrassed". Arthur couldn't stop moving. He clutched at himself and shifted restlessly, this way and that, literally not knowing which way to turn. Finally he revealed the source of his anxiety: Yvonne was under psychiatric care and the doctors were talking about giving her shock treatment. Arthur told Betty he thought Yvonne was dreadfully ill, that she was being aggressive, illogical, demanding people answer phones that weren't ringing, staying up all night scribbling random thoughts in her notebook.

Arthur declared that he had no idea what was wrong with his wife and Betty could offer little help. She knew nothing of Yvonne's situation, had not guessed at it. The two old school friends did not discuss their problems, "nobody talked ... you were almost ashamed of your traumas in those days".

Yvonne's decline began after the birth of Lucy.⁷⁸⁶ Many put Yvonne's illness down to postnatal depression.. Phyllis believed: "Yvonne got very overtired ... physically far too much was expected of her ..." Margaret Forster, on hand daily to witness events, seconded that: "I wasn't surprised when she finally folded...they were all under considerable stress". One afternoon, when Margaret dropped in on the Boyds, she found a visiting Mary Perceval furiously cleaning the kitchen table, saying: "You've got to wipe out the stains of life". Yet, for all the strain, Arthur's reputation with the public and the critics had never been higher. His career was unequivocally on the rise.

The phenobarbital prescribed by Yvonne's GP shortly after the birth, seemed to exacerbate her highs and lows, and deepen her erratic postnatal condition. "I went to Dr Speed and said, 'Have you heard of the expression 'things are piling up ... things pile up' ... I remember saying it like I was quoting Shakespeare". She was driven to write her novel – to write through the night. When Arthur read the results the following morning, all he could see were incoherent phrases. The thesis she had typed for Brian O'Shaughnessy had addressed physical action, whether or not will can be exerted on objects, limbs. Some of O'Shaughnessy's thoughts now appeared in Yvonne's written

⁷⁸⁵ "All Arthur could manage to say, in his bewildered state to Holden was ..." Bob Holden interview, 8 May, 2005.

"Yvonne's decline began" ⁷⁸⁶ Lucie (the spelling on the birth certificate) Ellen Gough Boyd had been delivered by Dr Speed on 1 May, 1958, at the Southern Memorial Hospital, Brighton: sister to Polly Geraldine, aged eleven years, and Jamie Patrick, aged nine.

ramblings.⁷⁸⁷ She believed she heard messages being tapped out on the electric wires of the telegraph pole outside the sleep-out.

While Arthur confided his concerns about Yvonne's state of mind to Tim Burstall, Yvonne was telling Burstall she thought Arthur was mad. Her nerves were raw. A sentence in her diary shows that she was wrestling with doubts: "It was said of the Wittgenstein, via George Paul, via Camo, Melbourne discussions that it was a kind of game –if so it's a very dangerous game, with human souls for dice". Eventually Dr. Speed prescribed hospital treatment. After a matter of weeks Yvonne was discharged, but the release was premature. Speed then referred Yvonne to a Dr Jeffrey, and she was hospitalised once again and sent to Ward 21, Alfred Hospital, Prahran.

Throughout the last months of 1958 a series of people helped alleviate Arthur's role as both father and mother to a family of three. Yvonne's mother, Edna, moved in and neighbours and friends rallied. Initially Margaret Forster minded Lucy: "Arthur wouldn't have brought Lucy to me lightly ... he was very possessive of the baby". Margaret Forster, a trained nurse, had not known Arthur long enough to be aware of his over-protective fathering. She was surprised the day she saw Arthur running down the side of her house towards the pram by the clothes line. "He clutched Lucy to him, concerned she didn't have her jumper on". Arthur paced the floor with Lucy through the nights rocking her to sleep, and by day did all he could to keep life ticking normally for Polly and Jamie. In November, 1958, Doris wrote a birthday note to "Dearest Little Polly" hoping she will enjoy her day: "I believe you are going to some entertainment in town, darling! With Daddy!"⁷⁸⁸

During her second hospitalisation Yvonne responded well to Dr Jeffrey. She found him "receptive, sternish, patient" with a lined old face and a no-nonsense approach gleaned from his time in the army. During their long rambling talks, "confessions", Yvonne opened up. She talked about her adoption of the fifties notion of personal freedom, about Arthur being possessive. "I told him everything that ever happened, problems I'd had with sex. Leaning back on her hospital trolley bed, as she was being wheeled in for treatment, Yvonne recalled propping her arm behind her head and saying "You couldn't help me, I suppose?" as a joke. Looking back you know it was you, you know you were there, but you can't understand why you did certain things".

Recovery was slow. Treatment spanned a three-month period, with Yvonne continuing to see Arthur as a mortal threat. "One time I was getting jumpy and het up ... I only remember I made a mighty inward effort forcing myself to get over this fear, to cling onto something like sanity ... a *fierce* effort ... saying, 'This is not right – this is *Arthur*'. And then we embraced on the bed for what seemed a long time. He was so relieved. We just hugged, I don't know how long. Then the doctor came in and gave me a jab and after I had an enormously long sleep. Then I was well".

⁷⁸⁷ "Some of O'Shaughnessy's thoughts ..." As told to Brian O'Shaughnessy by Arthur Boyd. Brian O'Shaughnessy interview.

⁷⁸⁸ "In November, Doris wrote a birthday note ..." Bundanon archives.

Was Arthur conscious of the power he had been wielding? Had he been willing Yvonne to understand his paralysed fear, his tangled desires, his haunting visions? Had he been, as he once explained, “unseeing ... expunging [his] own guilt by painting ... painting something ... out of [his] system ... trying to get rid of it ... facing up to it...”⁷⁸⁹ Many of the paintings were as big as billboards (five-foot by six-foot). In full vivid colour they depicted longing, grief, disinheritance and persecution; the collapse of partnerships and the disintegration of a marriage. All through Yvonne’s pregnancy these life-size images mounted up, and pressed in, surrounding the walls of Surf Avenue.

On one hand, Yvonne was aware Arthur was trying to help her think things out. On the other, she believed he was trying to kill her. Part of her fear had been centred on the images Arthur was painting. “They upset me ... I thought they were about me.” She felt it seemed “like a terrible emphasis” to paint a dead figure in a coffin, “not once, but twice”.

As Yvonne began experiencing a distancing from reality, her dilemma appeared to stem in part like L’Ignota (the heroine in Luigi Pirandello’s play, *As You Desire Me*) from a confusion of identity. She felt she was writing for an audience, that she was in a Pirandello play ... unable to judge whether she was acting or not acting ... feeling her audience was closer than outside the window. Had Arthur, like Pirandello, attempted to solve his personal dilemma by creating a cast to explain his story? Did this cast take on a life of their own and haunt their creator until he found a way of resolving the story?

Jean Langley’s garden signalled a difference. Rather than the clipped lawns trimmed by strict rows of hydrangeas and zinnias lining straight paths to self-respecting doors, Jean grew native plants. Waratahs and eucalyptus flourished and neighbours complained about her untidy garden. Roses trailed around the weatherboard of Rose Cottage and in the back garden there was another small cottage built from old tram carriages. The interior of the house, like Jean’s wildflower paintings, was delicate and individual.⁷⁹⁰ Arthur’s paintings hung around the walls. They were on loan, and for sale for around £50. Arthur made a habit of lending his paintings to various friends in the hope of finding buyers.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁹ Had he been, as he once explained, ‘unseeing ...’ Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁷⁹⁰ “The interior of the house, like Jean’s wildflower paintings ...” Jean Langley’s antipathy towards Bert Tucker that grew over the years, may have roots in his criticism of her work, summing her drawings up as “aimless sloppy line churned out by the score in every art school all over the world.” The Reeds took umbrage and John Reed defended Jean’s talent in a letter to Bert, July 1953 “That line beautifully defines its object: it is clean and delicate as I see I, and the drawing informed with intuitive taste and sensibility. Not the sensibility of a mature personality, but must we publish only that? Sun and I feel certain of her gift and so hope it will flower, but she is young and draws very little ... and has just married John Sinclair.”

⁷⁹¹ “Arthur made a habit of lending his paintings ...” Jean Langley interview, Anne Cairns interview..

For John Sinclair, marriage to Jean had triggered a string of infidelities. After the birth of their only child, Jane, the marriage faltered and at one point, to escape John's alcoholic aggression, Jean moved into the garden cottage. Bob O'Reilly, a school teacher and friend of Jean's, would come to her rescue when times were particularly tough and block John Sinclair at the door. O'Reilly knew Sinclair: "Normally he was the soul of politeness and good manners, bright and sensitive, but he was insane when it came to Jean ... it went beyond jealousy". Although O'Reilly believed Sinclair was never pompous, "he would talk to, and of [Jean], as if he thought he'd married beneath himself. He beat her".⁷⁹² Few people were aware of the violence of John Sinclair's temper (he would eventually break and permanently cripple Jean's finger) but all were acquainted with his clever, sometimes caustic, tongue.

After the break-up Arthur visited Jean when she was seriously ill with anaemia. There had been occasions in the past when Arthur would just drop by, on his bike or in the Dodge, alone or with the family - times, Jean recalled, when "his whole face looked overcome ... I couldn't quite work it out. He was watching me deteriorate ... he would say about Sinclair, 'you must not let him kill you'".⁷⁹³ Jean was desperately unhappy, "crying all the time" and appreciated Arthur's gentle company and sweet wit: "He walked in and my radio was playing something he liked ... a certain Bach, and he said, 'Your ABC is better than mine'". On one occasion, after Arthur had left, her mother commented: "He never took his eyes off you, Jean". She dismissed it. It never occurred to her that Arthur was unhappy.

One evening, in the last months of 1957, Jean travelled into South Yarra with Arthur and Yvonne and neighbours of the Boyds, the Murphys, to see a production of *Waiting for Godot*, with Barry Humphries and Peter O'Shaughnessy. The tickets had been issued for separate rows and Jean ended up sitting alone with Arthur. The theme of the play - that life consists of waiting - would prove, for Jean, to be darkly prophetic. But that night the futile message of the play was fully countered by Jean's heightened state: her sudden, unexpected and overwhelming sense of attraction to the man sitting next to her. In the dark of the theatre, as the hour wore on, she considered she was going mad as she struggled with strange new feelings for such an old friend. As she fought an overwhelming desire to take Arthur's hand, his reached out for hers, and held tight. When the lights came up she was astonished, embarrassed, fumbling. When Arthur turned and his eyes locked onto hers, she knew he felt the same. To that point she had never realised the intensity of his eyes; "he never looked straight at people". She would later recall, in many letters written to Arthur, but never sent: "There I saw you, the real you, for the first time." On the way home in the car Jean sat next to Arthur. When the conversation turned to Tim Burstall and his newest conquest, and the Murphys suggested that Tim was casually breaking up yet another marriage, Yvonne defended him. She also announced she was pregnant.

⁷⁹² "Although O'Reilly believed Sinclair was never pompous ..." Interview Brian O'Reilly, 7 August, 2001. France.

⁷⁹³ "He was watching me deteriorate ..." Jean Langley interview.

After Yvonne's breakdown Arthur stopped painting the pictures that had been disturbing her. Yvonne believed, "it was like a palliative to me in a way". This group of work that held such powerful sway rose from Arthur's memory of the rejected and repressed people living in makeshift homes in the Northern Territory: people whose homes and identity had been stolen away. They were pushed far enough away to be forgotten: "It wasn't a question of going one hundred miles, five hundred, or a thousand ... You could go on forever and no notice would be taken of you at all". Arthur's overwhelming memory was of sadness. Not sadness so much of "the scene" or "the treatment" of these people, but of the "absolute separation ... and separation is a terrible thing to happen to anybody ... if you're kept out ... it's not a good feeling."⁷⁹⁴ Arthur knew what it was to be rejected, to become so isolated you were invisible; not only to those outside the circle, but those within: "There is an element of exclusion in all societies, and in all connections, that has really dark consequences."⁷⁹⁵ Arthur returned from the outback with "quite a lot of drawings." He then "fantasised" on them.⁷⁹⁶

These images became the "trigger"⁷⁹⁷ for a series of paintings titled *Love, Marriage and Death of a Half-caste*, that would become known as 'The Bride Series', arguably the pinnacle of Arthur Boyd's work and, next to Nolan's 'Kelly,' one of the most famous series in the history of Australian art. When describing them, Arthur said: "A lot of subjects I have painted before this with lovers in the Australian landscape ... would have been connected with these aboriginal pictures ..."⁷⁹⁸

The paintings were not, as many consider, a political statement. At that time, Robert Hughes was one of the few who first saw it; saw that "behind it all, just as it lay behind the St. Kilda paintings, the search of man for love".⁷⁹⁹ Critic Gary Catalano, would see it too: "It could be said that all lovers ... are to some extent mis- or imperfectly matched... I think that Boyd's paintings are about the experience of losing a lover".⁸⁰⁰ Decades later Arthur would elaborate on his depiction of lovers: 'There are some of my paintings of figures lying in a landscape that are gentle and represent romantic love, but with that you also have the dark side – the fear of castration, impotence, the fear of deprivation, the

⁷⁹⁴ "They were pushed far enough away to be forgotten ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC archives, Sydney.

⁷⁹⁵ "There is an element of exclusion in all societies" *A Man of Two Worlds*, a John Read production, BBC/ABC, 1978.

⁷⁹⁶ "He then 'fantasised' on them". Arthur Boyd, ABC radio archives, Sydney.

⁷⁹⁷ "These images became the 'trigger' ..." Arthur Boyd: "... like the plight of the Aborigines, the plight of people setting themselves alight, they trigger off all sorts of ideas." *The Bulletin*, December 21, 1993. Extract from Grazia Gunn interview: GG: "... the details of the spirit (the aboriginal spirit) does occur in the 'Bride Series' but at the time you were not actually thinking of that as a subject? AB: No ... I did the drawings as a traveler and the thing really didn't kick home ... there must have been some reason for it being triggered off three or four years later."

⁷⁹⁸ "When describing them, Arthur said ... lovers in the Australian landscape ..." Arthur Boyd, Hetherington interview. Op cit..

⁷⁹⁹ "At that time, Robert Hughes was one of the few ..." Hughes, Robert. *The Art of Australia*, Penguin Books, Australia, 1966. While Hughes displayed this insight into the paintings, in an article for 'Nation,' April 4, 1964, Hughes he would decry the 'Bride Series' as being marred by sentimentality and calls the works "a singular outburst."

⁸⁰⁰ "Decades later, critic Gary Catalano, would see it too ..." "For Boyd's works the time is right", *Age*, 26 November, 1986.

fear of being left out, the fear or shame of being left out of sexual activities. This is the opposite of romantic love. There is also cruelty in sex".⁸⁰¹ A line of prose from one of Martin Boyd's novels seems to haunt this notion: "the sorrow of losing what we love is nothing to the torment of having it present but denied us".⁸⁰²

Just as Yvonne saw herself in these paintings, Bob Langley saw Arthur: "I was still working with Arthur ... that sort of look on those faces in some of those paintings was much the same as himself".⁸⁰³ "I don't know why people can't see this is you", were according to Jean, Arthur's words to her.⁸⁰⁴ While Yvonne believed Arthur was trying to kill her, Arthur may have imagined it was John Sinclair threatening to kill him. Jean was convinced it was her husband pointing the gun at her and Tim Burstall thought it could be Arthur pointing the gun at him. In one work Arthur confirmed that the man with his arms outstretched towards a runaway woman was "very like" his father and that the couple were "shipwrecked".⁸⁰⁵ While Yvonne saw herself and Doris, perhaps she also saw Betty. Arthur's life swirled through the paintings:⁸⁰⁶ he said, "the subject might be private but the actual shapes wouldn't be quite so private".⁸⁰⁷

In *Half-Caste Child* there is canvas and paint, but the surface gives way to a force beyond the form of droop and lean and crouch, that unearths, like a divining rod, deep wells of pity, grief, regret. The black man, the longest, darkest shadow in the composition, hangs as a vertical dead weight, spent and broken, limp and powerless. He is a shadowy, phantom body dropping down from a cross at Calvary, or from a tree's bough in the deep of America's South: a universal, timeless shape of the victim.

Bridegroom and Gargoyle recalls the bleak and loveless years of South Melbourne by imitating *The Gargoyle*, painted in 1944. Over thirteen years later the bridegroom has become a completely different physical type to John Perceval. One symbol links the men: they are now both cripples. The foundations of the house have been almost completely undermined by the shadow of the flying gargoyle, which not only threatens to bring the house down but to devour the crippled bridegroom. Like a priest raising a host, like a soldier waving a white flag, like an offering and a surrender, the bridegroom holds the head of a bride high in his hands and wills the gargoyle to see. His eyes are all

⁸⁰¹ "There is also cruelty in sex". Arthur Boyd, Sandra McGrath. *Aspect*, 'Art and Literature', Spring 1974..

⁸⁰² "A line of prose from ..." *A Difficult Young Man*, Martin Boyd.

⁸⁰³ "Bob Langley saw Arthur..." Bob Langley interview

⁸⁰⁴ "I don't know why people can't see this is you ..." Arthur Boyd in reference to his painting, *Persecuted Lovers*, Jean Langley interview

⁸⁰⁵ "In one work Arthur confirmed that the man with his arms outstretched ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

⁸⁰⁶ "Arthur's life swirled through the paintings ..." When Arthur visited the State Library in the 40's he is sure to have viewed (source name of book) In it Edvard Munch's work titled 'Jealousy' employs similar structure to *Half Caste Child*: one half of the foreground is filled with the portrait of a man, eyes staring distractedly into the distance

⁸⁰⁷ "He said 'the subject might be private ...'" Arthur Boyd in reply to the question: "some people might find your own allegorical pictures or symbolic pictures pretty private ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC sound archives, Sydney.

for the unseeing gargoyle, while the eyes of the women in his possession (the only light in the dark) are all for him.

As in past works the threesome dominates. In *Wedding Group* (two brides and the blackman) it is further emphasised by the shape of the wedding dresses forming perfect triangles. Throughout the series the positions of the central cast change and roles are reversed. The desired becomes the desiring; the victim becomes the persecutor. For all the blazing physicality, the work speaks of the metaphysical, begging us to look beyond skin or genus, and beyond colour or form, to understand our collective and connecting fears and desires. These paintings are not recreations of the disinherited in the central desert but empathetic images from the desert of the heart.

Such was Arthur's inability to discuss his deepest feelings that Jean Langley never learnt what had been transpiring in Arthur's life (neither did he tell anyone about Jean). Horrified by Tim Burstall's general behaviour (an episode that rocked her was when he read out aloud at the pub one of his diary entries that dealt with a personal conquest), Jean once asked Arthur how he put up with him. Arthur simply replied: "Oh Tim's alright". On another occasion when Jean's brother, Bob Langley, asked the same question, wondering how Arthur coped with Tim's "arrogance" and the "haughty" personality of Denison Deasey, Arthur offered a quiet revelation. Bob Langley, reserved like Arthur, had an energetic but dominating friend named Sam who would take him to parties, organise him, be his strong frontman, play up to him. Arthur's answered Bob Langley's question with: "We've all got our Sams". Later in life Arthur appeared to have expanded on this notion: "if people become grand you should not cut them down, you should allow them to blow themselves out, or up".⁸⁰⁸

At the end of 1958 Arthur was coaxing Yvonne back into the world, anxious to get her motivated. He arranged driving lessons, made improvements to the house and encouraged her to take up her drawing again. And, for a time, he stopped painting the Bride series. By this time the love affair with Jean had begun in earnest. Jean's feeling was:

This is the most important person in the world to me and if he wants me I'm his - to hell with the world. I just had the feeling that something terrible had happened and he needed me: perfect justification, mind you. We were two highly sensitive, very lonely people ...of course it was a powerfully sexual thing.

Did Arthur ever move, ever reveal himself, until he had scouted out the surrounds and was sure of his territory? Jean and Arthur's first night together began when Jean walked out into the garden and found Arthur standing in the dark: "We literally fell into each other's arms." On another occasion, while sitting around the fire one Sunday afternoon chatting with her visitor, Brian O'Reilly, Jean's phone rang.⁸⁰⁹ It was Arthur, saying:

⁸⁰⁸ "Later in life Arthur appeared to have expanded this notion ..." Arthur Boyd, *Testament of a Painter*, op cit.

⁸⁰⁹ "On another occasion, while sitting around the fire one Sunday afternoon ..." Interview Bob O'Reilly August, 2001. "I knew about Arthur ... knew Jean was madly in love with him. I heard about Arthur calling that night long after the event."

“Who is that with you?” Jean queried: “How do you know there’s someone here?” “I’ve been in the garden watching...get rid of him quickly, I’m coming around”. Arthur never failed to be cautious. Jean believed he was terrified of John Sinclair. He once reported to Jean: “I was coming to see you but the Citroen was there, so I went for my life”.⁸¹⁰

Given Yvonne’s tender state Arthur must have felt it impossible to be frank and follow the instruction he had given Tim Burstall. One thing he made very clear to Jean from the outset was he would never leave Yvonne. As secrecy and lies proliferated, Jean believed that Arthur carried a heavy guilt: “his torment, as much as my passion was out of control, out of common sense”.

Jean may have harboured many false hopes, but one thing she was absolutely clear about was Arthur’s commitment to his work. Sometime in 1958 Arthur and Jean had arranged to meet in Melbourne at a pub. Arthur never arrived. Instead he painted a beachscape at Mentone. This was Jean’s bay beach, her territory, a place where she walked almost daily. When Jean learnt how Arthur had spent his day, she believed he had deliberately manoeuvred to get her out of his line of sight, so he could work without distraction.

The tinkling of Jamie practising on the piano was the gentle greeting when Arthur brought Yvonne home from the hospital. And then another sound, as she cradled Lucy towards her breast, Arthur exclaiming, “‘No! ... no!’ ... as if I didn’t know I couldn’t feed her ... I probably didn’t”. Slowly life wound itself back onto the loop. Polly remembered her mother’s rehabilitation treatment, “making baskets, weaving things”. Arthur arranged a camping holiday and they drove up the coast of New South Wales. Yvonne washed nappies in creeks, coped with an impacted wisdom tooth, and enjoyed the fuss when a local town paper took a picture of Polly standing in front of a proud new addition to the camping site; a room full of sparkling new washing machines,. Recalling that holiday, Yvonne commented: “It was quite happy, nothing went wrong”.

In the summer of 1959 Tom Sanders took photographs of Yvonne sitting in an Eltham garden, among a party of friends, on a sun-filled day.⁸¹¹ Lucy stands in her carry cot, clinging onto its wicker sides while Yvonne spoon-feeds her. They are part of a circle formed by John and Mary Perceval, Tim Burstall, David Armstrong, and Matchem Skipper. The group chats and drinks and children play. Arthur, with shirt sleeves rolled up, one hand on his hip and the other clutching a pint of beer, hovers on the sidelines. His eyes are focused on Yvonne and Lucy. Yvonne’s face seems childlike; her long hair has been cut into a short bob, blunt at her ears, and is haphazardly pinned back. She looks distant, dazed, bruised. This is not the cover girl, the glamorous ‘war bride’ on the front of the 1943 copy of *Woman’s Own*; nor the statuesque lipsticked Millet figure, photographed straight of back and sure of hand, mixing clay slip for a magazine feature on the Olympic statue. Yet, even after her pregnancy and in her late thirties, without a

⁸¹⁰ “It was Arthur, saying ...” Jean Langley interview, op cit.

⁸¹¹ “In the summer of 1959 Tom Sanders took photographs These photograph are published in Tom Sanders autobiography *Spare the Face Gentleman Please* illustrated by Arthur Boyd and published by Phoebe Publishing, Victoria, 1993.

scrap of makeup and recuperating from her illness, Yvonne looked like a young girl and still resembled her long-ago screen idol, Greta Garbo.

Around nine months previously the Bride series, exhibited by Australian Galleries in April 1958,⁸¹² had astonished the critics into a torrent of words. Some reviews were half-hearted, one or two critical,⁸¹³ but most conceded, like Alan McCulloch, that this was Arthur's "most impressive performance to date". An announcement made just before the show opened spurred interest. Arthur received a letter from the Prime Minister's Department, extending an invitation to exhibit in the 29th Venice Biennale.⁸¹⁴ Only two Australian painters had been chosen. Both were named Arthur. Sir Arthur Streeton, who had died in 1943, was considered the first and greatest painter of Australian landscape. For Arthur Boyd to be placed alongside Arthur Streeton on such a special platform put him in the public eye and in the realm of the 'greats'. The establishment appeared to be handing on the baton.

Australia had been the new kid in town at the 1954 Venice Biennale and Alan McCulloch, in his capacity as *Herald* Art Critic, nervously questioned, "What reception can we expect?" "Crumbs" he finally reckoned. The contenders came from a field of twelve. No doubt the line-up had something to do with works already shipped over for the 1953 Burlington exhibition. The Arts Advisory Board was nothing if not thrifty. They had refused, in 1951, to accept a deal from the Italian Government: an Australian pavilion built for twelve thousand pounds and the land thrown in, gratis. Instead, alone of all the countries, they accepted a courtesy corner of one of the Italian galleries. McCulloch picked three artists from the twelve he considered possessed "the only thing that international jurors will look for ... the development of indigenous Australian art." McCulloch reasoned: "Drysdale alone satisfies general international requirements of

⁸¹² "Around nine months previously, the 'Bride' series, exhibited by Australian Galleries in April of 1958..." Twenty-one works (sixteen major works and five studies) were exhibited under the title: 'Exhibition by Arthur Boyd, Allegorical Paintings': *Shearers Playing for a Bride, Persecuted Lovers, Groom Waiting for His Bride to Grow Up, Neglected Bridegroom, Death of a Husband, The Mourning Bride, The Baptism, Protection* (a ceramic tile), *The Frightened Bridegroom, The Reflected Bride, The Escaped Bride, Half-caste Child, Bridegroom Going to His Wedding, Wedding Group, Phantom Bride, Escaped Bride* (study) *The Lovers* (study) *The Dreaming Bridegroom, The Watching Bridegroom, Bridegroom Sailing Away* (study) *The Lovers* (sketch). According to Stuart Purves, the paintings had no titles until his mother, Anne, and Arthur collaborated, naming each work as they wandered through the gallery after the pictures were hung. By the time the exhibition moved to Adelaide and Sydney *Mourning Bride 11* had been completed.

⁸¹³ "...one or two critical ..." Laurie Thomas, reviewing 'Brides' for the *Sun*, 1 October, 1958, wrote himself out on a limb and then sawed it out from under him: "They are grotesque. They are real. They have the reality of human nature. But they are bad paintings. The artist has lost himself in an idea and mistaken an idea for a painting". David Jones archives.

⁸¹⁴ "An announcement made just before the show opened ..." This letter of 18 April, 1958 informs that a selection of Arthur's paintings have already been chosen by Mr. Robert Campbell, Director of the National Gallery of South Australia; among them *The Ploughed Paddock, Wimmera Landscape, Mount Terrible* and *The Irrigation Lake*. There was considerable protest in the art press about the selection. The headline to an anti-Menzies article by Laurie Thomas bemoaned the new "Ming Dynasty" and denounced the Prime Minister as a "bumblodrom" who "sits on our art!" Thomas complained of inequality – Streeton outnumbered Boyd by almost two to one. The general feeling was the landscapes chosen did not do justice to Arthur's great range of work.

conception and execution. Nolan is the most enterprising of the trio, but his work is not free from guile. Boyd is the most imaginative and the most truly Australian, but his work has certain structural deficiencies”.

By 1958, Arthur’s “certain structural deficiencies” had been dismissed by McCulloch and his new concern was that “injustice” had been done by the AAB in their limited choice of Boyd’s works. Arthur’s expressionist works: his ceramics, sculpture, and particularly the Bride series, were not included. By limiting the selection to landscapes, McCulloch insisted that Australia was isolating herself from the world stage: “We are to appear, it seems, like a geographical magazine, as the propagandists of our native scenery”.⁸¹⁵

Publicly Arthur played down the high-handed approach of the A.A.B, mumbling to the press that if it had been left to him, he would have chosen differently ... but ... well ... it was an honour ... one he hadn’t expected, nor sought.⁸¹⁶ Privately, it was “a big disappointment ... Mr. Menzies wouldn’t have a bar of anything except Australian landscapes. Everybody was very upset ... mainly me ... I could have had a very good showing”.⁸¹⁷ Ever since changing his first gallery in his teens, Arthur had had a keen sense of the market place. It was Arthur who originally approached Australian Galleries. If the world accepted Arthur’s gentle, head-shaking, unworldly persona, they were buying only half the package.

On 9 April 1958, Arthur was photographed posing: “putting finishing touches” to *Bride Reflected in Creek*. After the announcement of the Venice Biennale, Arthur was now so newsworthy there was a need to know more about the painter behind the paintings. Above a picture of Arthur, a headline screamed: “The Woman I’d Love to Meet!” the journalist reported that the artist would like to meet Madame Chiang Kai-shek, and Greta Garbo.⁸¹⁸ As Arthur did with his paintings, he was making a public statement speak privately. He was both politically and aesthetically, mentally and physically, talking to his nine-month pregnant wife. It was she, he was saying – the amalgam of Garbo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek – his very own beautiful communist that he had always desired.

One honour denied Sir Arthur Streeton, but given to Arthur Boyd, was the invitation to paint a refrigerator. Late in 1958, to raise money for widows and children of men who served in war, Legacy asked Arthur to paint a fridge. Eleven artists were commissioned and in March of the following year an exhibition titled, ‘Art in Everyday Life’ was held in Sydney, and eleven Kelvinator refrigerators were auctioned for the charity. Even on this strange canvas Arthur overlays the personal with classical myth, and uses the story of sexual seduction in the form of *Leda and the Swan*. The story forms a triptych around three sides of the machine. Arthur doesn’t stray far from his iconography. Here is a

⁸¹⁵ “By limiting the selection to landscapes ...” *The Herald*, Wednesday, 23 April, 1958.

⁸¹⁶ “Publicly Arthur played down the high-handed approach of the A.A.B ...” *The Herald*, 9 April, 1958.

⁸¹⁷ “Privately, it was “a big disappointment ...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁸¹⁸ “Above a picture of Arthur, a headline screamed...” *The Herald*, 9 April, 1958.

bride, but this time wearing what appears to be a hospital white nightie and a short veil, reminiscent of a nurse's veil. The black swan, an ominous symbol in the South Melbourne works, appears again. As in previous works where the female is cast as seductress, or the object of desire, the colour of the woman's hair is red. The decorative metal strip at the bottom of the fridge has been used as a pedestal for the bride (in earlier portraits Arthur has put both his mother's and Yvonne's feet on a pedestal). One of Arthur's earliest symbols, the metamorphosing moth/butterfly, is common to each panel.⁸¹⁹

A flowering tree (the tree of knowledge/Eden's tree) spreads across each section. In the first panel a moth alights on a branch. In the main panel the moth is attached to the bride's neck (as it has been, and will be, attached to female throats in many other works). In the last panel the black bird, who had perched prettily on a branch in the central panel, has now swooped on the moth and is about to devour it. The entire work could be read as biblical. Panel one: Innocent Eden. Panel two: woman enters Paradise (literally steps up into the garden) and encounters temptation (the Roman God Jupiter disguised as a swan). Panel three: after the seduction, loss, The Fall. But a witty warning from the artist on over-interpretation: an exposition of original sin it may be, but the name of this particular Kelvinator model is definitely a pun, 'Magic Cycle.'⁸²⁰

In the first week of August 1959 the old Dodge, packed with artists and their wives, bounced off to the opening of an exhibition entitled 'Antipodeans'. The catalogue contained the historic 'Antipodean Manifesto', a repetitive, didactic statement lambasting non-figurative art. The "colourful, elegant and shapely blot[s]" of "tachistes, action painters, geometric abstractionists, abstract expressionists" were "not an art for living men." Abstraction produced "a death of the mind and the spirit", reducing art to "the silence of decoration". It was proposed that the image, the figured shape or symbol, fashioned by the artist out of his imaginative experience, was the "living speech of art". New York, Paris, London, San Francisco and Sydney were listed as the hotbeds of abstract attraction, where young artists were "dazzled by the luxurious pageantry and colour of non-figuration". The sermon was, of course, directed towards the only city on the list that would care enough to cock an ear: sybaritic, silly, sandstone-hearted Sydney.

⁸¹⁹ "One of Arthur's earliest symbols ..." In this work the moth not only symbolises change of matter, but pinned to the neck of the woman it suggests Emma Minnie's poem in which the moth is represented as a symbol of beauty, just as it is when it appears reflected in a stream in *Figure Running in a river* - its wings changed to form a pair of globe-shaped breasts.

⁸²⁰ "But a witty warning from the artist ..." This painting is in the permanent collection of Bendigo Art Gallery - sited close to Arthur's army studio. Previously, it had been purchased at a Christie's auction in May of 1989 by the not-yet-disgraced Sydney stockbroker Rene Rivkin. Its value had been estimated at 7,000 dollars. Within thirty seconds it had been sold to Rivkin for 50,000. Having secured the winning bid, Rivkin bowed to the crowd and walked out of the auction.

In almost every sentence of the 'Antipodean Manifesto', Bernard Smith took pains to use the collective "we" or "us". In bold black type the 'us' listed on the catalogue were: Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, David Boyd, John Brack, Bob Dickerson, John Perceval, Clifton Pugh and Bernard Smith. Robert Hughes believed Smith to be "more Antipodean than any of the Antipodeans ... he took a certain pleasure in being the ringmaster of the circus".⁸²¹ Or perhaps the puppeteer, for in the publication *Australia To-Day*, with the group publicly committed, Smith now stepped out of the line-up, reduced the 'Brotherhood' by one, and wrote as the dispassionate art critic. His story, titled 'The Antipodeans' and published in October, was simply a regurgitation of the manifesto. It began: "A new group of artists with a definite and vigorous point of view was formed in Melbourne early in 1959. They call themselves 'The Antipodeans' and there are seven artist members".

After the exhibition, brickbats flew. Alan McCulloch, speaking with the powerful voice of the only art critic on the only evening paper in Melbourne, denounced the Antipodeans as "a collection of timid individuals huddled together in the hope of mutual advertisement and protection."⁸²² Mirka Mora, writing in *Modern Art News*, lobbed at all eight heads: "I am disgusted at the Antipodeans, who betray all the painters of the world of long ago, of time to come, and of present time... They can say thank you to their Chairman for having led them into a well organized farce. No one has the right to tell painters what to paint, not even His Highness, 'Sir Bernard Smith.'" In the same publication Clifton Pugh, uneasy with the group statement, took a step back. He was not "Anti any particular form of Art, all sincere directions of Art are valid ..."

The formation of groups may have provided a common bond and purpose to the art movements of the past, but it brought angst and argument to this post-war bunch of painters. According to Pugh the original idea for the exhibition was hatched by Charles Blackman, John Perceval and himself, after a day spent painting together at Cottles Bridge, close to Pugh's art communal, 'Dunmoochin'. When assessing the finished results they were fascinated by the fact each landscape was entirely different; no similarity existed, although they had been viewing the same scene. The fact that Arthur had painted in this same area also appealed. An exhibition was mooted and the idea was energetically taken up by David Boyd, who introduced it to Bernard Smith. Helen Brack dubbed the group, 'The Brotherhood of St. Bernard'.

Meetings were held at John Perceval's house. When David Boyd designed the poster and booked the exhibition space, Pugh saw it becoming "a fait accompli.... we thought ... it will be a good exhibition... we all chipped in". According to Pugh the manifesto was formalised by Bernard Smith and he passed it round to everybody: "we all signed ... we are responsible because we did sign it". Len French took off for Sydney, according to

⁸²¹ "Robert Hughes believed Smith to be "more Antipodean than any of the Antipodeans ..." Robert Hughes interview.

⁸²² "Alan McCulloch, speaking with the powerful voice ..." An open letter by Alan McCulloch in the May Broadsheet, *Modern Art News*, 1959.

him because, "I was so sick of Bernard Smith. Bernard and I fought over the Antipodeans, I thought it was anti-art and I said so".

Smith held sway. More than a decade previously, Arthur had resisted being roped into Noel Counihan and Vic O'Connor's anti-fascist, realist movement; as a consequence, Bernard Smith had dropped Arthur's work from his first book on Australian art, *Place, Taste, and Tradition*. In retrospect Smith admitted it was "one of the most shameful things" in his life and blamed it on the politics of the time: "It was because of Noel, who was in a state of enmity, in what he regarded as Arthur's desertion of the cause".⁸²³ All his life Arthur shunned politics, the closest he ever came to a political comment was a playful and typically ambiguous statement that "the left was right". Why did he become involved now? Did he fear further rejection by Smith? Listening to Clifton Pugh's account, perhaps David's passion for the project, and the desire of the group to hold a joint exhibition, were the manipulating factors. Bound by the wishes of family and friends, Arthur may have found himself blocked into a corner so tight that for once he found it impossible to perform a sideways manoeuvre.

By Bernard Smith's account, Arthur attended all the meetings but when asked to submit his ideas in his own words offered nothing. By Arthur's account, he believed in the proposition that "whatever the image might be ... no matter how fuzzy or how scratchy ... it was important" and felt it "pretty hard to take when it got outweighed by the force of fashion". Even though this was one time Arthur could not avoid running with the herd, he still managed to go his own steely quiet way. A month previously he had begun work on a mural for an Anglican church in the LaTrobe Valley, Gippsland. Arthur described it as "very slightly figurative" and "very abstract".⁸²⁴

In September 1959 Jamie and Polly were woken in the middle of the night by their mother and father, who were leaving them in the care of a friend. The man who had influenced Arthur's wide acceptance of the world and its ways had left the world. Merric's death certificate registered 'chronic nephritis and epilepsy'. In a sense it was epilepsy that had killed him. He had died of kidney failure, the direct result of medication he had been taking to stop his epileptic attacks. The decision to administer the drug was taken after a particularly severe fit that resulted in Merric's hospitalisation. While the pills stopped the attacks, they blanketed the personality, although much of Merric's fascinating soft/sharp focus continued.

In 1955 David and Hermia, returned from England. Moving into Open Country they converted the bungalow into a display room and held exhibitions from the house. They

⁸²³ "In retrospect, Smith admitted it was 'one of the most shameful things' ..." Bernard Smith interview, 28 November, 2001. Melbourne.

⁸²⁴ "A month previously he had begun work on a mural ..." The date of 1955-56 given by Franz Philipp for this "altar painting" is incorrect. The title he gives of 'Crucifixion' differs from the title it holds 'The Ascending Christ.'

would advertise and as a result "hundreds if not thousands of visitors"⁸²⁵ would arrive. Each exhibition would be launched with an opening party. It was a strain on Merric. His home engulfed with crowds, he would handle the situation in his very own and different ways. On one occasion a visitor, coming across a dignified gentleman carrying a glass of wine in one hand and an axe in the other, enquired if he knew the whereabouts of the host. Merric chatted amiably for several minutes, then said: "Would you mind holding this glass for a moment?" As the young man obliged, Merric suddenly shouted "...while I chop your head off!"⁸²⁶ When not prompted to create a scene from *The Three Stooges*, Merric, unable to distinguish guests from customers, would feel duty-bound to make the necessary polite introductions. One particular day in 1957, with David by his side, he rambled: "This is my son, my third son. Arthur my eldest son is not here. Nor is Lucy, my second son. My wife's children, you know". When a square-built, aggressive looking woman muttered something like "Which wife?", Merric, looking at her with his sunken but luminous eyes, retorted: "Tell me: why are you growing all those hairs on your chin, dear lady? Is it ..."⁸²⁷ As David twirled around to make amends, he found his buyers leaving.

Each day, Doris crushed the pills and mixed them into Merric's milk or tea. As Merric's distracted wanderings ceased, he developed an uncharacteristic paunch. As he became less agitated, he sunk deeper into his chair. The illness that precipitated his death lasted only a week. He slipped into a coma and, after a lifetime of enduring violent and fearful trauma, he died peacefully in his bed.

His obituary was reported the same day of his death, September 9, in the evening paper: "Pottery pioneer dies at 71. William Merric Boyd, known as 'the father of Australian pottery,' died today at his Murrumbidgee home. He was 71. He was a member of one of Australia's best-known families of artists, sculptors and potters. He pioneered truly Australian pottery, and many of his best pieces are now in the china cabinets of Australian society families. His parents were both artists and some of their paintings hang today in the National Gallery".

Doris had originally chosen cremation but, at the last minute, changed her mind. As Merric's coffin was lowered into the earth of Brighton Cemetery, Doris stood by her eldest son for support. As he gently held her arm, he offered: "You won't have to worry about him getting out now."⁸²⁸ Doris, always understanding of her darling 'Chooky boy', patiently accepted this as Arthur's attempt at trying to find something bolstering to say. Fifteen years would pass before Arthur would bid an eloquent farewell to his father. He would do it with ink and pastels and paint.

⁸²⁵ "They would advertise and as a resultDavid Boyd. *The Pottery and Ceramics of David and Hermia Boyd*, John Vader, Mathews/Hutchinson, Sydney, 1977.

⁸²⁶ "Merric chatted amiably for several minutes ..." Ibid

⁸²⁷ "On particular day in 1957 ..." The recounting of this incident is taken, almost verbatim, from Denison Deasey's diary. Deasey papers, Manuscripts, SLV.

⁸²⁸ "As he gently held her arm, he offered ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd.

Arthur must have been grateful he was still around to comfort his mother for, after arranging a mortgage on their house in March to help finance the trip, the family had planned to leave for England earlier in the year. Perhaps it had been the promise of a large commission for a church mural – a project that carried an eight-hundred pound, heaven-sent reward -- that delayed the journey. Robin Boyd had championed Arthur for the St John's Church renovation project. He had submitted Arthur's name to the church committee and Arthur had tried hard to get the job. He asked permission to come to Yallourn to talk to the vestry committee about his proposal. He took a miniature of the work, lights and a crucifix, which he suspended to show how the mural would look, echoing the shape of the cross. Early into his presentation, one of the twelve vestry members loudly interjected, like an echo of Yosl Bergner: "Oh rubbish! ... we're wasting our time." Charitably the rector interceded and Arthur continued and after ten minutes or so, the same man who had shouted 'rubbish' moved that Arthur Boyd be awarded the commission. The general consensus was that Arthur "obviously knew what he was about".⁸²⁹

In 1963 Robert Hughes, keeping his readers up to the minute on 'Australian Painting Today' mused: "It seems, at present, that abstraction is the medium by which metaphysical speculation has become central to Australian painting." Arthur's metaphysical abstract had been hanging quietly in the country church for almost four years, and Arthur had moved on. This painting, with the exception of one other work of similar colour and mosaic square construction,⁸³⁰ is unique to his oeuvre. Sixteen masonite panels form an overall image measuring twenty-four feet by sixteen feet high. Using casein and tempera, the form of the Christ and the surround is composed from hundreds of rigid hard-edged squares and circles of colour: the background is predominantly blue, the abstract figure white. It creates the effect of a huge mosaic or stained glass: Arthur pictured it as "the milky way".

In 1953, he had seen a work by Vieira da Silva at the Melbourne exhibition 'French Painting Today' and that experience now influenced this work. A nebulous form hovers from the top to the bottom of the work, arms stretched outwards and upwards. There is a suggestion of a mouth flung wide - does it preach forgiveness ... cry for help ... scream a warning? This is the shape seen in *The Mockers* – both on the cross, and within the crowd: the tormented figure that proliferates through Arthur's work. However, in the church above the sacristy, as the backdrop to the crucifix, the work can be read as positive and peaceful and suggestive of the title: *The Ascending Christ*.⁸³¹ Before it was installed Arthur arranged the completed picture in the back garden of Surf Avenue, laying the masonite squares out like a giant jigsaw. It was an apparition in the suburbs. The painting ran under the washing line, skirted past Polly and Jamie's tent, and butted up against Lucy's sandpit.

⁸²⁹ "The general consensus was Arthur "obviously knew what he was about". Charles Spencer interview, January 2005. Charles Spencer, a member of the St. John vestry, was present at this meeting.

⁸³⁰ "This painting, with the exception of one other work of similar colour and mosaic square construction" Titled *Night* this painting was sold to a Desmond Digby.

⁸³¹ In 1963 Robert Hughes wrote: "it seems, at present, that abstraction is the medium by which metaphysical speculation has become central to Australian painting." *Australian Painting Today* catalogue

Throughout the years the Boyds had nurtured a friendship with Douglas and Anne Cairns. The Cairns kept company with the same artistic circles. Douglas and Nolan had befriended each other during their army years. Douglas was a pacifist. He had refused to bear arms and was put into a medical unit. His then commanding officer in Wangaratta was now, by coincidence, Yvonne's doctor, Dr Alan Jeffrey. Douglas was a passionate lover of painting, collecting whenever he could rustle up the funds. An orchardist and chorister, he sang and tended his garden and his family.

The Cairnses had visited Murrumbeena in the early years, after marrying in 1939 when they were both twenty. Even then Douglas Cairns was passionate about painting. As his income grew he became an avid collector, appreciative of much of the work of the time, but particularly of Arthur's. His enthusiasm was such that, when travelling to London in the mid-1950s he strode about the galleries in his bushman's boots, armed with a scrapbook containing series of photographs of Arthur's paintings that he hoped would generate further interest. The gallery people, Anne recalled, had a field day.

In the early days of their association with the Reeds, Anne regarded Heide as a revelation. She appreciated the effort that had been made to keep it aesthetic "from the front gate to the cow shed ... and it was Sunday who managed the steerage". Murrumbeena, on the other hand, was "a working place". As was the Cairns' home, a sixty-acre apple orchard sited near Merricks North, close to the holiday house rented by the Boyd clan. The Cairns's children were around the same ages as Polly and Jamie, and they all grew up as friends. The time spent with the family was quiet and peaceful; as Polly recalled, "there was no carousing". It was a safe haven.

It was on a visit to the Cairns family March 1959, with Yvonne recently released from hospital and their long-held dream of travelling to England about to become a reality, that Arthur painted one of his most joyful pictures *Swan Flying through an orchard*. Centred in the picture, between Eden's fruit and Europe's trees, is an Australian gum tree.⁸³² It is the paradise of home. While the Cairns's daughter, the aptly named Eve, works happily with Polly, picking a bounty of ripe Jonathan apples,⁸³³ an unexpected event occurs: the bursting flight of a swan, its white wings swooping across the red and green trees and the sun-dried grasses of the orchard. This is an extraordinary bright happiness: a vision, unseen by all except a leaping black dog (the same dog who bounds through the majority of works of the late fifties). At the back of the orchard lurks the primeval bush. But on this day of family and harvest, of peace and private pleasure, there is no darkness, no mourning black swan of seduction or trespass. Arthur is once again "young and easy under the apple boughs":⁸³⁴ the teenager, let off the chain, embracing the day. It would seem for the first time in twenty years, he has found the joyful optimism of Rosebud.

⁸³² "Centred in the picture, between Eden's fruit and Europe's trees, is an Australian gumtree." Today at the Cairns' property the orchard is gone, but the gum tree still remains.

⁸³³ "While the Cairns's daughter, the aptly named Eve..." Arthur exhibited *Apple Orchard* 14 April, 1959. The Cairns were growing Jonathan apples, and this variety is harvested in March. Both Polly and Sid remember this day.

⁸³⁴ "Arthur is once again "young and easy under the apple boughs ..." Extract from Dylan Thomas

In November 1959 on a warm Sunday evening, around fifty people gathered in the Boyds' garden. It was the final party in a series of farewell parties; the following evening the *Iberia* would be carrying a cargo of five Boyds towards England. Arthur poured beer and barbecued chops and delivered them to his friends, all of whom said, "Don't go!" As the sun moved to the far corner of the garden, carpeted with the fiery orange of nasturtiums, it struck panama hats and glinted off eyes that would, as the evening and alcohol wore on, become more melancholic.

Jean was there, thinking of Arthur's determination to leave. She believed he was "manoeuvring to keep his family together." Denison Deasey was contemplating Merric's death, and "so many endings". Danila Vassilieff's strong spirit had been weakened by a lack of interest in his work. He had been feeling depressed, alone, unappreciated⁸³⁵ when, on a visit to Heide, as John and Sunday Reed bustled about with chores, he suffered two coronary occlusions in rapid succession and died on the Reed's sofa.

The 1950s had brought changes. Deasey, Arthur's old confidant, had felt a distancing with Arthur in the past years. He saw him rarely and then only as "the smiling party goer". But it was Arthur, Deasey believed, who had made something of the energy they had all promised. Arthur represented "the nucleus of the group" and now he was leaving "the molecular fringe, us".⁸³⁶ David and Guy were sad, naturally. Betty found saying goodbye "horrible". And Tim Burstall, like Deasey, was dwelling on that ultimate departure – death. His contribution towards livening up the scene was to read Ezra Pound's translation of the *Exile's Letter*. Pound's words would have resonated with many at the leave taking:

And if you ask how I regret that parting:
It is like the flowers falling at Spring's end
Confused, whirled in a tangle.
What is the use of talking, and there is no end of talking
There is no end to things of the heart.

On 2 November, much the same crowd gathered on Station Pier at South Melbourne docks. Until the advent of cheaper airfares in the 1970s, Australians reached the other side of the world by sea. With the round trip taking three months, it was a long time between drinks and few let this last opportunity to raise a glass slip by. Contributing to the party atmosphere bands played and hundreds of colourful crepe-paper streamers floated like frail mooring lines from ship to dock.

What were Arthur's thoughts as the ship pulled out, as he set off from his homeland for the first time, two months after his father's death, six months shy of his fortieth birthday? It is a fair bet they were centred on his mother. Those at the dock who saw his

⁸³⁵ "Danila Vassilieff had died in 1958 ..." Letter from John Reed to Albert Tucker 5 April, 1958. Tucker papers. Manuscripts, SLV.

⁸³⁶ "Deasy, Arthur's old confidant ..." Extract from Denison Deasy's diary, Deasy papers, SLV.

face knew how he felt.⁸³⁷ Amid the smiling, waving, noisy farewell party, Doris stood, propped up it seemed, in thick lisle stockings and solid lace-up shoes. She gazed, oblivious to all but the sight of the ship; her hand fused to the streamer -- the last connection to her son. Arthur had promised he would be home soon. He planned six months. Death, success and war, would turn that half year into almost eight years, but he would never permanently return. As the ship pulled away, streamers stretched to breaking point. Soon the sense of distance began to blur. Arthur's eyes lost their fixed point, and Doris became absorbed into the crowd.

⁸³⁷ "Those at the dock who saw his face knew how he felt". Interviews with Margaret Forster, Yvonne Boyd, Phyllis Boyd, Tim and Betty Burstall..

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Speaking Australian

Arthur is making this journey at a stage where most artists of his calibre would have had the experience behind them. He does not expect to be able to paint much, except in his head, nor does he think that he will be able to exhibit very much – but then “much” is a mysterious word when used by him. He told us over a glass of beer that someone had said to him – “Don’t be too disappointed if you don’t set London on fire.” “And,” said Arthur, “that man has known me for fifteen years!

Modern Art News. 1959

On his first day in London Arthur came face to face with his lifelong hero. But first came the faces of the boys from the AMB pottery.

Brian O'Shaughnessy and Tom Sanders were there, waiting under the soaring arches of St. Pancras Station, winter pale and years older but with broad grins and overcoated hugs that warmed the December air. The Boyds' bags, plus Jamie's violin case and Lucy's pram, were shouldered and shared and they were off, packed into two cars: Yvonne and the children with Brian, and Tom and Arthur with the luggage, heading along the northern roads out of the city, up to the green fields and village of Hampstead.

Tom took a detour and hijacked Arthur. He didn't tell him what he had planned; he simply parked the car and led him through a high-pillared gate, around a circular drive, into a high white mansion, across a wide 18th-century entrance hallway and took a left down a corridor to a room where Rembrandt waited. Kenwood House would become Arthur's second home and he would return, over and over again, to this dark, high-ceilinged room to stand in front of the master's self-portrait.⁸³⁸ Rembrandt's hand, holding palette, maulstick and brushes, is a whirl of abstraction. The still point is the eyes. While one is shadowed, the other is compass-point sharp. Did Arthur recognise the 'seeing eye' and experience a shiver of recognition in the enigmatic half-circles of the background? Did he see, in this curious backdrop a link to his own life, a repetition of his earliest iconography?

One of the reasons Arthur had come to Europe was to see the paintings. He had been reading his friend's reports, scrawled on airmail letters, for well over twelve years. He had been regaled with descriptions of Gauguin, Renoir, Utrillo, Degas, Cezanne, and Van Gogh at the Tate, and Piero della Francesca and Uccello at the National Gallery. But he would never have dreamed of seeing such a masterpiece, hidden in an outer suburb of London, even before he'd hung up his hat.⁸³⁹ The very next morning Brian O'Shaughnessy bundled him out of the house to stand in front of Constable's old residence. At the turn of another corner he was walking on the hill where Keats once bumped into Coleridge and had a quick chat. A short distance away Menuhin was bending his bow and Kokoschka his brush. The hills of Highgate, crowned by swathes of green, flowed into Hampstead Heath's ponds and copses and avenues of trees that had stood long before Constable sketched them and Blake found them inspirational. A few months earlier he had wandered with his family down by the Cairns's water-hole and now they gathered around Whitestone Pond in Hampstead. It had taken him almost forty years to make the journey, but London, wrapped in fog and history, much have felt worth the wait.

While they were looking for a house the family split up. Polly and Jamie stayed with Tom and Elizabeth and their children while Arthur, Yvonne and Lucy stayed with Brian,

⁸³⁸ "Kenwood House would become Arthur's second home ..." *Rembrandt's self-portrait*, c 1662, London, Kenwood House, Iveagh Bequest.

⁸³⁹ "Kenwood House would become ..." Arthur, discussing his arrival in England, admitted to a journalist: "when you arrive you feel the great weight of European painting for the first time – something you can never feel in Australia". *Now! 'Capturing the Outback in the Heart of Suffolk'*, 28 November, 1980.

his South African wife 'Red' and their son and daughter in Inglewood Road, West Hampstead. They were stalwart friends, with Brian appearing in the middle of the night with a bottle to placate the crying Lucy, and Brian and Red fielding a neighbour's complaints about her nocturnal screaming. It took six weeks before the family was reunited in a tall Victorian house on Hampstead Lane, Highgate. The rent was twelve pounds a week. The offer from Australian Galleries of a twenty-pound a week stipend for five months had made the trip possible. However, with a mere eight pounds a week to live on, it wasn't long before Yvonne found a part-time job in a local solicitor's office in Highgate village and Arthur began knocking on doors. A letter of introduction had been sent by the Professor of Fine Arts from Melbourne University, Sir Joseph Burke (Joe to his Australian admirers, of which there were many). Burke was British, the former private secretary to Clement Attlee, and a long-standing friend of Sir Kenneth Clark.⁸⁴⁰ Arthur lost no time in making contact with Clark. On a copy of Burke's letter Arthur scrawled the appointed hour, day, and his means of getting there -- 'Piccadilly Circus Tube'.

When Nolan arrived in London he had been welcomed at Clark's home to dine, but Arthur was grateful for the invitation to his office. He must have been nervous as he entered the imposing stone building on the north-east corner of the elegant St James's Square and mounted the lane-wide staircase that lead to the office of the man who headed up the Arts Council of Great Britain.⁸⁴¹ He carried a large portfolio of black and white photographs of his paintings and sculptures.

In 1949, when Clark was in Australia giving a lecture tour on Cezanne and being guided around by Joseph Burke, he visited Sidney Nolan's Sydney house to view his work. That day Clark promised Nolan if he should come to London he would do what he could to facilitate his way.⁸⁴² Arthur had now come to show his credentials, well aware of Clark's power to champion. But Arthur didn't feel confident. He had been ignored by Clark in 1949, who hadn't found time to travel to Berwick to view the Grange mural. Ten years on, Arthur believed Clark wouldn't be giving him the time now if it hadn't been for the letter from Burke.⁸⁴³ Never one to sell himself, even if he could find the words, Arthur's mumblings would have merely served as punctuation points in the erudite stream of Sir Kenneth's meeting and greeting.

"Do you like Scotch, Boyd?" the great man inquired. Perhaps it was due to the high blood pressure occasion, or Sir Kenneth's accent, but somehow the tipples' initial 's' never reached Arthur's ears and he heard the final consonant as a hard 'k'. Consequently, for a flushed second Arthur believed Sir Kenneth had posed an extremely indelicate question and he was being directly propositioned. He stuttered out a shocked,

⁸⁴⁰ "Burke was British ..." Burke held his 'Herald' chair at Melbourne University from 1947 until his death on 25 March, 1979.

⁸⁴¹ "He must have been nervous ..." Clark was a founding board member of the Arts Council of Great Britain and 1960 was this was his final year as Chairman.

⁸⁴² "That day Clark promised Nolan ..." *Modern Painters* Volume 1 Number 2, Summer 1988. Sidney Nolan to Peter Fuller.

⁸⁴³ "Ten years on, Arthur believed Clark wouldn't be giving him the time ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

'No!' but remembered thinking, "Is this how you get on in London?"⁸⁴⁴ However, as Yosl Bergner maintained, good stories cost, and Arthur had earned one that would entertain the troops for years to come.

At the end of the interview, although Clark had been "polite, kindly", it was clear to Arthur he would not be given the entrée extended to Sidney Nolan. Looking at Arthur's work in black and white was certainly looking through a glass darkly. Clark passed over Arthur's paintings and simply made polite noises about the ceramic work. Arthur believed Clark was interested "in the ceramic stuff" because he thought them slightly more "original."⁸⁴⁵ This was a term scoffed at by the Murrumbeena troops, with Peter Herbst dismissively labelling John and Sunday Reed as "originality mongers".⁸⁴⁶

On that dismal London day, as Arthur tumbled out into the square, intimidated and crestfallen, he had no idea that in little over six months he would be staging a successful one-man exhibition just a ten-minute walk away in a gallery that sat between the British Museum and the National Gallery, off the broad, busy thoroughfare of Charing Cross Road. It began with a telephone call from Anton Zwemmer.⁸⁴⁷ Anton knew everyone in the art world. He sold art books, published art books, and had founded Zwemmer Galleries. He counted himself friend and patron to many modern artists, from Picasso to Wyndham Lewis, and staged the first Dali exhibition in Britain and major exhibitions of Miro and de Chirico. By the sixties he had settled into long, anecdotally rich lunches with his artist friends at *The Ivy*, and had handed over the running of the gallery to Michael Chase.

Michael Chase was a painter's son, and was later to have his own career as a painter. At this stage of his life he wrote for *Arts Review*, and had a flair for framing and hanging exhibitions and for public relations. Chase was a struggling artist's dream. He viewed himself as an impresario, seeing his role not as a businessman but as the conduit through which money and success could be passed on to his artists. In 1960, an exhibition of Sidney Nolan's at the Matthiesen Gallery had just closed, and Albert Tucker was showing at the Waddington Gallery. Among the names falling onto Anton Zwemmer's luncheon plate was that of the newest antipodean in town. Michael Chase was immediately dispatched to Highgate to knock on his door.

The Boyds occupied three of the four floors of the early Victorian house. A Mrs Ashbee rented the basement to another set of tenants. Natural light flooded into the first floor, both front and back. These two high-ceilinged 'best' rooms were claimed by Arthur. The back room, looking out onto a long narrow garden, was the serious, paint-splattered

⁸⁴⁴ "He stuttered out a shocked, 'No!'" ... This story is told by Tom Sanders and illustrated by Arthur in Sander's memoir, *Spare the face, Gentlemen, please*.

⁸⁴⁵ "Arthur believed Clark was interested 'in the ceramic stuff' because ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

⁸⁴⁶ "This was a term scoffed at by the Murrumbeena troops ..." Peter Herbst interview.

⁸⁴⁷ "It began with a telephone call from Anton Zwemmer". Much of the information regarding the Zwemmer gallery and Michael Chase is obtained from Vaux Halliday, Nigel. *'More than a bookshop: Zwemmer's and art in the 20th century'*, Philip Wilson, 1991, London.

working studio; the front room doubled as a drawing room and a place to store canvases and boards.

This is where Michael Chase sat and was introduced to all manner of people, sharing all manner of skin colours. Their yearning, imploring eyes ignored his presence: they either stared straight past him, lost in the past and seeing no future, or were passionately involved in their own present, locked together in an eye-binding threat or entreaty. Propped on pieces of furniture this unsettling, larger than life, exotic tribe slowly filled the large Victorian room and overwhelmed the visiting Englishman. Michael Chase was transported. Believing he had made a major discovery, he raced back to the gallery to prepare for an exhibition consisting of seventeen of the 'Bride' series. He would write about it later, describing the series as "a dream fantasy of extreme potency and visual tension".⁸⁴⁸

Just a little over a month before the exhibition,⁸⁴⁹ scheduled to open 19 July, 1960, Polly knew from the way her father stood and stared out the window that something was wrong. When he left the house she followed and watched as he stopped by a tree. He crouched down on his thighs, buried his face in his hands, and became the hunched grieving figures in his paintings. When Polly caught up and asked what was wrong, all he said was, "Go away".

When Yvonne heard the knock on the window, she looked up from her typewriter to see her husband's face. Without explanation to her boss, Mr Davies, she rushed out of the solicitor's office and into the Highgate high street. In the time it took to reach Arthur, to learn what was written on his face, she must have scrolled down any number of possible disasters. He could barely stand; he was collapsing at the knees. As Yvonne slipped her arms around him, all he could say was: "Doris is dead". There had been a telegram from Guy. Just one sentence: 'Mummy died last night' and then, Yvonne recalled, "a word like 'peacefully', trying to be comforting". Yvonne and Arthur walked up to the Highgate woods. They walked for hours, without a word being said.

Arthur had not been told how his mother had collapsed as his ship pulled out of sight, how his brothers had obtained permission to drive a car up to the wharf to collect her, how they took her back to Guy's house and insisted she drink a little whisky. He certainly would not have heard a whisper of it from Doris. A letter had been waiting for him when the *Iberia* pulled into Port Said, without a trace of sadness:

⁸⁴⁸ "He would write about it later, describing the series as "a dream fantasy of extreme potency and visual tension:.. Chase, Michael. 'When Arthur Boyd came to London,' unpublished essay. Extract *From More than a Bookshop*

⁸⁴⁹ "Just a little over a month before the exhibition ..." Seventeen 'Bride' paintings were exhibited from 19 July - 20 August, 1960, at the Zwemmer Gallery. The catalogue dating of some of the works is questionable, particularly given that with some subjects Arthur made several versions. The date of 1959 is given to *Frightened Bridegroom*, *Drowned Bridegroom*, *The Mourning Bride*, *Bridegroom Drinking from a Creek*, *Bride Walking down a Creek*, *Reflected Bride*, *The Hunter*. The 1960 works were: *Lovers by a Creek*, *Bride Running Away*, *Bride Walking in a Creek*, *Bride in the Moonlight*, *Bridegroom in a Black Creek*.

It was an unforgettable "send off" and we caught a good glimpse of you and the whole little family even after the lovely ship had turned round! & it all looked wonderful! I imagined my streamer holding on till the ship had really left the wharf darling (& I think it did, too!) It is strange to think of you on the sea darling! But I know you will have your rightfull reward & a splendid trip – for all the wonderful work you have always done – in your Art, & all human relations, darling.

Each month a letter arrived from her, always with a little last minute thank-you for Arthur's parting gift of the "telly": it was "going well ... working well". She was always reassuring, perhaps recalling the great disappointment caused to her son over the stand-up wireless he had given her so many years ago. Whatever the weather, by Doris's account, the outcome was fine. If it was "warm" that was cause for celebration, and if not, Guy had just brought over the radiator repaired as "good as new" or she was taking a hot water bottle to bed. Always happiness and well-being was expressed in work: "Guyzie Boy was working like a Trojan", "Davy Boy was turning out a lot of good work" and "Bunny was getting on with his music... everyone was well and working". Just as mother and son had done in the Rosebud years, their outward show of love and devotion came from their creative output. She signed off with a sentiment so often expressed between mother and son that it became an incantation⁸⁵⁰: "I'm doing bits of work for you all, darling". Out of the six-months clutch of letters there was no hint of anything amiss. Her letters were full of loving deceit.

Only Doris knew she was pulling herself through the days with an exhausted heart. Open Country, although suddenly peaceful, must have seemed empty. David and Hermia and the children had recently moved to a house in Sandringham and, apart from her grandson (Lucy's son, Robert) ensconced as resident potter, Doris was alone; for the first time in forty-four years, without family surrounding her. When Dr. Curry visited June 12, he prescribed hospital. Doris refused to go. When Guy visited that evening, she kept the doctor's advice and her decision to herself. After preparing dinner, Guy left with the assurance that all was well. Some time during that night Doris died. The doctor recorded the cause as congestive cardiac failure. She was seventy one. When Bunny found Doris the next morning, she appeared to be sleeping. Nine months after her husband's death Doris was buried at Brighton Cemetery. Arthur's heart must have broken a second time when her letter, written June 7, arrived days after her death. In it, she told Yvonne, "things" are always going on and everyone seems to be in "top gear".

Phyllis couldn't comfort Guy. He cried for nights. She had never seen her husband so distraught. It shook her, just as it shook Yvonne and Arthur's family and friends, as they witnessed Arthur with all his defences down, quieter and more non-communicative than

⁸⁵⁰ "She signed off with a sentiment so often expressed ..." Yvonne Boyd commented that "bits of work" were something like prayer in the edicts of Mary Baker Eddy. Yvonne Boyd interview..

ever. His depression went on for months.⁸⁵¹ David wrote urging Arthur to grow stronger and continue, as part of the vital spirit of life Doris had handed on to her children. Perhaps in that spirit Arthur, knowing his mother would want him to “stick to creative work”, ordered over sixty pounds of pigment just a week after her death: cobalt blue, cobalt violet, rose madder, crimson and scarlet, greens and black, burnt umber and ochre, and began mixing his paint.

These colours would form the early dark nudes: veiled figures, empty conical shapes, streaming through dark space like falling stars. The watcher appears along with various women of different identities, with or without bridal veils; but these falling figures are not sensuous or naked. Mournful and otherworldly, they move in a shadowy zone suggestive of departing and crossing over; registering somewhere between a scream and a lullaby. The conical body of the falling figures will later be explained by Arthur in a title of an etching.⁸⁵² He saw it as a satellite. The first satellite, a Jules Verne fantasy made real, had been launched into space in October 1957. As a transmitter, a wavelength, a communication unhindered by the earth’s atmosphere, perhaps Arthur saw the conical shape as a symbol of a celestial body.

These few early paintings Yvonne would cling to throughout the years, watch for in the auctions, seek out through the dealers, declaring in a rare possessive outburst: “They’re mine”. She found “a sombre feeling about them. I often associated them with the loss of Doris”.⁸⁵³ When Arthur began painting these works, Yvonne asked if they were a requiem for his mother. He didn’t reply; he just shook his head: “He didn’t want descriptions. He didn’t want me to offer words”. Whether Yvonne had been correct in her description, she would never know. Arthur couldn’t, wouldn’t, verbalise his grief. In the decade of his own death he said: “I think the nightmare is some kind of concept of discontinuing ... I don’t mean just because of death ... when continuity is cut off it’s like reliving every minute ... again and again and again and again of some sort of thing that you know is an obvious mistake”.⁸⁵⁴ Whatever the mistakes and regrets at this point in his life, the promise he had made and not kept of returning home in six months must have played on long after he read those words printed out on the telegram.

Even before the ‘Brides’ opened Arthur had agreed to exhibit in a collective show titled ‘Recent Australian Painting’ in 1961 and, more importantly, in a retrospective scheduled for June 1962. Both exhibitions were to be staged at the Whitechapel Gallery, and the gallery’s director, Bryan Robertson, was well on his way to turning the out-of-the-mainstream venue into a star turn. Robertson was a brave heart in London’s art world, refusing to be cowered by his less adventurous peers who would never have considered

⁸⁵¹ “His depression went on for months”. Brian O’Shaughnessy recalled: “Arthur was muted and depressed. There was no doubt he and his mother were close”.

⁸⁵² “The conical body of the falling figures ...” *Nebuchadnezzar with Dancing Figure and Satellite Plate 59. Arthur Boyd Etchings and Drawings*, op cit

⁸⁵³ “She found “a sombre feeling about them”. Yvonne added “no one asked (Arthur) to do them ... they weren’t commissioned ...” Yvonne Boyd interview.

⁸⁵⁴ “In the decade of his own death he said ...” ABC sound archives, Sydney. 2BL interview Jenny Brockie, 1994.

backing such risky exhibitions. When Dr Lilian Sommerville, director of the British Council, took an interest in introducing Arthur around London art circles, Brian Robertson was on her list but by the time Robertson and Arthur met, the two men had heard of each other. Robertson had staged an exhibition for Nolan in June of 1957 (hampered by John Reed's reluctance, and then refusal, to lend works of Nolan's). Professor Joseph Burke had also written a letter of introduction to Robertson (Arthur would credit Burke as the man who helped "make landing in England soft"). It was Robertson who wrote the introduction to the 'Brides' for the Zwemmer catalogue.

While touching briefly on Arthur's work, it read like a nomination to the Explorers Club: a brief résumé of Arthur's background, his birthplace, his family lineage. Fresh back from a tour of Australia, with a boatload of paintings booked for passage (55 artists would be represented by 111 paintings),⁸⁵⁵ Robertson's focus was less on 'Brides' and more on exciting a general interest in Australia; much of his prose would be transposed to the 1961, 'Recent Australian Painting' exhibition catalogue.⁸⁵⁶

Arthur Boyd, Robertson opined, hailed from a paradoxical people in a paradoxical land. Australians were new settlers in an ancient place. A people who claimed to be unconventional and anti-authoritarian, but with a militant puritanism. Their landscape, viewed from a distance, was monotonous; but close up, exotic and strange. The imagery of Australian artists was fierce, tough, slightly delinquent, but expressed with loving tenderness: think Patrick White, Judith Wright, he urged the reader. As for the Boyd family, Robertson suggested, think Trevelyan, Keynes, Darwin, Wedgewood -- aristocracy through intellectual attainment. However, while on the subject of bloodlines, he indicated the Boyd bloodline wasn't too shabby: they could claim as ancestors Thomas a'Beckett along with a Brit who became the first Chief Justice of Victoria, and the Kilmarnocks of Ireland (in the 1961 catalogue Robertson ventures to add: "There is a strong Celtic strain in Australia, notably Irish, which has its own waywardness".)

If this sounds patronising, Robertson was merely playing to the gallery. Generally the British viewed Australia as another planet and Australians as a strange, perhaps lesser, race. Dickens and Wilde had indelibly described the penal and social punishment inflicted on those who, having been booted out the back door, dared to re-enter by the front door. The hairdresser in *Educating Rita* proved she had earned her English degree when she informed her professor, "Good God Frank, if you could get thrupence back on all those bottles you could *buy* Australia." Even Monty Python's fresh new humour

⁸⁵⁵ "Fresh back from a tour of Australia, with a boatload of paintings ..." The Orient Line waived cost of shipment of works to Britain and The Tate agreed to finance cost of the return passage.

⁸⁵⁶ "Robertson's focus was less on Brides ..." A letter from the Rt. Hon. The Viscount Bearsted, dated 22 February 1960 offers insight, not only into Robertson's friends in high places, and his touch-the-ground-lightly personality, but his obvious powers of persuasion: "I think he works very hard and needs a proper break of this sort, provided he does not overdo it by lecturing too much while he is out there. I think however, it is rather important that this visit should show some positive results in the way of an exhibition of Australian art. I felt that after the difficulty there was in getting him some money to go to Italy last summer in order to help him to get together an exhibition of modern Italian art, the fact that no such exhibition appears to be visible in the immediate future has rather strengthened the hand of the opposition..." Whitechapel archives

drop-kicked Australians who purported to have a philosophical idea in their head. Brian O'Shaughnessy hadn't felt at home while reading Philosophy at Oxford. Like Jean Paul Sartre had done in the thirties, he bridled at the "frightful privilege".

Perhaps Arthur had not informed Robertson of his ticket-of-leave great-great-grandfather, but that would have been overkill. It was simply assumed. As Robertson pointed out in the catalogue, "As we are so often told, they are so often descended from convicts." The remark wasn't out of place. It was a general opening line at any pub or cocktail party, "Oh you're Australian ... Was your grandfather a convict?" And if Australians didn't play along and chortle at the tired repartee ... well, it was that old chip on the shoulder, wasn't it? Like most minorities, acceptance could be gained, if not on the wide playing field of sport, then through the arts ... they can sing (Sutherland)⁸⁵⁷ and dance (Helpmann) -- let's see if these natives can paint.

Apart from the critics, it was a predominantly hometown crowd that gathered to support Arthur at Zwemmer on 19 July, 1960, at the private view. After the show they spilled out into Litchfield Street, waited to snatch Arthur up, and all headed off to nearby Chinatown for a celebratory banquet. Sid Nolan was there with his wife Cynthia, resplendent in a pill-box hat, and her daughter, Jinx, as were regulars from the Brown Room: Peter Herbst and Valerie, Max Nicholson, Tom Sanders, Brian O'Shaughnessy and Bert Tucker, whose exhibition at the Waddington Gallery was showing concurrently with Arthur's. Philosophers from Melbourne University, the Fabians and Max Teichmann, were also in attendance, along with a blonde-haired ballet dancer, Rosalind Tong, who accompanied her husband, Barry Humphries. Years earlier Bert Tucker had written to Arthur warning him against coming to Europe, decrying the English, telling him it was all too tough and that he would return home disappointed. Tucker had been right: it was tough, everyone was poor and struggling. Rosalind Humphries had been forced into working at a local green grocery and Barry Humphries at a Walls ice cream factory. But there was great promise and Tucker's tale of doom would not come to pass. Eventually Red would start her own psychology practice and Brian O'Shaughnessy would publish books on philosophy. Barry Humphries had just landed the part of Mr. Sowerberry at the New Theatre in the West End production of *Oliver!* And that very night Arthur would sell six of his paintings.

The morning after the launch party, Yvonne sat down to write to Betty and Tim Burstall. In 1959 Burstall had made a short film using paintings from the Bride series. They had been edited to a ballad, unsurprisingly titled *The Black Man and His Bride*, with the emotive power coming from the visuals rather than the simplistic folksy lyrics. However, the film won a prize, reviewed well and was seen by an audience just a million short of the entire population of Australia.

⁸⁵⁷ "...they can sing (Sutherland) ..." In 1959 Joan Sutherland's performance in Donizetti's, *Lucia di Lammermoor* launched her international career. She would be recognised as one of the greatest singers of the twentieth century.

Shortly after, while the Zwemmer exhibition was still showing and during the children's school holidays, the family travelled to Europe for the first time. Brian O'Shaughnessy had helped Arthur buy a second-hand car soon after they arrived. Arthur had vacillated over Brian's first choice, a VW that was "dirt cheap", and ended up with a Bedford van "doormobile", complete with kitchen sink and bunks: a purchase destined to provide a regular income for the Highgate auto specialist. The brakes had begun to leak even before they got to Dover. But off they all went in a two-car convoy, the O'Shaughnessy family in a Morris Minor that Brian dubbed Red's "dowry". They spent their nights in farmers' fields most of the way. Lucy slept across the two front seats of the Bedford, Arthur and Yvonne in the back, and Jamie and Polly (as did the O'Shaughnessy family, soon to be expanded to three by the birth of a second daughter) in a tent. Given the logistics of taking six children, it was rare they would hit the road before 10.30 in the morning. At 1p.m they'd stop for lunch and head off again around 3p.m. Both men were cautious drivers: at the end of the day the ground covered would average no more than 140 miles.

On different nights they pitched tents at Waterloo, in the middle of a German forest, by the Moselle River laced with castles, by the Rhine, and in a vineyard not far from Venice. They marvelled at the great Romanesque cathedral at Worms, still surrounded by the debris of war, shivered when they passed Buchenwald, and saluted Brueghel as his mediaeval villages and landscapes rolled by. After ten days of winding roads and one thousand four hundred miles, they arrived at their destination, a small, unfashionable little seaside town called Castiglioncello on the coast of Tuscany. The holiday alternated between quiet, relaxing times on the beach and more adventurous days on the dirt roads that led to sights like the renaissance towers of San Gimignano rising up from the woods like a mini New York; or the Leaning Tower of Pisa, which inspired Arthur to overcome his fear of heights and climb it (only halfway). Or to Siena and the treasures of the Duomo.

By the time Arthur returned to London, a Sunday radio broadcast titled 'Comments made by the Critics' had distilled the broad coverage of the 'Bride' exhibition at Zwemmer into a few sentences:

Frighteningly good. Like masks from Greek Drama. Faces of Purple Blue and White. Like walking into a dream. Paintings are tragic, but show great gentleness. Colour used symbolically – aborigines are blue-purple. Use of palette deliberately simplified. Paintings show feeling of pity for ugliness. No other artist achieves the flatness and 3-dimensional quality that Arthur Boyd gets.

The full-blown critical reviews revealed more. A certain P.M.T. Sheldon-Williams, burdened by a plethora of names (but not yet weighted further by the medical term) felt the need to lay a few on Arthur: the 'Brides' the review in *Time and Tide* pointed out, ran "the full gamut of Chagall and Carl Hofer." They did not have Sidney Nolan's "lush, interior decorator's charm of Leda and Swan", nor did they possess "the austere

authority of Tucker's Australian desert".⁸⁵⁸ The art publication, *Apollo*, saw the "primitive, hairy man, the half realised woman" as perhaps a "Picasso influence transferred to the far side of the world ... deliberately turning to the primitive and cultivating crude images for the sake of their shock value. It makes news; but those of us who have set our faces against the subversion of civilised values may well doubt whether it makes art".⁸⁵⁹ The *Observer* critic considered the earlier 'Brides' crude but saw promise in the 1960s version. "Boyd's smaller works, such as the bride walking in a creek, indicate that there are qualities in this painter which only his lurid narrative has suppressed".⁸⁶⁰

Negative comments were over-shadowed by accolades. The art critic for *Tatler & Bystander* was "for the second time in a few weeks stunned by an Australian armed with a paintbrush." While he appreciated both Nolan and Boyd, he saw Nolan's lyricism as intellectualism, but Boyd as "an unashamed humanist whose lyricism is instinctive."⁸⁶¹ The *Guardian* critic reported: "[Boyd] has not been illustrating a known written story but painting emotions."⁸⁶² The *Daily Telegraph* echoed that thought: "Ostensibly [the 'Brides'] tell the story of an aborigine who takes a white bride, but in fact they speak to us of abiding human emotions and passions ... certain of the pictures touch upon passions usually suppressed, but common to us all."⁸⁶³ The *Times* was agog, declaring Boyd's figurative paintings "something new, strange, and fascinating".⁸⁶⁴ John Russell nodded his opinion-forming approval: "Mr. Arthur Boyd's interpretations of *The Half-Caste Bride* have an undeniable power ... Mr. Boyd has a sense of wonder, and a purity of intent, that prompt him to find, over and over again, just the image that forces the observer to an effort of imaginative understanding".⁸⁶⁵ The collection with its Faulknerian fecundity and unrelenting emotional pitch, was something the London art world had not witnessed before.

The 1959 'Bride' paintings exhibited at Zwemmer, together with those of 1960 (which, if not incorrectly dated, must be supposed to have been executed at Highgate between February and June are separated from the 1958 works by their subject matter. The intimate story continues, but any traumatic triangular situations have been abandoned: only one man is cast in a role. From the bare stage of the earlier 'Brides' (a desolation relating back to 1943/44 works) the landscape has become a fertile tangle. Creeks and

⁸⁵⁸ "A certain P.M.T Sheldon-Williams ..." 'Seventeen Brides...' by P.M.T. Sheldon-Williams, *Time and Tide* 30 July, 1960.

⁸⁵⁹ "The art publication, *Apollo* ..." "Current Shows and Comments. The Retreat from Beauty". *Apollo*, August 1960. Vol 73. No 426.

⁸⁶⁰ "The *Observer* critic ..." "Pressure Cooking" Neville Wallis, *Observer* 24 July, 1960.

⁸⁶¹ "The art critic for the *Tatler & Bystander* ..." "Mr. Boyd's dream-drama," *Tatler & Bystander*, Alan Roberts, 10 August, 1960.

⁸⁶² "The *Guardian* critic reported ..." 'A third warlock from Australia,' Frederick Laws, *Guardian*, Thursday 21 July, 1960.

⁸⁶³ The *Daily Telegraph* echoed ... "Strange Vision and Power in Paint, Australian's work." Terence Mullaly, *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, 21 July, 1960.

⁸⁶⁴ The *Times* was agog ... "Haunting Australian Paintings", July 20, 1960.

⁸⁶⁵ "John Russell nodded his opinion-forming approval ..." , John Russell, *The Times*, 24 July, 1960.

rivers flow sensually. In the shape of the prone bodies, and in their abandoned need for life-giving water, a natural sexuality is expressed.

In *Bride Walking in a Creek* a fresh breeze blows through the painting and a free-flowing stream cleanses and creates a path of light. In the darkness, both in the undergrowth and under the myth of Susannah, lurks the Blackman now transformed to the watcher. This is the first time the Blackman has appeared as the watcher in the Bride series. He has been placed in a position that is immediately recognisable to those outside the painting. Has the Blackman been given the role of watcher as a disguise, allowing him to play dual roles - to appear to be speaking about one situation when he is really expressing another? Although the Bride shares red curly hair (symbol of desire and passion) with the woman in *Persecuted Lovers*, her round-moon face appears to be an amalgam of all the brides. Is she a fusion produced by a confusion of desires? Whoever the cast, their fate remains unclear. The painting pivots on a question mark. What will happen at the turn in the stream? Will the woman trip herself up on the rocks, or will the presence of the watcher cause her to stumble? Is the man, with his hand outstretched, about to reach out to protect and support, or to hold and embrace?

After the success of the Zwemmer exhibition, Jamie began to notice a change in his father. He sensed that, because Arthur was immediately well received, there was a need to follow it up. "When we got to England he'd entered an adult world ... Melbourne was a small pond ... London was the big test, his career was at stake." Given that most people who had come in contact with Arthur in the forties and fifties commented on his fierce work ethic, he must have been driven. Yet Jamie recalled no change in Arthur's attitude to his children; his constant accessibility remained.

With Doris gone so had Arthur's main reason for returning home. With the children settled in schools, and his retrospective in October 1961 to prepare for, Arthur negotiated an extension on Mrs Ashbee's lease until the end of June the following year. London was a stimulating place and there was much to explore. The family went on long rambles throughout the counties and Arthur joined the peace march from Aldermaston to London on a four-day-long CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) protest in the spring of 1960. Red and Yvonne had stayed behind with the small children; but Tom Sanders, the O'Shaughnessy brothers and Barry and Rosalind Humphries were there together with Arthur who was, for once, happy to be counted politically. As he strode out along the winding English roads and through the countryside as fresh green buds were springing forth, he felt he could be taking part in a pilgrim's progress; 'Ban the Bomb' posters and flags waved like medieval banners and the bands replaced the flute and lute. Arthur was excited by the landscape.

When snow fell on Hampstead Heath, in the first month of his arrival, he had raced out to capture a light he had never seen before, producing a series of oils. One of these was given to the O'Shaughnessys as a thank you, and others sent back to Australian Galleries to be displayed in the dry heat of a Melbourne summer. Arthur had grown up looking at the English landscape through the watercolours and oils that his grandparents, Emma Minnie and Arthur Merric, had painted during their time in Wiltshire; now he could

begin to explore and interpret it for himself. Perhaps Uncle Martin had described the very landscape that Arthur explored daily. During World War I, in Martin's early days of completing his officers' training course, Hampstead Heath had been his parade ground. Whether the city or the country, Arthur loved what he saw: he thought it "a most gentle, touching sort of landscape." He was surprised by "the jungle-like richness" with a "weight" he never expected. He had imagined something "lighter, more fluffy" and the "heaviness of foliage in high summer"⁸⁶⁶ surprised him. But in the run-up to his retrospective, between the summer of 1960 and the summer of 1962, Arthur painted the landscapes of his memory.

Out of the 115 paintings in the 'Recent Australian Painting' exhibition, only two were by Arthur Boyd: *Bride Drinking from a Pool, Plate 111*, which had been exhibited at Zwemmers, and a new work *Lovers in a Landscape*.

'Watch out for the Australians! Yes, it's art I'm talking about.' -*Evening Standard*, June 1961. '... many people in this country must imagine that contemporary Australian painting is a rather exotic art form discovered by Sidney Nolan in a cave near Alice Springs, round about the year 1940, and since handed on – under an oath of secrecy sealed in wallaby blood – to Albert Tucker and Arthur Boyd.'—*The Observer*, June 4, 1961. These opening gambits to the reviews of the Whitechapel 'Recent Australian Painting' exhibition in the summer of 1961, set the scene. As one critic ventured "...many of the abstracts would attract notice in any exhibition in any country" but "...it is surely not merely a patronising liking for the outlandish or the primitive which makes one prefer those Australian painters who stick to the natural image without embarrassment or shame."⁸⁶⁷

The general consensus was: let's extend a visitor's permit and examine these specimens a little further. As one critic, Eric Newton, explained: "During the last few years we have become conscious that a group of painters in the Antipodes was gradually solidifying itself into a 'school' and that school, because it was so far away and emerged from a background so different from our own, was something that had to be understood (and perhaps 'studied' as we study Oriental or Mexican or African art) before it could be enjoyed."

Bryan Robertson had been at it again, bolstering any typecasting the critics may have harboured with his twelve-page preface to the show. He launched his exhibition with all the bluster and insensitivity of a Henry Higgins:

Ten years ago we only knew about Australian cricketers, and we have always liked them; but the possibility of so much creative activity from Australia so steadily infiltrating into the London scene would have seemed tenuous, to put it mildly. Australia seemed then a large, extrovert, open air country which bred live

⁸⁶⁶ "He had imagined something "lighter, more fluffy" ... Arthur Boyd. Anthony Schooling interview, 1969, conducted for the English Reader Series, *Outlook: Artists' Talking*, Penguin Education, Penguin Books, Middlesex. Bundanon archives. To be cited as 'Schooling interview'.

⁸⁶⁷ "As one critic ventured ..." John Douglas Pringle, *The Observer*, 4 June, 1961.

stock and marketed dairy products, exported invalid-type wine, and sent splendid if unruly soldiers overseas whilst sun bronzed sheep farmers and their families lived back home in an empty if picturesque landscape containing odd pockets of a rowdy if mildly dull kind of suburbia.

Three art critics swelled the catalogue. After a brief introduction from Kenneth Clark, and the large preface from Robertson, came the young pretender to the critical art world, Robert Hughes, with his introduction to the wild men from the south. Few could have missed his broadside. He harked back to his first visit to England, just two years previously, when the British, he felt, had an "ineffable assurance ... that if one wasn't a rough-hewn visionary one wasn't Australian". But that was in 1959. Times, Hughes speculated, may have changed: "Perhaps we are no longer the wild pets for the supercultivated that we were. There is little point in looking at Australian art with the slightly complacent wonder with which Captain Cook regarded his first platypus".⁸⁶⁸

Despite the 'them and us' attitude, Australians painters were, in the parlance of the 1960s, 'a happening,' they were 'IN!' The reviews for the show were plentiful, on the whole optimistic and even handed, and all agreed Bryan Robertson was an enlightened chap and the show most deserving of interest. It was a success.

For all of Arthur's generosity of spirit, he was ambitious and competitive. He wanted to be "the best" ... wanted to paint "*the great picture*."⁸⁶⁹ He must have felt the sting when a number of critics singled out Charles Blackman's works as best in show,⁸⁷⁰ and when some publications picked up Hughes's reference from his catalogue introduction to "the Boyd brothers", grouping Arthur with his brother David who, although a master of pottery, was relatively new to painting. Arthur, like Nolan, had been lumped into the 'figurative Australian school.' Few critics singled him out, and one who did stated: although Arthur's work had "like Chagall, great charm" it was "like Chagall, a little oversweet."⁸⁷¹ And when it came to the Tate, Arthur didn't make the cut: the Tate trustees bought just two paintings from the exhibition; one by Brett Whiteley and the other by Godfrey Miller. Under the direction of Sir John Rothenstein, the Tate had purchased works by Drysdale and Nolan in 1951.

Arthur would have been only too well aware that the upcoming retrospective at the Whitechapel represented his greatest opportunity to display the scope of his talent, and

⁸⁶⁸ "Times, Hughes speculated, may have changed ..." 'Recent Australian Painting' Whitechapel Art Gallery: London 1961. Catalogue credit: Robert Hughes: Sydney: September 1960-January 1961.

⁸⁶⁹ "He wanted to be 'the best' ..." Hetherington interview. Arthur tempered this revelation with his usual modesty "as you get older, of course, this possibility [of being the best] recedes ... And if his ultimate aim for the Great Picture could not be reached, he admitted he would strive for "some very, very good one.

⁸⁷⁰ "He must have felt the sting ..." "The Australian Painters", by John Douglas Pringle, 4 June, 1961 "But the most moving – and the discovery of the exhibition – are the three remarkable paintings by Charles Blackman ..." And, "Australian Art at Flood Tide. The Post-Nolan Era", *The Times*, 27 March, 1961. "Notable among the exhibitors in the (representational painting) is Charles Blackman ..."

⁸⁷¹ "Few critics singled him out ..." 'Antipodeans' Edward Lucie-Smith, *New Statesman*, 14 July, 1961.

he threw himself into its preparation. In July of 1961 Yvonne wrote to Betty: "Arthur is working like mad for the exhibition we hope is coming off about next March."

During this time Brian O'Shaughnessy recalled that Arthur was "... working intensely. It was rather a splendid experience to enter his house at that time ... the smell of paint and all these images appearing on canvas ... big canvases just stashed there ... rather dark paintings." Arthur often spoke to Brian about the influence of Constable's work at this time. When Constable had been under the influence of Gainsborough, after journeying through 'Gainsborough countryside', he saw his fellow painter "... in every hedge and hollow tree." In Arthur's case, it wasn't subject matter inspiring him; he wasn't shadowing Constable's footsteps on Hampstead Heath. He was, he told Brian, drawing inspiration from the "sensuality" of Constable's paint. Though familiar with his work, perhaps Arthur was unaware that both he and Constable held exactly the same view on their craft, Constable believing: "Painting is with me but another word for feeling." In describing the 1960-62 works, Franz Philipp would note: "In the London paintings of the early sixties it is the theme of the thwarted lovers which comes to the fore, which turns into general pictorial mediations on the destinies of Eros, on the myth of sex ... the erotic symbolism of the 1960s has ... a new quality of sensual affirmation..." Another aficionado stated that "a deeply sensuous passion" had been brewing in Arthur's works as far back as the 1940s.⁸⁷²

Jean Langley had arrived in England in June 1960. She had not received a word from Arthur since he had sailed seven months previously; but on inheriting a small amount from her father's estate, enough to get her to England, she immediately booked a passage for herself and her daughter, Jane. She came under the public pretext of searching out her father's relatives, but had left behind a knowing and furious John Sinclair, and a concerned Sunday Reed. Jean and Jane visited the Boyd family at Hampstead Lane immediately on arrival. A week later, the day Jean and Arthur had planned to meet in a churchyard close to St John's Wood, was the day Arthur learnt of his mother's death. Weeks passed until they set eyes on each other again, and then it was among a crowded party of ex-pats. Shortly after, they began meeting alone.

Although Jean delighted in London and its people, she was forced to work both as a child minder and a char lady. She was alone and lonely. In August, John Yule, a friend with a long and deeply affectionate relationship with Jean, wrote in answer to her fourteen page letter, to "her hand stretched out across those thousands of miles of emptiness":

Jean I am so sad for you with Arthur. I cannot be unselfishly noble because I am jealous ... I am jealous of Arthur's precedence over me in your heart but the harrowing to which the situation is subjecting you makes me weep silently. I do not know quite what you expected: that he should leave her altogether for you? Or that some Continental-style liaison should be permanently pledged between you in secret, semi-secret or by open agreement all round. Thus I don't know to what extent you have been thwarted, or to what extent you can hope...

⁸⁷² "Another aficionado stated ..." T.S.R. Boase, 'Introduction', *Arthur Boyd*, Franz Philipp, op cit.

If Arthur ever trusted words, ever believed them adequate, he may have found a connection in John Yule's conclusion:

It is so strange how we live... You know those Indian gods who have more than 2 arms: I have felt something like that often in relation to you – I have never known which arm was the right one for you, and the other ones have tangled up the gesture anyway.⁸⁷³

But instead of talking, Arthur painted. Now the cast and the titles change from 'bridegroom' and 'bride', 'husband' and 'wife,' to 'lovers' and 'nudes.' One of the earlier works *Lovers in the Landscape* shows earth divided by water. A woman spans two land masses and crosses water to connect with her lover. The terrain behind her contains a black ram, and a black bird (turning blue). On the opposite side she embraces a man and appears to be pulling him into the frame, into the world. He wears red, the colour of passion, desire; she is clad in natural, earthy tones. The sexual cut in the landscape contains a stream that flows through the woman.

This stream appears again in *Figure in landscape*.⁸⁷⁴ In this work the attitude is one of copulation. Feet grasp the rumps of the parallel hillsides and legs are spread so wide the canvas cannot quite contain them. The figure lies, face down, while arms cradle and fingers tangle through streaming locks of water, caressing and attempting to hold that elusive substance like a lover's body, a lover's hair. As water performs a baptism and man and nature conjoin, the ram observes from a wild dark forest.

In *Figure in landscape* both the lovers' eyes are closed, shutting out the surrounding world. In *Lovers with Bluebird*, the landscape has dissolved into an embryonic cradle - an all-encompassing, weightless embrace. The rampaging ram has fled and the blackbird has completed its metamorphosis from threat to joy. Now totally exposed, the naked flesh of the lovers reveals that she is white -- as white as any wedding dress -- and he is black. But between this black man and white woman there is no separation or neglect: as they entwine they illuminate and define the other.

These two works are among the most romantic and gentle in a group that is always sensual, often disturbing. Franz Phillip asserted "that the Blackman has turned into the lover, watcher, victim of the red-haired nymph of the London mythologies, the male, the Everyman – lover rather than half-caste – can hardly be questioned."⁸⁷⁵ Many of the 1961 works replay old themes from 1940s and 1950s, but where sex was once associated with death, it is now brimming with life. The *Lovers in a Boat* are no longer withered and emaciated but full-bodied creatures. *Lovers in the Trees* recalls *Lovers in a Hammock*, but in this bed bodies merge and hands hold. The floating figure and anxious woman no longer hover, but the frog is still present. Is the frog a symbol of trespass?

⁸⁷³ "In August, John Yule, a friend ..." Letter John Yule to Jean Sinclair, 10.9.1960. Langley papers, manuscripts, SLV.

⁸⁷⁴ "This stream appears again ..." See *Nude washing in a creek III*, 1961

⁸⁷⁵ "Franz Phillip asserted ..." Franz Philipp, 'Arthur Boyd' op cit

Jean's two years in London would see three different men exit and enter her life. Arthur, perhaps because he knew he could not give her money or protection, and only scraps of his time, made no move to interfere. At one point John Sinclair, leaving his mistress behind, had travelled over to London but was unsuccessful in convincing Jean to return home. For a short period Jean lived with John Falkard, a tall, handsome, English advertising man, but she left when his alcoholism became untenable. Jean waited for a commitment from Arthur that never came. For a year and a half their relationship was on-again, off-again. Then John Hull, an English picture framer, said he wanted what Jean wanted; something she longed for, but which Arthur had absolutely refused to give her - a second child.

Jean's friend and employer, Daphne Dennison, viewed the relationship between Arthur and Jean from close quarters. She found him "an exceedingly nice man ... very sweet and gentle". Immediately she understood the relationship: "It was obvious, quite obvious ... they were very similar people". Daphne watched as "the program of getting back together again did not work out". When John Falkard and then John Hull entered Jean's life, Daphne understood Arthur's acquiescence: "He had a wife and family. He would have wanted Jean to be happy. I thought his relationship with Jean was very genuine".⁸⁷⁶

In December 1961, Jean met John Hull. By the time she returned to spend Christmas day with all the ex-pats invited to the Boyds' house, she knew a connection had been made. On New Year's Eve 1961, snow fell thickly. A large party was being held at the home of Walter Neurath, a neighbour of Arthur's and the owner of the publishing company, Thames and Hudson. Many people at Walter and Eve Neurath's party lived in the heart of London and were trapped on the high snow-covered hills that night. But Arthur and Jean lived within walking distance, and Arthur escorted Jean home. It would be a night Arthur would never forget: it was the evening he would meet his life-long hero⁸⁷⁷ and the last time he and Jean would be alone together.

One of Walter's honoured guests that night was Oskar Kokoschka and, by way of introduction, Walter steered both Kokoschka and Arthur to several of Arthur's works hanging in his home. Arthur recalled: "I didn't nudge his elbow and say, 'What do you think of that?' But he said, 'I like that very much'"⁸⁷⁸ and then, "Keep that going, boy".⁸⁷⁹ Arthur recalled his pleasure: "My chest swelled up and I started work."⁸⁸⁰ Arthur didn't talk to Kokoschka about painting. He found it "pretty hard in those circumstances"; he needed to have "someone to [himself] for an extended period". But though little was said, Arthur sensed Kokoschka's strength of body and spirit: "He was tall and strong and upright, not at all stooped ... he was determined to hang on ... kept working right up to ..." ⁸⁸¹ and then Arthur censored the next few words.

⁸⁷⁶ "The first time Daphne met Arthur ..." Daphne Dennison interview, England, 6 July, 2001.

⁸⁷⁷ "It would be a night Arthur would never forget ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁸⁷⁸ "But he said, 'I like that very much'" Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁸⁷⁹ "...and then, 'Keep that going, boy'." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁸⁸⁰ "Arthur recalled his pleasure ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁸⁸¹ "But though little was said ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

It was a pity the two men didn't have the time and circumstances to get to know each other because, despite their age and geographical distances, they had an uncanny amount in common. While Arthur had been painting his South Melbourne pictures in 1944, Kokoshka, having escaped Europe, was avoiding the bombs in London.⁸⁸² Like Arthur, Kokoschka was easily upset as the war overshadowed everything: often his nerves seemed to be completely on edge. Like Arthur he painted the hell created on earth by war. He painted Brueghel's 'bird's eye view.' Kokoschka was humble. He did not think of his work as 'art' but painted because he had to. Man, he thought, was ultimately a primitive and the war between the sexes seemed like cosmic powers. He conceived the artist as a man whose profession it was to *see*. Finally, just to confirm he was joined to Arthur at the hip, Kokoschka believed his mother was the only person who really understood everything he did; she was naturally very imaginative and never recognised the meanness of the world.

New Year's Day, Jean woke to a ringing doorbell. John Hull had arrived, completely unexpectedly, to announce he had left his wife and was in love with her. On that white, still morning, in an air of unreality, Jean wandered down to the Coach House Tea Rooms at Kenwood with Hull. They walked in to find Arthur sitting alone at a table. It had only been hours since she and Arthur had parted and, according to Jean, Arthur was uncharacteristically rude and short to John, a man he had never met. Jean played a part, making the pretence of not knowing if Arthur took sugar in his tea.⁸⁸³ But this was to be the last of the game playing. Arthur and Jean would always live on the periphery of each other's lives, always be tentatively involved with each other's families; but this morning heralded a quiet goodbye. As they stood in the frosty air on a snow-covered slope, Arthur adjusted Jean's black furry woollen hat and, pulling it down around her ears, said, "England suits you". He then turned and, with a scarf slung around his bent neck, his trousers tucked into his socks, wearing something that resembled a teapot cosy on his head, he trudged off towards the icy pond.

Jean and John Hull made a pact. If Jean would give up Arthur and her gang, Hull would give up Scientology and everyone for her. By April 1962, Jean was pregnant with John Hull's child. Arthur, now "acting like the kind uncle" after learning that John was a gilder, said to Jean: "I'll help you ... I'll give this John a job". Living in London was a stop gap for the couple; their long-term plan was to move permanently to Wales. Having found a little cottage there, and made all the necessary arrangements, John announced on the eve of moving that he would be staying in the city three days a week to be close to his Scientologist guru.⁸⁸⁴ Jean's reaction was to turn and run: "I'd spent most of my life

⁸⁸² "While had had been painting his South Melbourne pictures ..." Arthur contributed Oskar Kokoshka's 'The Tempest' as one of his early influences. Much of the detail on Kokoschka has been sourced from J.P. Hodin, 'Kokoschka: The artist and his time,' Cory, Adams & Mackay Ltd., London, 1966.

⁸⁸³ "Jean played a part ..." John Hull remembers this incident, and recalls immediately recognising that Jean was "fibbing." Interviews with John Hull were conducted in London on 27 July, 2001; 26 April, 2002; May 2002; 3 December, 2004; 8 November, 2005. All subsequent quotes by John Hull to follow have been taken from these sources.

⁸⁸⁴ "Having found a little cottage there ..." According to John Hull the decision was influenced by employment "I needed to make some money".

at night on my own, and to be left with a new baby and a schoolchild in a god-forsaken mountain cottage made of stone, with no warmth and no man ... I just couldn't do it". Financed by Arthur, Jean left John Hull and by July she was heading back home to Australia.

At the beginning of 1962, while Arthur painted furiously, Yvonne was immersed in the logistics of collecting Arthur's past works for the retrospective. Many saw Yvonne as the perfect artist's wife. Clytie Jessop was one of them. She had remained on in London when her sister, Hermia, returned to Australia with her husband, David Boyd. Long before the optimism of the 'Swinging Sixties' and 'Swinging London,' at the age of twenty-one Clytie had opened a ceramic gallery. She saw Yvonne as a great helpmate to Arthur: "a calming influence ... very contained ... a sphinx with a pioneering spirit".⁸⁸⁵ Apart from raising the children, bolstering their income with part-time jobs, and taking language and literature courses through the 1960s, Yvonne was Arthur's amanuensis. She deciphered the hieroglyphics of the replies he scrawled across incoming correspondence; she typed up his dictated letters, wrote the rest herself, kept the books, booked the transportation of works to exhibitions and galleries around the UK and across to Australia; she organised family, friends and the days and nights around Arthur's schedule.

Uncle Martin had been contacted in Rome and Yvonne was searching out paintings in Uncle Martin's possession; some on loan, some stored in Cambridge. She wrote to the Burstalls, asking if Betty's portrait could be shipped on the *Arcadia* leaving Melbourne the last week of April: "It's difficult to write to you I suppose because you are key figures, the ones about whom mysteries and fantasies revolve, but you two like the sphinxes say nothing".⁸⁸⁶ Tam Purves had been asked to track down past clients and their pictures and to solicit a loan. For the rest, the works owned by family and friends, Guy and Phyllis were the lynchpins, the main organisers in securing the works required. But they failed in the area of diplomacy.

John Reed was already miffed because Arthur had cited his obligations to the Australian Galleries as preventing him participating in a proposed Museum of Modern Art exhibition of his work. Reed wrote a huffy letter to Arthur.

I will gladly do all I can to help with your retrospective show, though your dear brother Guy is not the best intermediary at the moment. He recently told Sweeney he would gladly give the Museum fifty pound if they got rid of me. It is strange to have this sort of talk coming from the Boyd family, and of course not from Guy alone.

Reed would manage to send only one work. Despite all the geographic, political, and personal differences, on 20 June the walls of the Whitechapel were hung with one hundred and seventy five of Arthur's works.

⁸⁸⁵ "She saw Yvonne as a great helpmate ..." Interview Clytie Jessop, London, 15 January, 2001.

⁸⁸⁶ "She wrote to the Burstalls ..." Yvonne Boyd to Tim and Betty Burstall, copy of letter not dated, Bundanon archives.

No doubt a few teacups rattled as bleary eyes of breakfasting Londoners were opened wide by *The Sunday Times* colour section that appeared early June of 1962. A full-page colour photograph presented Arthur's forthcoming Whitechapel works propped against the rear walls of the Highgate House. While a black man lay splayed on a bridal veil, sprouting flowers from his ear in the tangle of an unkept garden, on the second storey atop the roof of the back-door entrance stood Arthur, dwarfed by two massive paintings. On one side a bosomy Diana and the lizard beast appear to fly into space, while on the other a pair of wide-flung legs spread themselves suggestively across half the span of the house. *Harper's Bazaar* was more restrained. They ran a full-page picture of Arthur in a polo-necked sweater clutching, Rembrandt-style, a fistful of brushes and a paint rag.

Bryan Robertson's PR machine was in high gear in the run-up to the opening of the retrospective and Arthur received a full-blown critical response. With images on display that mutated and threaded their way through twenty-five years, in a variety of styles and techniques and subjects, there was more than enough fodder to fill the column inches. One critic praised Arthur's "strength of imagination ...and conviction as a painter" and found "Boyd's world a haunting and exciting place".⁸⁸⁷ Another claimed him to be "a visionary from Down Under", but warned that "the eye of the true mystic is beadily sharp and here there are occasional lapses into woozy Blakeish spiritualistic apparitions ...the props of romanticism, the blasted trees, croaking ravens and horned beasts were invoked too readily ..."⁸⁸⁸

Another art writer, staring into Arthur's works, named the usual influences, "Brueghel...Bosch...Van Gogh...Picasso..." then added a few more, "Pollock ...Nolan and Bacon ..." but concluded that Arthur Boyd was, "as memorable, and as distinctively his own, as that of any painter one can think of. He not only exposes us to moral predicaments ...but as we cannot ignore them, he obliges us to make up our own minds."⁸⁸⁹ The exhibition left the majority of critics making up their minds in favour of Arthur Boyd, finding him powerful, compelling, unforgettable. The long trek to see an Australian in the East End, they believed, was worth the journey. The man from the *Yorkshire Post* was one of the few exceptions: after pronouncing *Boat Builders* Arthur's "tour-de-force", he found little else to please and hopped back on the train to Leeds.⁸⁹⁰

Before the opening of the show Barry Humphries penned a particularly antipodean posy and presented it to Yvonne. Titled *Boyd Song at Eventide*, it evoked the excitement and anticipation that must have been coursing through the gang from home. It is an ode, not merely to Arthur but to all the expats struggling through that freezing winter with bare pockets, all those hopefuls enduring the hardships of London in the belief they might melt her heart:

⁸⁸⁷ "One critic praised Arthur's 'strength of imagination ...'" Roger Berthoud, *Evening Standard*, 29 June, 1963.

⁸⁸⁸ "Another claimed him to be ...", Nigel Gosling, 'Weekend Review,' *Observer* 24 June, 1962.

⁸⁸⁹ "Another art writer, staring into Arthur's works ..." George Butcher, 'A Poignant Guilt,' 23 June, 1962.

⁸⁹⁰ "The man from the *Yorkshire Post* ... John M. Nash, *Yorkshire Post*, 13 July, 1962.

Winter has whitened London like a clown
 The trees are birds' claws buried upside down
 Behind occasional windows dim with steam
 Hot casseroles of people dance and scream
 Laundrettes of laughter spin the drip-dry folk
 Inhaling beer and gulping pints of smoke
 Outside the icebergs of disaster cruise
 On the lookout for pleasure boats to bruise
 Long whiles ago in one such glassy street
 The cobbles rang with Jack the Ripper's feet
 Behold what this grim artist left behind
 A large nude in vermilion – unsigned
 Few artists, we must own, have done so well
 Since that bleak winter's night in Whitechapel
 Yet there be one, methinks, will fill the void
 I mean God wot, young Arthur Merric Boyd!
 For when the Spring breaks winter's icy spell
 His art will burst like buds in Whitechapel
 Not since the coming of the dinosaur
 Will men have known so lithe and lush a Thaw
 Europe will hasten to the Aldgate Road
 Beholding there a huge and emerald toad
 And evolution will change perspective
 When Arthur Merric holds his Retrospective
 Lofty white windmills like young brides will faint
 And fan the bracken with their stricken sails
 Gazing in pools where goldfish swim like paint
 Through deeps as membranous as bridal veils
 Large luminous dogs will look with mild reproach
 As the pavilion'd elders darkly stare;
 Susannah wears her nipple like a brooch!
 Blossoms will trickle through the blushing air
 The hairy hillsides climb towards the snow
 A ram comes blundering out with a spiral horn
 High in a gnawed white tree, there sits the crow
 And in the dark the bridegroom's dream is born
 The beetle ticks upon the murderer's cheek
 The lovers drown like swimmers in the grass
 They gaze into the earth and what they seek
 We pray that the dark earth will bring to pass
 When Spring hits frozen Europe once again
 Take the whole family down to Petticoat Lane
 And when the nippers ask what's on the go?

*Tell them it's Arthur Merric's One Man Show.*⁸⁹¹

Here is an early example of Humphries' samurai-sword tongue: a side-swipe at Eliot then London likened to a clown, British artists compared to butchers, and fair Albion to the land of the dinosaurs. Yet, for all his waspish wit, he kept his eyes on the paintings and drew a metamorphosing mix of Boydian life swirling in a lush, 'membranous' pot. When Arthur was asked to describe these most recent London works, he reported:

They are nudes in Australian landscapes. The sort of thing I am doing now is more primeval. The nudes look a bit like frogs. The paintings begin to emerge as being related in some way to the origins of man in a primeval sort of way. They are very disjointed and they are almost acrobatic. They are watched sometimes by frogs, sometimes by red dogs...they are about people turning back into animals or else emerging or coming out from being animals...some sort of mutation taking place. I have painted nudes flying over mud banks of red earth in the depths of the bush, flying or diving into deep black pools with gold fish swimming around them ...women turning into fireflies or vice versa...when these pictures are all together I think they do come out as a group. I don't like to say "series" the word has just about had it. So I'd call them a group of paintings which have something in common.⁸⁹²

While scholars illuminated Arthur's words in pages and pages of text, British and Australian critics' pens ran hot and ripe. Arthur Boyd was a man who didn't trust words, yet screeds of the serious and the comically serious proliferated in his wake

Arthur had been revisiting the National Gallery, drawn to Titian's *The Death of Actaeon* and Piero de Cosimo's *A mythological subject*. The subject involved the spy, and the spied upon. Actaeon, travelling through the forest, hunting with his hounds, stumbled upon the naked Diana as she was bathing in the woods. Although Actaeon's desiring gaze had been triggered by an innocent mistake, Diana rushes to judgement and turns Actaeon into a stag, setting his own hounds upon him. They, not recognising their master, tear his body to pieces. Arthur saw connections - a kinship in the myth and metamorphosis; echoes of his imaginings. When he looked at Actaeon he saw the lizard beast from his 1943-44 works, and Diana became the hunter from 1945. When he looked at Titian's mournful dog; waiting, watchful, wordless, he saw a helpless but compassionate presence, completing a triangle involving a female victim and a satyr (half-man, half-beast).

Arthur's 'Diana and Actaeon' works totally dissolve the fearful stillness of the 1957-1958 'Brides.' Water continues as a primary element; but the woman is no longer an object of desire to be observed from a distance. Now the viewer, rather than standing on the sidelines with the watcher, is drawn into a swirling, liquid place. The lovers move insistently, with an elemental push and pull; like matter in a bloodstream, like particles in space. At times the dog or the ram appear to become stand-ins for the lover but, no

⁸⁹¹ Barry Humphries, 1962. 'Neglected Poems and Other Creatures.' Angus & Robertson.

⁸⁹² "They are nudes ..." Arthur Boyd, Hetherington interview

matter what their guise all creatures, humankind or beast, are powerless. A critic interpreted the figures as "strong enough to stand out but not solid enough to break away altogether from the background ..." revealing "the paradox of the power and transience of life."⁸⁹³ One thing is evident: there is no human autonomy, nature controls.

At the end of the 1960s an interviewer posed the question: "...people read guilt in your painting. Would you think there was guilt lying around there?" Arthur, laughed, and then replied:

Yes, lots of guilt, I'd say! But my guilt would not be much greater than anyone else's ... I did a lot of paintings of Diana and Actaeon because I think it's a very sad story ... because it's an accidental story. It's not a story of spying at all ... she thought he was spying she... turned him into a stag and his own dogs turned on him and ate him up. Well, you can't have a sadder story than that. That seems to be a terrible thing to happen, and this is the way things seem to work for me a lot.⁸⁹⁴

Looking back on these works at the age of sixty, while sitting in the Australian bush and being interviewed by art historian, Grazia Gunn, Arthur explained how a parallel world existed for him in paint: one he could govern; at times with a ruthless hand. Without prompting, Arthur made a comparison to another famous story, *Susanna and the Elders*, he had employed in the 1940s:

Diana was different to Susanna ... Actaeon wasn't spying, he wasn't like the Elders ... he had stumbled upon Diana ... he wasn't really looking for her... it was a completely different story Diana was guilty ...if Diana had any sensitivity she must have been very upset, or she might have been doing it deliberately ... I chopped off her arms so then she couldn't shoot him... Actaeon is trying to embrace her ... but she can't return it ... she's looking away.

When Grazia Gunn commented "It was quite a punishment taking her arms off...", peace-loving, gentle Arthur, now flustered, realised he had exposed himself and his fantasy world, and began making excuses: "It was her fault she was guilty ... I didn't exactly take her arms off because she was guilty ... they fell off because she was guilty ..."⁸⁹⁵

Robert Hughes believed in a strong "air of reality" surrounding Arthur's images: "...one feels that Boyd believes in their magical efficacy as firmly as medieval Catholics believed in succubi, imps and familiars".⁸⁹⁶ Hughes was right. The paint lived for Arthur; in the case of Diana in particular, almost like a fetish. When discussing *Nude Reflected in a Black Pond*, Grazia queried whether Diana had been given arms in that particular work, and Arthur replied as though he inhabited the world of his canvas: "No, that's just a body ... it's either a leg or a body ... that's Diana & Actaeon ... stag and

⁸⁹³ "A critic interpreted the figures ..." Bill Hannan, *The Bulletin*, April 6, 1963.

⁸⁹⁴ "At the end of the sixties an interviewer posed this question" Schooling interview.

⁸⁹⁵ "Without prompting, Arthur made a comparison to another famous story ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁸⁹⁶ "Robert Hughes believed in the strong 'air of reality' ..." Robert Hughes, *Nation*, 23 March, 1963.

man together ... he's sort of riding past ... that Diana & Actaeon *Nude and Starry Night*... that's the same".

Punishment aside, Arthur admitted that, in the "amorphous" *Diana and Actaeon* and the 'diving nudes with dog and frog', he sought "a certain sensuality in the paint".⁸⁹⁷ Arthur wanted the paint to be "texturally accurate" to convey "fleshiness". Certainly, the "sad frailty of flesh"⁸⁹⁸ that Robert Hughes saw in the South Melbourne works of 1943 had all but disappeared. While the Diana & Actaeon paintings speak of the impossibility of permanent union, there are no frantic couplings on hard rocks, or in claustrophobic barren spaces. No red hot suns burn here. All is a rich primeval soup; a humidity-thick, water-hazed, verdant, blood-earthed Eden. The paintings are, according to Arthur, "to do with softness".⁸⁹⁹

If the 1961 work *Lovers in a Landscape* is read as the introduction to the nudes, then *Sleeping Nude* executed in 1962, can be read as the epilogue. The composition contains the same primary elements, a divide in the terrain, a pair of lovers but the story is reversed. Rather than the female entering, she exits. She has become Diana: she cannot embrace and now she has given up the chase. She closes her eyes, turns her face away. Her lover, once blue/white, is now black and has become the passive watcher. Although he still wears the red shirt of passion/authority he stands rock-still and makes no move to reach out towards Diana, the support for his resolve coming from the frame of the picture itself. His stare is trance-like. He appears haunted by a vision that is all-encompassing: both liquid and solid, cool and warm, sunset and sunrise. Diana's prominent rosy nipple echoes the sun, her globe-round breasts the moon, her pubic hair the tangle of grasses and reeds. As supple as water, as ethereal as mist, she pours over the earth and is absorbed. She is the goddess of nature; of earth, sea and sky. As the black man stares towards her white iridescent body, the shining centre of this dreamscape, the blue bird, drained of colour flails, falling towards Diana's breast.

Unlike his compatriot, Sidney Nolan, Arthur wasn't taking tea with the Queen but his pictures were being bought by Princess Alexandra and a young princess of British cinema, Susannah York. Prices as high as four hundred and fifty pounds didn't deter buyers: people were 'investing' in his works. Now Arthur was lunching at the traditional Wheelers in trendy Old Compton Street; discussing features on Australia with the Arts Editor of *Vogue*; dining at the Savoy with decorated personages; accepting invitations to speak on radio, giving critical reviews to painting students, and being invited to prestigious parties.

⁸⁹⁷ "Punishment aside, Arthur admitted ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁸⁹⁸ "Certainly, the 'sad frailty of flesh' ..." Robert Hughes, 'Nolan and Boyd', *Nation*, 4 April, 1964. .

⁸⁹⁹ "The paintings are, according to Arthur, 'to do with softness'." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

Walter Neurath wrote after the retrospective to congratulate Arthur on his “magnificent achievement”.⁹⁰⁰ A series of lovers in acrobatic clinches, detailed only by body hair, decorated the cover of the exhibition catalogue. They are the antithesis of the ‘lovers’ and ‘nudes’ and *Diana and Actaeon*. They tumble yet are fixed. They couple wildly yet appear so one-dimensional, so clinically sharp, it is as though they lie flattened between microscopic glass plates and are being scientifically observed. Arthur later admitted these tangled lovers (in some instances wound around props of the cripple and the ram) had wrestled in his psyche for some time: “They went back, quite a long way”.⁹⁰¹ Commissioned by Robertson, these works were credited in the catalogue as belonging to the Neuraths. It had been a gift, and in gratitude Walter showered Arthur with Thames & Hudson art books fresh off the presses and with great praise.

One person who had little praise for Arthur was his landlady. She was furious at the sight of her home pictured in the *Sunday Times*, plastered with paintings, and of Arthur standing on her roof. Her solicitor reported that she was shaken to her foundations, fearing her house had suffered the same fate. Whether it was the abuse of bricks and mortar, or the broken dustbin, or the missing chair, or the unkempt garden, no one was really sure but Mrs. Ashbee rapaciously demanded compensation and took Arthur to court to get it. Arthur of course bowed out of the legal battle, according to Yvonne, because “he didn’t want to waste the time”.

Most were outraged. The local solicitor said he thought it “shocking the way English people treat visitors to the country”. David Boyd shared Yvonne’s sense of injustice, and stepped into the breach, agreeing to accompany her to court. David was, Yvonne recalled, her “pillar of strength”. However, their joint efforts failed and the plaintiff was awarded forty-five pounds for damages. The lease had expired in July 1962 and Arthur and Yvonne found shelter, initially for several months, at 42 Well Walk (just next door to Constable’s old house); then more permanently in the adjoining road, at 43 Flask Walk, Hampstead. The peace would not be total. Echoes of the voices of Murrumbena residents would ring in the Georgian street when Arthur installed his kiln in the small back garden: almost immediately his neighbour was on the phone to the council complaining about the smell, the smoke and the noise.

But for the most part, the setting was ideal. Flask Walk extending into Well Walk, adjoined the heath, and the opposite end of the street accessed Hampstead Underground. A school sat behind the Boyds’ house. Apart from the children’s voices at playtime, the street was quiet despite a mix of shops just minutes away that provided the necessities of life. A haberdasher sold emergency elastic for knickers, ‘Steele the Butcher’ proudly provided British beef, and ‘The Flask’, a cosy pub, pulled a pint of the best. Arthur liked the fact that the area attracted a Jewish contingency, “people always keen on the arts”, and that there were “quite a few eccentrics about”.⁹⁰² Friends and family were within walking distance. The poet and critic, Al Alvarez, was a neighbour; the O’Shaughnessys

⁹⁰⁰ “Walter Neurath wrote after the retrospective ...” Bundanon archives, 6 July, 1962.

⁹⁰¹ “Arthur later admitted these tangled lovers ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁹⁰² “Arthur liked the fact that the area attracted a Jewish contingency...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes

lived at the end of the road in a large block of flats, The Pryors, as did the newly-arrived Hermia and David; and across the heath and further afield, there were so many imports from Melbourne it resembled Old Home Week.

Since the Boyds landed, old faces had been rolling in. Yosl Bergner journeyed over from Israel to hold a London exhibition, Arthur leaving his name in the visitor's book as a way of surprising his old mate. Stacha Halpern travelled across from Paris with his girl and his young baby. He brought Arthur a yarmulke, hired a synagogue and married Beth with Arthur as a witness, while Yvonne stayed home and babysat. In 1960 the Blackman family had poured themselves into the top floor of Hampstead Lane until they found a place of their own nearby in Jackson's Lane. Len French and his family had done the same, and Mary and John Perceval and their four children followed. Apart from close friends and family, friends of friends came knocking, to the extent that Yvonne became proficient at offering the faces she barely recognised the address of a hostel close by in the village.

Mathew Perceval had arrived before the rest of the family. The Percevals' trip had been delayed while John completed a large mural for Melbourne University and, just before leaving, held a successful exhibition of remarkable ceramic sculptures, vividly depicting small round-faced winged cherubs, who possessed all the strength, gall and seductiveness of the fallen archangel himself.

In February 1962 when the Percevals docked Mary was shocked at the sight of her brother. Since she had last seen him two years previously Arthur's hair had gone white. "My mother's death after he left was the most terrible thing that ever happened to him. He didn't want to be away from his mother, he had to, his life's work sent him that way and, of course, Yvonne's illness was a great trial, a worry". Lucy, Mary's elder sister, held a similar view. Lucy was aware that there was "a conflict going on" and believed "part of Yvonne's recovery was going away and being interested and involved. I think he was torn about leaving his mother... daddy had only just died ...but naturally he had to follow his career, mummy wouldn't have it otherwise". Had Doris, understanding the extent of the pressures on Arthur, urged him to leave?⁹⁰³

'Who would have thought it of old Chook Chooks, Chookie Boy, Arthie?' was the general consensus amongst close family and friends back in Melbourne as news of his acclaim and rewards constantly filtered back. There were reports of Arthur shaking hands with the Queen and chatting with Prince Philip, of him putting the price of his pictures up almost fifty percent, of him being called on stage at the Royal Opera House to take curtain calls as honoured set and costume designer, of him driving around London in a Rolls Royce he had exchanged for a tile. The news travelled home squeaky clean: free of the social gaffe Arthur had made on the red carpet, the high cost of living in London, the censorship of *Elektra*'s designs and the fact that, even before he had

⁹⁰³ "Had Doris, understanding the extent of the pressures on Arthur ..." At one point towards the end of 1959, although Jean Langley had not revealed the situation to Doris, according to Jean she had said affectionately: "I wish I had one more son for you".

neglected to put anti-freeze in the Rolls, the car (sporting a Nescafe lid on the front of the bonnet where the silver lady would normally sit) had only been good for scrap and he had given it away.⁹⁰⁴

Under the Royal crest topping his letterhead, Sir John Rothenstein, director of the Tate Gallery, following hard on Robertson's heels, wrote of the upcoming *Australian Painting exhibition*, to be staged early in 1963: Dear Mr. Boyd, The Queen intends to visit the Australian Exhibition on the afternoon of Tuesday January 29 ...⁹⁰⁵ His pen, dipped in blackest ink (many, including Robert Hughes, ventured stronger stuff) scratched his signature with such a flamboyant flourish it rivalled the monarch's signature on a royal decree. Several months before this, he had dashed off a missive:

Dear Mr. Boyd, When I spoke to you about my admiration for your *Ploughed Wheat Belt*, I was speaking on my own behalf and not on that of the Trustees, but I am nevertheless very appreciative of the opportunity of bringing it before our Board, and of your own helpfulness in making this possible. I will show the colour transparency to our Trustees ... I take it that the picture itself has long since been sent back to its owner, but I am confident that a number of Trustees will have seen it.

This would be one of many rebuffs by Rothenstein, despite untiring championship of Arthur by Bryan Robertson who, in 1962, stubbornly refused to take Rothenstein's consistent 'no' to a Boyd for an answer.⁹⁰⁶ Nick Waterlow, a young British art critic at

⁹⁰⁴ "The news travelled home squeaky clean ..." The dilapidated Rolls Royce belonged to Geoffrey Dutton. Shortly after Dutton exchanged it for a tile painting Arthur gave the car to his assistant John Hull.

⁹⁰⁵ "Under the Royal crest ..." Exhibition entitled: *'Australian Painting: Colonial, Impressionist, Contemporary*, 24 January -3 March.

⁹⁰⁶ "This would be one of many rebuffs by Rothenstein ..." Bryan Robertson had worked tirelessly through June and July of 1962 trying to encourage the Tate to purchase a work by Arthur Boyd. His first attempt received a rejection on the 20 July, the day the Tate Trustees had viewed a selection of works composed of: *Nude turning into a dragonfly*, *Nude running in a river*, *Nude with beast*, *Lovers with a blue bird*, *Nude floating over a dark pond 11*, *Double nude 1*. The highest price was four hundred and sixty pounds.

Three days later Robertson ploughed on, writing to Ceri Richards, CBE: "We were all delighted to see you at the gallery this morning and I am so glad that there is to be another opportunity for the Tate Trustees to look at Arthur Boyd's work. The four pictures that I shall hold back for the meeting next September are as follows: *Red Dog and Black Pond* 1961, *Nude with Beast*, *Nude with Frog*, *Lovers with a Blue Bird* (all 1962). Despite another rejection, Robertson remained undaunted. Circling Rothenstein, he approached Sir Colin Anderson, Chairman of the Trustees, writing 27 June: John Rothenstein is coming over to see the Boyd paintings tomorrow and have lunch with me. I hope so much that, funds and general opinion permitting, the Tate may consider adding a Boyd painting to the permanent Collection.

As you know, Boyd is considered very much on the same level as Nolan in Australia, and by many outside Australia; and with the small number of very good Australian pictures now in the Tate, it would seem rather a pity not to have a Boyd included." After the summer break, on 20 September, the following pictures were taken to the Tate: *Red dog black pond and nude*(1961) *Nude with beast 11* (1962) and *Lovers with Blue Bird* (1962) (All correspondence sourced from Whitechapel archives, London)

Almost a decade passes and still the Tate is crying poor. In 1971, Allanah Coleman proposes an Arthur Boyd painting to the Tate. The 'Keeper of the Modern Collection' Ronald Alley, writes 28 July, 1971, agreeing with Coleman that "no doubt" Arthur Boyd ought to be represented, but the suggested sum of

the time, saw Bryan Robertson as an individual with “an extraordinary eye” who had made the Whitechapel the liveliest gallery in town, “way ahead of the Tate”. On the other hand, Waterlow rated Rothenstein’s vision “slightly limited.”⁹⁰⁷ Rothenstein was dismissive of the school of Paris and stated that Picasso was overrated. His directorship, 1938-1964, would ultimately be viewed as a period of stagnation and his failure to purchase would be judged as one of his major errors. During the last years of his long but limited reign, when Rothenstein would bump into Arthur at social occasions, he would mutter platitudes like, ‘must get you hanging ... can’t believe we don’t have a painting of yours ...’⁹⁰⁸ As for the seriousness of that intent, heading towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century the Tate Gallery still does not possess one work by Arthur Boyd.

The *Australian Painting* exhibition was divided into ‘three phases’- colonial, impressionist and contemporary. Many believed the selection of the contemporary was unrepresentative and there was too much “official taste”.⁹⁰⁹ The critic for *The Times*, wearied perhaps by antipodean fare, felt “cries of revelation” had been spent with “the first discovery of certain individual Australian artists in this country a few years ago”.⁹¹⁰

The Queen would discover Arthur Boyd to be among those ‘certain individual Australian artists’, for they would meet several times. At one opening, as Australian painters lined up in a long line and alphabetical order, from Blackman through to Daws and down to Whiteley, Arthur would have been wishing his name ended with Z so he could quietly drop off the end of the line without any notice or fuss. On that occasion he escaped with the nod of the royal head and a pressing of the gloved hand. It was Yvonne who attracted attention. As she curtsied, looking elegant and every inch a duchess, Philipp exclaimed “Are *you* Australian, *too*?” However, horror of horrors, on another occasion, as he and Yvonne stood in front of his work, Philipp slowed down to chat about Arthur’s painting. The picture was one Arthur took pride in. He had once accidentally let slip, “It was the least typed of the Diana and Actaeon ones quite beau ... one of the better ones”. Prince Philip waved his hand, slightly impatiently, either towards a beetle creature or figures by the creek, Arthur wasn’t sure which, and queried: “What’s that?” Perhaps trying to maintain the Australian flavour of the occasion, Arthur replied: “It’s a nude chasing a blowfly up a creek ...” The Prince, no doubt expecting a

seven thousand pounds he believes would be more than the Trustees “would be prepared to pay.” The sum in question was seven thousand pounds. (Tate archives, London)

⁹⁰⁷ Nick Waterlow, a young British art critic at the time ... Interview, Nick Waterlow (Senior Lecturer School of Art History Theory, College of Fine Arts, Sydney.) 10 March, 2006, Sydney.

⁹⁰⁸ “During the last years of his long but limited reign ...” Yvonne Boyd interview

⁹⁰⁹ “Many believed the selection of the contemporary was unrepresentative ...” John Reed writing for *The London Magazine* stated that the exhibition lacked “completion and balance.” Considering the mix of historical and contemporary Reed concluded that “the dual nature must tend to distract and disrupt a direct critical appraisal of the works themselves.” He believed “Pugh was well represented but Nolan and Boyd inadequately and Drysdale excessively. ..” *The London Magazine*, February, 1963, Volume 2 No 11

⁹¹⁰ “The critic for *The Times*” *The Times*, 24 January, 1963.

more considered and respectful reply, recoiled and snapped back at him: "It looks more like a thalidomide baby to me..."

Prince Philip hadn't heard the last of Arthur Boyd. In the early months of 1963, in preparation for the Queen's arrival, the director of the Royal Opera House, Dame Ninette de Valois, gently enquired if Arthur would be so kind as to remove the copious amounts of pubic hair sprouting on the backdrop he had painted for *Elektra*. Arthur later confessed that in some cases the whole figures were composed of thorny pubic hair but, because only Arthur was aware of this they escaped censure. Arthur wasn't fussed; where the pubic hair was obvious for all to see, he complied with the request: "It wasn't very hard ..." although he believed "the Queen wouldn't have minded one bit".⁹¹¹

Arthur had shared his initial forays into set design with Peter O'Shaughnessy and William Shakespeare. At the Arrow Theatre in Melbourne's Albert Park, Arthur had created a set for a play that had always "fascinated" him – *King Lear*. As the play progressed, the set closed in, simulating what Arthur felt to be "the claustrophobic atmosphere" of the play.⁹¹² He had achieved the effect with a series of pulleys that gradually moved the set (composed of hessian bags) inwards and down, finally encompassing Lear in an enclosed space.⁹¹³ In 1955, collaborating with Peter O'Shaughnessy, he had designed the set for *Love's Labours Lost*. It was economical, just a single backdrop, but so convincing in perspective, so atmospheric in design, that the small church hall, adjoining the Wesley Church in Lonsdale Street, convincingly became one of Shakespeare's magical forests. Arthur then leapfrogged to Sadler's Wells Theatre.

Lord Harewood, for his first season as Director of the Edinburgh Festival in 1961, invited the Western Theatre Ballet to present a programme of three ballets. One was Stravinsky's *Renard*. After failing to engage Chagall, Richard Buckle, an influential figure within the world of ballet, persuaded Arthur to undertake the designs, believing "Boyd's personal 'folk-lore', inspired by his native Australia, was as pungent as Chagall's".⁹¹⁴ Arthur centred the ballet on a large box, centre stage, with a mechanical lid that opened and shut as action demanded. "It was a lot of hard work which nobody either could do, or would do", Arthur recalled, and it required him building the box himself, first in Edinburgh and then in London.⁹¹⁵

Two years later Bryan Robertson was asking Arthur if he could "fiddle 2 tickets ...", saying he would pay "almost any price" to see Robert Helpmann's Royal Ballet

⁹¹¹ "Arthur wasn't fussed ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes

⁹¹² "As the play progressed, the set closed in ..." Arthur Boyd, *Hampstead & Highgate Express and Hampstead Garden Suburb and Golders Green News*, 24 April, 1964.

⁹¹³ "He had achieved the effect with a series of pulleys ..." Arthur Boyd, 1993 interview Fischer McKenzie.

⁹¹⁴ "After failing to engage Chagall ..." Richard Buckle. 'Spotlight. Four centuries of ballet costume. A tribute to the Royal Ballet.' Victoria and Albert Museum, 8 April to 26 July, 1981.

⁹¹⁵ "It was a lot of hard work ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes

production of *Elektra* with set and costume designs by Arthur Boyd.⁹¹⁶ The show was a sellout, something of a *cause celebre*, and, despite Robertson's press contacts, not even he could cajole a pair of tickets. Robert Helpmann had returned to the Royal Ballet after a seventeen-year absence and had approached Arthur to help reinterpret the classic Greek myth. The Aussie duo produced a production that was both brave and broad. Helpmann distilled Elektra's decade-long vengeful meditation on her father's murder by her mother and stepfather, and the resulting bloody killing of the couple, into a fifteen-minute "erotic climax". Richard Buckle remarked that "when the two Australians went Greek they also went to town". Buckle saw Arthur's design as "a tragic strip cartoon ... a picture of sex and murder...as if inspired by the graffiti on lavatory walls".⁹¹⁷ Helpmann himself termed it X-certificate.

After Malcolm Arnold's brief, violent overture, the curtain rose to reveal the unexpected. Rather than the monumental architecture traditionally associated with Greek tragedy, the set consisted of four canvases: two backcloths and two permanent screens boxing in the set. Arthur's vast line-drawings flew wildly across these huge canvases, threatening to outdo the orgy of sex and death about to unfold. A luminous blood-red floor cloth lapped over three low steps positioned at the back of the stage, and continued flowing, shining, like a river of spilt blood across the entire floor. Eight Furies, centre stage, lay supine. At the back, in the centre of the steps, Elektra, with streaming vermillion hair and dripping in a black tangle of rags, squatted, her legs spread-eagled, holding a huge axe high above her head. Then the furious unceasing action began. Elektra, crazed with lust, crawled, spun and twisted maniacally. The Furies wormed towards her, captured her, picked her up, tossed and flung and threw her. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, indulging in crazed sex acts, were censured by a cleaving axe. The wild wielder of the axe, Clytemnestra's son, Orestes, in turn suffered an upside-down crucifixion at the hands of the Furies. Her brother dead, Elektra's initial attraction to the axe intensified. As she seductively straddled the gory implement and a decidedly uncomfortable climax seemed inevitable, the curtain fell.

Hysterical cheering and thunderous applause followed, producing an ovation of twenty-three curtain calls, lasting almost as long as the ballet itself. The critics were blood-red with indignation. "To call it a disgrace is to make it sound more interesting that it deserves",⁹¹⁸ it was a "balletic viper's nest"⁹¹⁹ ripe with "peephole, sensationalist sex;"⁹²⁰ "reducing a universal myth to a titillating melodrama, the fare of "Hammer Films or Hollywood's biblical best sellers".⁹²¹ The wrath was almost exclusively directed towards Helpmann. Arnold's music was dismissed. But, the majority agreed,

⁹¹⁶ "Two years later Bryan Robertson ..." Extract of letter from Robertson to Boyd, not dated, Bundanon archives.

⁹¹⁷ "Buckle saw Arthur's design as ..." Interview for *Spotlight*, op cit.

⁹¹⁸ "To call it a disgrace ..." Clive Barnes, 'Vile Bodies' *The Spectator*, 29 March, 1963.

⁹¹⁹ "it was a 'balletic viper's nest' ..." Alexander Bland, 'Helpmann aims too low' *Observer Weekend Review*, 31 March, 1963.

⁹²⁰ ripe with "peephole, sensationalist sex ..." Clive Barnes, op. cit.

⁹²¹ "reducing a universal myth ..." Alexander Bland, op. cit.

Boyd was “a shot in the arm”.⁹²² While one critic lived in hope, “hope that such a fine artist as Boyd will one day be employed on a project worthy of his great talent”,⁹²³ another stressed the production had “the advantage of the finest ballet décor to be seen at Covent Garden for a long time, a set of startling power”.⁹²⁴ This statement was taking into account Sidney Nolan’s set design for *The Rite of Spring*, which had been staged just months before at Covent Garden.

The man who designed a hessian smock shirt for himself at the age of nineteen, had decked out the Royal Ballet in sensational garb, creating purple costumes painted with glaring yellow eyes (that doubled as breasts) for the Furies, metallic studded gold bathing trunk for Orestes, and a lemon-yellow ‘plastic mac’ with a long serpent-like train for Clytemnestra. While most critics believed the costumes were less successful than the backdrops, they were unaware that much of the design had been watered down.

“Unfortunately they would not accept my costumes” Arthur bemoaned. “They were terrific, a bit erotic ...” Robert Helpmann made changes: “...he couldn’t fit the choreography into the costumes ... he chopped it all out and ruined my costumes.”⁹²⁵ Although the altered versions were nowhere near as graphic, parts were salvaged. The snake twirled around Clytemnestra’s loins, but it was not so all-consuming. Originally the creature’s head had arrived at Clytemnestra’s groin, its jaws flanking either side of her loins. When her legs flexed, they created hungry castrating jaws - a vagina dentate, the trope of South Asian mythology and a symbol so deeply Freudian it would have kept the psychiatrists who had examined Arthur at Heidelberg hospital during the war years up all night. One particularly effective graphic survived. Elektra was required to perform death-defying leaps over the heads of the Furies. Arthur, a man who knew too well the fear of flying, devised a way of making the dancer’s frantic flight appear even more dangerous and exciting. The trinity of faces painted on the hoods of the Furies was designed to confuse the audience and make them question which way the troop was focusing; on them, or on the twisting, twirling, earth-bound Elektra?

By July 1963 eighty thousand Australians would have stormed the island and London’s Bow Bells were being drowned out by an Aussie twang.

John Perceval had arrived in England after his peer group had already established reputations. However, struggling to refocus his vision in “a place where the sun sets backwards”⁹²⁶ within a year he would be planning on heading out on the first possible ship. Blackman would follow. Tucker was already back, as was French, Sanders and Herbst. Halpern would leave Paris and return to Melbourne. Whiteley would settle in Sydney. David Boyd would revolve between England and France, and then settle in Sydney. Nicholson would spend time in the Middle East, then return to Melbourne.

⁹²² “But the majority agreed ...” Richard Buckle, ‘Helpmann in a blaze’, *Sunday Times*, 31 March, 1963.

⁹²³ “While one critic lived in hope ...” Peter Williams, *Dance and Dancers*, May, 1963.

⁹²⁴ “another stressed the production had ...” Alexander Bland, op.cit.

⁹²⁵ “Robert Helpmann made changes ...” Arthur Boyd, Grazia Gunn

⁹²⁶ “But Perceval would lose the struggle to refocus ...” Letter Perceval to John and Sunday Reed, September 8, 1964. Manuscripts. Reed papers. SLV.

Within his peer group, with the exception of Nolan, it would be Arthur - the quiet, retiring artist who felt secure in the outer suburbs of Melbourne; seemingly the least adventurous, the man who had not left his family home until the age of thirty-five or his countries shore until thirty-nine - it would be this unlikely candidate who would continue to live a divided life and, up to the year of his death, criss-cross the oceans between England and home.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A Heart in Two Places

“The order of the past is the order of the heart.”
John Paul Sartre

"I think of Haystings and black swans and lovely studio's and boats and mangroves and mud. If I am to be a great anything I am sure that's no way to think".⁹²⁷ Highgate was a long way from Hastings. In his early twenties, as Arthur sat in his army barracks and wrote to Yvonne, long before grief compounded grief and disappointment and responsibility weighed him down, he had levelled his sights on greatness. It was almost as if he knew back in 1942 that a peaceful, removed existence could never be his. Even then he seemed to be steeling himself to accept work as the core of his life. Later he would discover that there was "no formula [on] how to be an artist ... you get the best out of the past".⁹²⁸

The 1960s were a decade of continuous labour, topped and tailed by two major retrospectives: the 1962 Whitechapel retrospective in London and Richard de Marco's Edinburgh retrospective in 1969. There were few long lunches, little time wasted celebrating past glories. Arthur hardly drew breath between one project and the next. If one well dried, he would bore another. If a medium began to cloy, or failed to inspire, he'd change: copper for glass, clay for canvas, pastels for oils. He was both pragmatic and obsessive; needy, like an addict turning to other substances. He used whatever got the job done: a blade, a hair, a reed, his fingers.

By 1962 curators, gallery owners and dealers, both in the UK and in Australia, had recognised Arthur as the cloth to cut. Old dealers and colleagues jostled for attention with the new boys. Arthur's "inscrutable Chinese politeness" now came into its own as he manoeuvred his way around the often shadowy, always sharp, business of the art world. As much as he may have resembled an easy mark, most of Arthur's business dealings fell his side of the table and with few exceptions his rewards exceeded those of almost all of his peers.

The Sydney gallery owner, Rudy Komon, pre-empting the Whitechapel retrospective, wrote in April of 1962 offering an exhibition and requesting (although he could not have failed to be well aware of Australian Galleries interest) the exclusive handling of Arthur's work in Australia. While Arthur ignored Komon's pass on this occasion, one particular line of his pitch would have produced an uneasy accord: "Please give this some serious thought, as it would be a pity to let popular interest in your work die down." Arthur was always suspicious of the fashion of the art world. No matter how his successes multiplied, having lived half his life struggling to reach this period of fruition, he was always expecting a tomorrow that would see dealers losing interest - his work removed from the walls of national galleries to languish in basements and his family, once again, forced back behind the barricades. Even so, he was prepared to lose sales to support the worldly calculation of his own worth. If dealers didn't agree with his high prices, he was prepared to walk away.

Back in Melbourne Tam Purves was feeling expansive: art sales were up and rising. He was putting the finishing touches to a new gallery when, in August 1962, he heard

⁹²⁷ "In his early twenties, as Arthur sat in his army barracks ..." Bundanon archives.

⁹²⁸ "Later he would discover that there was no formula ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

rumblings of a Boyd show at Kim Bonython's gallery in Adelaide. This was accepted practice, providing Australian Galleries were given acknowledgment and shared commission (the *Bride* series had been moved onto Bonython's after the Australian Galleries exhibition in 1958). What upset Purves was the thought of Arthur staging an initial exhibition elsewhere. He now proposed that "the first major exhibition" to be held in his new gallery should be by Arthur Boyd. He wrote to 'Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Boyd' in the tone of a man who had once held sway, not only over finances, but the subject matter of Arthur Boyd's landscapes.

To come to the point – and I write this after discussion with those who matter – i.e. John Reed – Westbrook⁹²⁹ – Alan McCulloch We all consider, in view of several circumstances, that it would be inadvisable to hold your exhibition of a new series of work in Australia during November of this year... NO work should be exhibited by the artists we handle ... without acknowledgments by an Interstate gallery on their catalogue – "By arrangement with Australian Galleries, Melbourne". If you decide to exhibit one or two works at Bonython Gallery in November, then I must insist that I have at least two of the same series (the best) at the same time, to hang in my new private office where the showing and selling of major high prices works to our best clients now takes place... Adelaide prices are twenty five to thirty three and a third percent lower than Melbourne prices ... [clients] travel between here and other capital cities as you or I would walk to the local post office.

While Purves was fuelled by professional competitiveness, at the heart of the problem lay the prices. In May of 1962 Arthur had fired off a warning shot:

Prices: They seem very good Tam, and compare well with London ones for me at present. Sometimes the London prices are a bit higher, not much, and up until about the beginning of this year, they were not as high as you are getting now. Keep up the good work... With the Whitechapel show coming up I'm expecting my prices to rise a bit more here." Purves, busy soliciting and proffering opinions from the Melbourne art world, had neglected a pointed remark by Arthur in that May letter: "On the whole I guess the Australian improvement in prices for art works is due to your business like approach, and artists' status should benefit as long as the trend continues this way, a welcome change from some past attitudes when artists have been thought to be lucky by some to be paid anything at all."⁹³⁰

Arthur held Alan McCulloch in his affections. In 1959 Arthur had made a rare gesture and written a farewell letter to Alan McCulloch from the ship, uncharacteristically expressing deep emotion, saying that times spent with Alan and Wilfred had been some of his happiest of his life.⁹³¹ At the same time, Arthur was only too aware that

⁹²⁹ "He wrote to 'Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Boyd'" Eric Westbrook was director of the National Gallery of Victoria (1956-75) and then head of the Victorian Ministry for Arts until 1980.

⁹³⁰ "Purves, busy soliciting and proffering opinions from the Melbourne art world ..." Extract of letter from Arthur Boyd to Tam Purves, May 1962.

⁹³¹ "In 1959 Arthur had made a rare gesture and written ..." "Dear Alan, Thank you for your kind letter it came the day we were sailing, that accounts a bit for the delay in answering. When leaving the place you have lived all your life you think a lot about the past, and the days I spent with Wilfred and you were some

McCulloch had known him as a gauche teenager, as the boy bumbling out from the bushes. And there were negative memories in Yvonne's life too, dating back to the thirties when Yvonne, struggling to paint, worked beside McCulloch in the bank. There had been a few discouraging critical comments by McCulloch over the years, and many more by the Reeds over works that were now being lauded. Tam Purves knew little, if anything, about this. Neither did he seem to notice the Boyds' subtle distancing from the old home guard in that same letter:

About the biography. Alan McC. Is a good old friend ... He has always been kind to me in his reviews and has, I suppose a somewhat "fatherly" attitude to me... I feel that it's difficult for him to ever see me quite objectively. It was good of him to write the biography but naturally it can only be an opinion. After I went over it making some alterations, it began to look rather cut up but in fact what we were doing (Yvonne helped) was to reduce it to a straight factual version.

Yvonne always helped. In this particular instance, she felt it necessary to openly bracket herself as a voice in her husband's affairs. But to close readers of Boyd letters it didn't need saying. Throughout the great bulk of 1960s correspondence and beyond, it became increasingly hard to tell who dictated what; at times impossible to hear how much of Arthur's voice leapt off Yvonne's typewriter. The only hard evidence was Arthur's almost illegible handwriting, which he infrequently scrawled across incoming correspondence, and his approval, or disapproval, registered either in ticks or the scoring of black lines.

Old mates prodding over the cold ashes of the past were not welcomed. An enquiry from Alan McCulloch, as he worked on the *Dictionary of Australian Art*, is one example:

My records for this dictionary show you as having been placed 3rd in the Dunlop prize 1950 and 2nd in 1953 and that's all are those the only prizes you have won? It's important for the records.⁹³²

Despite submitting his work for almost any major Australian award going, up to this point Arthur been given only one first prize. Now, with his talent acknowledged abroad, these instances of rejection and lack of recognition must have created, if not disappointment or resentment, at least bewilderment.

The reply to McCulloch was clipped:

I am sorry I cannot give you a long list of prizes I have won! In one way I think it would be better to forget the 2nd and 3rd Dunlop prizes. Still that's up to you to use what you think is right. A first prize in the Kuringai Art Festival in 1958 is the only other prize I've won (judged by Bernard Smith).⁹³³

of the happiest of my life. I intend to take your advice about staying out of the political arena. Yvonne has done a good job cross-indexing, I think you would be pleased with the system. Give our love to Ellen and Susan, Yours ever Arthur." Bundanon archives.

⁹³² "An enquiry from Alan McCulloch" Extract of letter from Alan McCulloch to Arthur, Shoreham, August, 1962.

⁹³³ "A first prize in the Kuringai Art Festival in 1958 ..." Arthur's first, first prize turned out to be the last issued under the banner of the Kuringai NSW prize. The award spanned the years 1951-1958. A year

As an elderly man Arthur would admit to being stalked in biographical detail by this undistinguished award: "...third prize in the Dunlop Art Competition haunted me all my life".⁹³⁴ By the middle sixties, with an international reputation to protect, if there were any sickles being sharpened for tall poppies Arthur had no intention of proffering his head. When Alan McCulloch, at this stage the foundation President of the Australian division of the International Association of Art Critics, invited Arthur, in 1966, to take part in the Georges Invitation Art Prize, to be judged by Alan McCulloch, Elwyn Lynn and Bernard Smith, Arthur's immediate response, scribbled in his hand across the bottom of the letter, was: "Thank you, NO".⁹³⁵

The prices Arthur had asked in the 1958 exhibition of 'Brides' had been high. When he quoted the "quite respectable price" reached at Bonython's Adelaide gallery, Anton Zwemmer was shocked.⁹³⁶ Zwemmer told Arthur: "Oh, couldn't have that ... couldn't have prices like that. No-one would ever buy them".⁹³⁷ Perhaps the only time Arthur had been bargained down occurred at one of his first exhibitions, in 1940, when he and Keith Nichol had rented space at the Athenaeum. Basil Burdett, the *Herald* art critic, had come hunting with his boss, Sir Keith Murdoch: "That, that, that, that, that and that," and "Murdoch ...bought six pictures, like that 1,2,3,4,5,6." Soon after Murdoch called Max Nicholson, who had been handling the exhibition and ignoring the six he had chosen and the asking prices, said he was interested in taking the whole lot – the catch was he wanted them for less than half price. Arthur received around seven pounds each for his paintings and put the rugged dealing down to "doing business, I guess".⁹³⁸

The meeting with Zwemmer in 1960 had proved to be a turning point. Despite the lure and need of a British exhibition, Arthur's confidence and resolve held firm: Murrumbena could not contain or cower him, and neither would London. Arthur set the benchmark and eventually Anton Zwemmer reluctantly agreed to Arthur's terms. All were rewarded by the red dots scattering that first successful 1960 exhibition. Doris had always been fond of comparing father and son, calling Merric "a genius" and Arthur "a genius with commonsense".⁹³⁹ In the 1990s Anne Purves, after a lifetime of dealing with Arthur, would conclude: "Arthur isn't really interested in money. He's not a greedy man, but he's not a fool either".⁹⁴⁰ Her son, Stuart, inheritor of the gallery and observer

later, in 1963, Arthur would add the Brisbane based, Henry Caselli Richards prize to this modest winnings..

⁹³⁴ "As an elderly man Arthur would admit to being stalked ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

⁹³⁵ "When Alan McCulloch, at this stage the foundation President ..." Bundanon archives

⁹³⁶ "When he quoted the "quite respectable price..." It is curious that Arthur was repeatedly quoted as saying that the one Bride that sold in Australia was to Kym Bonython (*Half Caste Child*). Records in the David Jones archive detailing the exhibition of Bride paintings, held 1-13 October, 1958, in Sydney, state that *Bride in a Cave* sold for two hundred guineas to a Mr. J.D. Robinson.. Red dots also appeared on *Shearers Playing for a Bride* lent by the NGV and *Groom Waiting for his Bride to Grow Up* owned by W.A.K. a'Beckett.

⁹³⁷ "Zwemmer told Arthur: "Oh, couldn't have that ..." Boyd, Arthur. Chalker interview.

⁹³⁸ "Perhaps the only time Arthur had been bargained down ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

⁹³⁹ "Doris had always been fond of comparing father and son ..." Interview Lucy Beck.

⁹⁴⁰ "In the 19990's Anne Purves ..." *The Australian magazine*, 24-25 August, 1991.

of Arthur since his childhood, described him in affectionate ocker parlance as “a tough bugger.”

However, back in February of 1963, Anne and Tam Purves were still unfamiliar with Arthur’s way of operating. His response to Tam Purves’s demands was typical: he said nothing and went his own way. When the totality of Arthur’s disregard unfolded Purves blasted off a cable, a precursor to a swiftly-sent three-page diatribe, full of shock, indignation and capital letters:

In August of last year when the question arose of you exhibiting some of your work with Kym Bonython BEFORE your major show with us in Australia, I wrote very strongly advising against that course, though I was not aware until quite recently that this work would form the “KEY PAINTINGS” of your show with us – had I done so my advice to you would have been expressed in even stronger terms... You can’t have it both ways, Arthur – you made the choice to show in Adelaide AND YOU PRICED THE WORK. Therefore neither we nor any other commercial gallery will exhibit this same work for sale for a period of 18 months to two years at a higher price... The thing which must not happen, if Australia is to have any chance of selling the work of her expatriate artists, is for the public(or the dealers) to think that painters sending work back to Australia can ask any price they like, i.e., three times the selling price of work in a show six months ago in London, OR DOUBLING the price from one State to another in a matter of weeks – for the same paintings ... I cannot afford to wait for a letter from you before we decide whether to cancel the show or not, and if it does not go on now it cannot be shown for at least eighteen months as we are very fully booked ahead... Because no “EXPLANATIONS” will make the slightest difference to the principles on which our decision was made, we have decided to hold the exhibition as planned, but it will be altered in this one respect – when we receive your letter. We intend to exhibit your etchings for sale and your paintings not for sale if you insist on advanced prices...

Purves claimed he had been put in an embarrassing position. Arthur’s works had arrived at the end of January and when they were privately shown to special clients options resulted. Purves took the high ground, proposing his clients were, “legally and morally within their rights if and when they take up their options – so that you must consider that some at least of these works are definitely sold at what we will call your old price”.⁹⁴¹

Purves created a home-town ruckus and involved Lucy Beck and Phyllis and Guy in the skirmish. It had the desired effect with Phyllis expressing shock at how Tam Purves “was very worked up” over Arthur wanting one thousand one hundred pounds for a painting, adding, “Guy says perhaps Arthur doesn’t want to sell them!!!”⁹⁴² John Reed also passed his judgement onto the Boyds:

⁹⁴¹ “Purves took the high ground ...” Letter from Australian Galleries 25 February, 1963. Bundanon archives.

⁹⁴² “Lucy Beck had reported to Phyllis and Guy ...” Extract of letter from Phyllis Boyd to Yvonne and Arthur, 26 February, 1963. Bundanon archives.

Purves is in a great state about the show It seems unfortunate the way things have worked out, and your last minute raising of the prices (or this is how it appears) will almost certainly cause unfavourable comment because earlier figures had already been quoted, and recent prices are known here through sales in London, and now by Kym Bonython. However, I told Purves this was only one aspect of the matter, and that as far as I could judge you probably felt you had every justification in asking high prices, and, on intrinsic merit, I felt they were worth every penny you put on them."⁹⁴³

In March 1963, the same month as his critical success with *Elektra*, Arthur was being solicited by the editor of *The Art Trade Press* for an inclusion in the 12th edition of *Who's Who in Art*, and was ably demonstrating that he could survive without those whom Purves considered 'mattered'. Arthur wrote a number of swift letters to Purves seeking to appease him and to clear up the muddle of price changes but ultimately Arthur could not be moved - he would rather give a work away than undersell it. Finally, it was made clear that, if there were any instructions to be delivered, they would come from the artist, not from his dealers:

Dear Anne and Tam: I sent a letter about a week ago with a new price list enclosed. You may have it by now. Just in case you have not I enclose another copy. I am terribly sorry about the clients that wanted to buy at the old price. I would like to give them an etching if they would like one to make some amends for their disappointment in not being able to afford the new price. On thinking it over again it would not be wise to show in Sydney, Adelaide or Perth as the directors say the new price could not be reached. If you do decide to hold the show yourself and you do not have room to show all the pictures, please Tam, would you keep to my hanging preferences.⁹⁴⁴

The etchings proffered as a peace offering had been printed on a third-hand printing press purchased by Arthur from John Hull for twenty-five pounds. Before John Hull met Jean, he had been in the business of selling paintings off Hyde Park's iron railings. The table model printing press had been bought from a fellow hawker.

After Jean left for Australia, around three months pregnant with his child, John Hull fell apart, "collapsed". He parked his old army van in a grove of chestnuts around the corner from 13 Hampstead Lane, outside Yehudi Menuhin's house and lived in it. His residency became so permanent milk was delivered to the van. About six weeks into his stay, at 4am, a policeman came knocking and instructed him to move on. Stranded, physically and mentally, John took to sleeping rough, in doorways around the village and when the weather turned freezing, in the crypts of Highgate Cemetery. All through that terrible period, he was aware of Arthur observing him: "He was always there ...

⁹⁴³ "Purves is in a great state about the show ..." Extract of letter from John Reed to Arthur Boyd, March 8, 1963. Bundanon archives.

⁹⁴⁴ "If you do decide to hold the show yourself ..." Letter from Arthur Boyd to Tam Purves, March, 1963. Bundanon archives.

attentive, always watching, keeping his beady eye on me... but at a distance ...walking on the other side of the road."

Arthur brought Hull in from the cold with offers of odd jobs here and there, not simply framing as he had originally employed him to do when Jean was still in England, but grinding paint and preparing canvases and boards. Gradually Hull became Arthur's full-time assistant. Then, recognising it was time to "grow up ...be a man," John saved enough to buy a one way ticket to Australia. Around January of 1962,⁹⁴⁵ after shipping trunkloads of his framing materials to Melbourne, his travel agent absconded with his money. John Hull stayed, working with Arthur. Ultimately they would share days and weeks and years together, but Jean was rarely mentioned. Hull could recognise Jean's body in Arthur's paintings: "We know our girls ... Jean was bosomy, like a ship in full sail". Nothing was ever said: "Arthur assumed I knew nothing and everything". Hull would always believe it was Sunday Reed or John Sinclair who had facilitated Jean's exit. He never learned it was Arthur who had bought Jean's ticket home.

Lovers below the Brasso Tin was one of the first etchings Hull and Arthur worked on together.⁹⁴⁶ The Brasso tin, used to clean and polish the copper plates, was in clear view, kept high on a studio shelf. The subject matter, the paradoxical power of love, remained stored in the minds of both men. Arthur's paintings, their "softness ...fleshiness", were now replaced with drawings that were, he agreed, "ferocious".⁹⁴⁷ The very process of dry-point and etching is ferocious, involving gorging and cutting with knives and sharp instruments. Arthur's first works were deeply and vigorously scored, resulting in plates so sharp they could injure the hands when wiping them down for printing. He found "a certain freedom" in the knife and felt he was "guided" by it. He knew what he wanted to do but the instrument (much like the force of the mallet, or his hands, when he sculpted clay) brought an extension of his expression, another force, a "sort of inventive thing".⁹⁴⁸ These first works were heavily bitten, the acid sometimes so strong it would boil. The conclusion to the lovers is doom-laden: burred and blanketed with the blackness of ink and dark and dense with cross-hatching.

⁹⁴⁵ "Hull saved enough to buy a one-way ticket to Australia". Hull's plans are confirmed in a letter from John Reed to Arthur Boyd. It is interesting to read the spaces between Reed's sentences; would Arthur have the uneasy feeling the lines were directed to him alone? "...The Sinclairs have been down several times, and Jean whose baby is due in a few days time, is very well and still wades out into the water. John Hull seems to be expected any moment". 3 January, 1962. Bundanon archives

⁹⁴⁶ "*Lovers below the Brasso Tin* ..." To help gauge a rough date for the production of the etchings, in October of 1962 Michael Chase wrote to Arthur asking to see proofs.

⁹⁴⁷ "Arthur's paintings, their 'softness ... fleshiness' ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

⁹⁴⁸ "He knew what he wanted to do ..." Arthur Boyd, interview with Hendrik Kolenberg, Bundanon, 1993. 'On the 1962-63 drypoints using a Stanley knife: "I wanted to get a very strong, heavy line ... there's a certain freedom, you're guided in a way by the knife, because it's not a precise thing, you know what you want to do, but you can never be sure that it's going to turn out exactly ... well I like that, because then there's a sort of inventive thing ...'

*"And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me."* Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*

As Arthur turned away from canvas to zinc and copper plates, he saw the new technique as an opportunity to "re-state and sum up".⁹⁴⁹ The ill-fated beast and nude are denied the sensuousness of colour and the fluidity of oil. From this first series of forty-five etchings and dry-points came the images for his designs for the ballet, *Elektra*. To conjure the triangular lusts of that story, the ill-fated beast and nude now composed mainly of pubic hair, are joined by the rampaging ram and earlier frantic and loveless images. The choice to return to the 1940s images was, according to Arthur, "deliberate".⁹⁵⁰ To be given one of the world's greatest theatres as a canvas was a big stretch from the Rosebud landscapes no bigger than his grandfather's firescreen and the modest masonite boards of the South Melbourne series but Arthur's performance was virtuoso, full of skill and bravado. The etchings blown up and transposed onto the backdrops had thrust themselves across the stage of the Royal Opera House with such ferocity they were likened to a Hieronymus Bosch version of Hell: an anatomical nightmare.

Arthur Merric had dabbled in etching; one example had hung on the walls of Open Country. Perhaps grandfather and grandson discussed techniques during their days together at Rosebud. Jessie Traill, a friend of Doris and Merric, gave Arthur some instruction on her etching press "well before the war... in the late thirties". He never forgot visiting her studio in the *Smith's Weekly* building in Flinders Street and seeing her etching press: "It was marvellous ... great big thing with big spiky wheels, always draped with a great big Union Jack". Neither did he forget her: "She was a good etcher".⁹⁵¹ Years later, John Perceval and Arthur visited her house at Harkaway with the express intent of exploring the process and asking her advice.⁹⁵² Apart from this, Arthur had done "a couple of lithographs at the Melbourne Tech" (Institute of Technology) in the early 1950s⁹⁵³ and, according to Alan McCulloch, Arthur had once executed a dry-point at McCulloch's house in the 1930s.

Now Arthur embraced the medium. Since 1960 he had had the opportunity to see the invention and skill of Picasso's and Goya's printmaking at exhibitions in London and Paris. He had looked long and hard at Rembrandt's etchings, admitting they had come as something of a revelation,⁹⁵⁴ and these possibly kick-started his new intense exploration of the etching process.⁹⁵⁵

⁹⁴⁹ "As Arthur turned away from canvas ..." Arthur Boyd: Michael MacDonald Scott 'Introduction,' catalogue for 'The graphic work of Arthur Boyd.' Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, 12-23 December 1974.

⁹⁵⁰ "The choice to return to the 1940's images ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

⁹⁵¹ "It was marvellous ..." Arthur Boyd, *ibid.*

⁹⁵² "Years later, John Perceval and Arthur ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd.

⁹⁵³ "Apart from this, Arthur had done ..." Hendrik Kolenberg, Arthur Boyd Retrospective, AGNSW

⁹⁵⁴ "He had looked long and hard at Rembrandt's etchings ..." Hendrik Kolenberg, Arthur Boyd Retrospective, AGNSW

⁹⁵⁵ "...these possibly kick-started ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

John Hull found Arthur's energy and enthusiasm infectious: "It was an adventure, we were discovering dry point ... experimenting. I had a long steel ring-sizer and Arthur ground one end down to a point". Arthur used this and the Stanley knife blade in place of the traditional burin or scribe. He enjoyed improvising. Instead of an acid tank, he used masking tape to form a wall about two inches high around each plate and nitric acid was then poured directly onto the metal. When the plate was sufficiently bitten, an edge was cut from a corner of the border and the acid drained off into a bucket. From the bucket it was poured into a jar and re-used until it lost its bite.

Arthur was always impatient to see the results, just as he had been at Murrumbena when firing his sculptures and tiles, and would often speed up the process by upping the strength of the nitric acid. At times it was so potent it would eat through the plate in little more than ten minutes. He pushed the boundaries, took the process to the limit, learnt, and pulled back. Perhaps Arthur did not have the 'fear and trembling' that both William Blake and Samuel Palmer sought to bring to etching, but in these early etchings and dry points he had an urgent passion. John Hull recalled: "He practically broke the press, putting so much pressure on the copper it started to roll. I don't know how much paper we wasted".

By March 1963 Arthur had been living in a smaller house at 43 Flask Walk for around six months. Now, instead of gallons of nitric acid and pounds of 'Best Press Black Litho Ink', bags of clay and oxides and underglazes were being hauled up the steep stone entrance steps of the Georgian cottage, in preparation for a one-man show of forty-six ceramic paintings scheduled for October at Zwemmer. The large sum of over two hundred pounds had been invested in an electric kiln, to be housed in the minute proportions of the garden of their rented cottage. The interior of the cottage was equally cramped, but once again the main space was given over to Arthur's studio. On a little desk positioned by the large Georgian front window, among a clutter of brushes, a dozen or so old jam jars and pots held a selection of beige-coloured pigments.

For the next five months Arthur would be deeply involved in the solid, physical labour that the production of ceramics required. Even with John's help, he needed to be fit. The physical effort of moving clay was exhausting. The size of the tile paintings, around 22 inches by 23 inches, reflected the size of the interior chamber of the electric kiln. The kiln reached a maximum temperature of 1,000 degrees centigrade and the process was slow, with the heat building up gradually to avoid cracking or warping. After two to three days the door to the kiln was opened; then, but only very slowly, the cooling down period lasted a few days. Despite all his past experience, again Arthur found himself experimenting. Under fire, English clay behaved in quite different ways to Australian clay. He would master it, to the extent that one British critic would claim that Arthur Boyd was as well able to "control the process as any Chinese potter of the Sung period".

The preparation for the tile paintings – the noise and mess of the brick dust being pummelled into clay – upset the neighbours. So too did the cookery of art – the smell of paraffin and flint, and the smoke it produced. Zoning regulations were such that Arthur could pursue his pottery for private pleasure, but not for commercial purposes. Propelled

by neighbours' complaints, the council inspector finally came knocking. That was John Hull's cue to run for cover: the sighting of an assistant would have signalled 'industry', and the end of the pottery. John, from his hidey-hole, listened as Arthur negotiated his way through the inspector's questioning: "He went into his Bugs Bunny act and handled it in the bumbling way he handled everything –with precision and courtesy." The inspector retired, John Hull believed, because "Arthur probably charmed him". If Arthur could have hidden away with John, he would have. Adept as he was at extricating himself from sticky situations, whenever possible, Hull observed, "Arthur let Yvonne do the dirty work".⁹⁵⁶

Before Yvonne left Australia, she told Betty Lawson she expected the move would be "just two dreary old people taking their kids to England ... more of the same, just a different place". Although Arthur found the pace of life less hectic and competitive than in Australia,⁹⁵⁷ he had not escaped the loud debates, the "shaping up," by moving to the other side of the world. The old gang gravitated like a flock of noisy galahs to perch in his parlour. The Humphries had arrived shortly before the Boyds, and Rosalind had found England "extraordinary". In London she discovered "manners ... gentlemen" and a place where she could "have discussions and not be put down or shouted at". But when the expats gathered, Rosalind, accustomed to handing over the stage to her husband, took herself off to a quiet corner of the room with a book and gave up all thought of reasonable conversation.

Both the O'Shaughnessy brothers had settled in England. Peter O'Shaughnessy's thespian vowels were so perfectly rounded that they were employed to punctuate the pips on the end of the telephone line, informing the British of their own Greenwich mean time. Lawrence Daws was an occasional guest. Laurence Hope had travelled over for a promised exhibition at Qantas Galleries which never eventuated, but he stayed on, moving into the Blackman's flat until he found a place of his own in Highgate village. Daws was part of the group, staging a three man show at the Johnstone Gallery in September of 1965, with Arthur and Blackman. Al Alvarez, a poet and a critic, with a love life as complicated as the Renaissance verse he analysed, would sometimes drop by. Len French and Charles Blackman were, by Len's admission, "like fox terriers" pitted against each other; Len French and Barry Humphries "quarrelled a bit," usually over politics, Humphries being "very much to the right." This was a group that included, during this early period, people such as Tucker, Perceval, and Tom Sanders. And you could add to this any Australian in town with the merest connection. Once again Yvonne stood patiently and stoically at the stove, often with Red O'Shaughnessy at her side and with spaghetti on the boil, while the men drank and lounged around the front room expounding on the notions of the day. Rosalind and Barry would always contribute a bottle or two to the gatherings, but many came empty-handed: "We were all pretty poor, but so many would just roll up ... It was always open house with the generous Boyds."

⁹⁵⁶ "Arthur let Yvonne do the dirty work". This observation was shared by Bob Dickerson: "I felt ... Yvonne was the fall guy". Interview Sydney 13 December, 2001.

⁹⁵⁷ "Although Arthur found the pace of life less hectic ..." Arthur Boyd, *The Scotsman*, Saturday, 1 November, 1969.

At times Yvonne would be forced to announce to the crowd: "Arthur wants to work." Rosalind recalled that it was "fairly firmly said, but it always struck me that they should have gone home hours ago".

If Yvonne's protestations fell on deaf ears, Arthur would escape. Len French witnessed one such breakout as he wandered around to the house late one afternoon to see if Arthur would like to have a beer. It was dusk by the time he arrived at the house. Through the lighted windows he could spot "the Blackmans ... the Humphries." By contrast, a lonely figure sat huddled in the reddy-brown Bedford van parked outside. It was Arthur, with a stack of copper plates, working fast. "I don't know if Arthur encouraged them, to be honest, but he always had visitors. That applied when he lived in Beaumaris, there were always a lot of people there". Len French saw that Arthur had "a marvellous capacity to drop back when the angst became too intense". He believed Arthur could not stop working: "I think if he stopped he would have become very ill." Rosalind saw it too: "He had this drive to work ... he worked every day."

The Boyd house was a haven to young Rosalind Humphries. She had felt the same sense of security that Arthur had bought to the group when he wandered into the Swanston Family with Perceval in the days of the Drift, when Germaine Greer came head-to-head with Tim Burstall in hot debates. Arthur still gave off a "paternal" aura and, although "Yvonne was distant ... always kept back a bit ..." in their joint company, she was "protected ... safe within a wild group". She always believed there was "an earthy solid thing" in the Boyd partnership: "They were such a strong couple".

The appearance of Sidney Nolan at such gatherings was rare. Like Brett Whitely he was hampered by geography; both had homes were on the other side of the city. He had attended Arthur's first exhibition at Zwemmer and soon after, and throughout the years to come, he would find himself mentioned in the same critical breaths with Arthur Boyd. To this point, as far as the English were concerned, if they had been aware of any Australian painters at all, they existed in the shadow of the eclipsing Nolan.

Due to Clark's favouritism, and Nolan's courting it, Nolan was already vaguely resented amongst the advancing home guard. An exhibition held in April, 1963, at the New Metropole Arts Centre in Folkestone, Kent, only served to compound the problem. Twenty-six Australian artists resident in Europe were represented by 43 paintings and 16 sculptures, a total of 59 works. Sir Kenneth Clark had been invited to officially open the exhibition.⁹⁵⁸ When the appointed opening hour arrived, Len French recalled: "One hour passed, then two, then finally a big car pulled up out the front and out stepped Sir Kenneth and Nolan. Can you imagine a Brett Whiteley ... *Jes-us*... I was fierce enough". Hard on the heels of this indignity the Mayor of Folkestone proceeded to introduce, "Sir Kenneth Clark ... who will open this wonderful Australian exhibition of Sidney Nolan's". "Nolan," French noted dryly, "had two pictures in the show". Then, snapping that memory sharply shut, he concluded: "I couldn't be bothered with him".

⁹⁵⁸ "Twenty six Australian artists resident in Europe were represented ..." Allanah Coleman was the organiser of the event which is further detailed in Coleman papers, Tate Gallery archives, London.

After the exhibition Arthur, Len French and Charlie Blackman headed off to Paris for a visit with their old mate, Stacha Halpern. Arthur and Halpern had, over a year previously, managed a successful house swap, the Boyd family moving into Halpern's apartment in an old Parisian chocolate factory and the Halperns taking residence by the Heath. Both men returned home to find their brushes and palettes clean, their paints arranged, their entire studios more organised than they could ever remember. It had been a spontaneous salute, a mark of friendship and respect, from one artist to another. Len remembered how in the early years, after Halpern and Boyd had sold their wares at the Primrose Pottery Shop, they would pop into the Swanston Family for a beer. "They'd get some money and go to the pub. Arthur would always end up with a bit more money because he didn't carry on like Stacha." Like so many others, French admired Halpern, thought him "a great big powerful man". But the visit to Paris this time didn't prove relaxing. Blackman and French fought, with French resentful that Blackman was crowding out his time with Halpern. "I was looking forward to seeing him on my own to be honest ..." But, by way of acknowledging Arthur's gentle, non-intrusive nature, French added that if the visit with Halpern had included Arthur only "that would have been alright". While Arthur stayed out of trouble, Len French stayed out on the town. When he arrived at the Paris train station the following morning he found his pocket had been picked and his passport was gone. While Arthur left on time, on the train planned, French sat "at the end of a whole row of tarts" on a prison bench, arguing with the Parisian gendarmerie who were accusing him of selling his passport. Later he would joke "This shouldn't have happened to me, you'd expect it to happen to Arthur".

Arthur didn't fight with anyone. The impresario Clifford Hocking, the man who presented Barry Humphries in his first three one-man shows, observed Arthur in London in the sixties. Hocking believed Arthur to be "totally without malice", to which he added "probably because he was surrounded by totally malicious people".⁹⁵⁹ As Arthur's star rose, it might have been reasonable to expect the glint in the group's green eye to brighten. Rosalind Humphries considered much of the behaviour between the men "cruel". But it was difficult for the crowd to find something negative to say about Arthur. One complaint was he had been born with a silver spoon. People like Vic O'Connor laboured all their lives under the misapprehension that Arthur always had "family money to bail him out". O'Connor even went so far as to believe that when Arthur arrived in London "there were connections". Rosalind heard this too, "the mocking thing ... that the Boyds all stick together ... you wouldn't get a leg in there with the Boyds".

Another criticism was Arthur ran with the hares and hunted with the hounds. Back in the fifties Kate Hattam had experienced an example of that when the crowd was moving on to another venue. The destination planned, Arthur then agreed, "Yeah ... I'll meet you there ..." Then Hattam recalled, "he got into his car and went in another direction". However, as Tim Burstall gently pointed out when he considered this story, "there was perhaps a little less of that with us". And perhaps Arthur was following his mother's example. Phyllis Boyd believed Doris was not "vague" as some people suggested but

⁹⁵⁹ "Hocking believed Arthur to be 'totally without malice' ..." Cliff Hocking interview, 2006.

simply “put on a vague manner when she did not want to get involved in discussions or situations that were upsetting to her or the people involved”. Given that Arthur had also been raised to view the world from both sides and that he needed, or chose, to hide his thoughts from the world, the few murmurs Rosalind heard of Arthur being ‘two-faced’ were perhaps understandable. And given Yvonne’s willingness always to be the messenger of bad tidings, always to bear the brunt, there was of course the accusation that Arthur was “under the thumb”. All of which suggests just how little the peripheral gang truly knew Yvonne and Arthur Boyd.

Like those in most enduring partnerships, over the years Arthur and Yvonne developed unspoken codes, signals; a private language that Arthur didn’t restrict to the canvas. In the 1970s, over the head of an interviewer from the National Gallery of Australia, they bantered back and forward about the Scots. While their visitors were completely unaware of Yvonne’s Scottish father and second-generation Irish mother, Arthur gently taunted: “We hate that vile Scotch ... the Scotch are so arrogant and proud ...” This matter of Yvonne’s bloodlines had been a subject of Arthur’s teasing since they were both twenty-one. In one of his letters from Bendigo he wrote: “Why are you Scotch you don’t look like a Scotch wooman I am sure you are really Irish ...”

While Grazia Gunn conducted her long exploratory interview into Arthur’s use of symbols, Yvonne was usually in attendance. When Grazia proposed that the lovers in the tiles were certainly much more sensuous, and less guilty and sinful, than the lovers from the 1940s; those on the rock or in the hammock, Arthur, after avoiding the subject, turned to Yvonne and, as if the words being said were underscoring a personal meaning for himself and his wife, he gently enquired, “How are you doing?” “Alright,” was her subdued reply. On another day during the course of Gunn’s long inquisition, while discussing the pen and ink drawings of the tumbling lovers that had been reproduced on the cover of the Whitechapel catalogue, Yvonne became more verbal:

GG: *It is a bestial love ... nothing to do with lovers ...*

AB: *Inside you’ll find the lovely amorphous lovers with a blue bird ...*

YB: (sticking to the subject of the line drawings): *They’re not sensual at all ...*

AB: *Oh, they aren’t, but inside ...*

YB: (snapping back): *She knows the difference between the paintings ...*

Max Nicholson had once remarked to Brian O’Shaughnessy that there were “a lot of dark forces locked up in Arthur.” But through the decade that O’Shaughnessy spent in close company with Arthur, he could not recall witnessing one instance of his anger, never saw him “come apart at the seams or lose his cool”, except for “rousing at Yvonne in a slightly unlovely way.” Phyllis Boyd confirmed that a lot of people thought Yvonne dominated Arthur, but his sister-in-law believed that “Arthur subtly domineered other people ... in a very quiet sort of way”. When Margaret Chalker, discussing the vast array of guests the Boyds entertained in London and their renowned roast beef, asked who did all the cooking, Arthur confirmed Yvonne.

MC: *“Did you tire of ...*

YB: *"And the washing up. Oh, yes, I used to get exhausted."*

AB: *"You didn't mind much. You were quite happy."*

Others observed Arthur's "bad habit" of putting Yvonne down on social occasions, by saying, "Yvonne do this ..." or "Yvonne can't handle that ...", or by making "nasty little remarks over her cooking, her dressing, her personality". Or else he would tell his stunningly attractive wife she was "becoming fat, not to eat, to hold her tummy in".⁹⁶⁰ For all of Arthur's gentle, peaceable qualities, in these circumstances it was Yvonne who demonstrated a Buddhist-like repose. She would not respond to his jibes. Instead she would smile, bow out, and leave the room.

Tim and Betty, together with their boys, Dan and Tom, arrived in London in 1965 on their way to New York where Tim was to spend a year studying film on a Harkness Fellowship. In the month-long reunion, the Boyds gathered the Burstalls up and showed them London. Tim Burstall found his friends "unchanged". Arthur "still looked at the world in a way that was warm and sceptical, self-mocking and compassionate" and Yvonne was "still very beautiful ... with the same level look she always had ... the face of a spirit and romantic that wants much more from the world than she ever gets, and yet somehow is without rancour". Thirty-something Tim Burstall, found to his delight, that his two friends at the age of forty-five, were "still conscious of each other ..."⁹⁶¹

Rosalind Humphries saw Arthur "fly off the handle" just once with Yvonne. "He was really abusive and I was really surprised". During a social gathering at the house, Arthur had taken Rosalind off to paint her portrait. He worked with his usual speed, completing two studies, then beginning a third. At almost the precise moment Arthur exclaimed, "I've almost got it ... I've almost got it", Yvonne burst in through the door with such velocity she jolted Rosalind out of her pose. She demanded to know if Arthur had finished. In response Arthur threw down his brush and yelled, "Yvonne! You've just ruined the best thing I've done" and continued to rant "It was almost there ... it was almost there!" In the face of Arthur's tirade, Rosalind recalled Yvonne's cool demeanour: "She kept completely calm and with a funny little smile on her face came over, looked at all the work and picked up the third attempt, saying: 'Oh this is beautiful. I'm having this'". Arthur would make a gift to Rosalind of the second two attempts, but she would never again see the painting that Yvonne had claimed.

John Hull worked within the walls of the family, for erratic periods, over two decades. He saw Arthur not only as "a big worker" but as a constant and caring father, always attentive: "If there was a row going on upstairs with Yvonne and the children, or music being played too loudly, he'd let it rumble. Eventually he'd open the studio door and call upstairs, "I can hear that". There would be a deadly silence, and then, "Sorry Dad". On the days when Yvonne would make a silent protest by absenting herself from usual

⁹⁶⁰ "Others observed Arthur's bad habit ..." Helena Boyd, interview Highgate, 9 March, 2002. All proceeding quotes from this source.

⁹⁶¹ "Tim found his friends unchanged ..." Letter written by Tim Burstall, 10 September, 1966, during Atlantic crossing to New York. Supplied to author by Tim Burstall.

duties, leaving a dinner halfway through preparation or a saucepan on the burner, Arthur would “just automatically take over”. Despite these blips John Hull believed that the marriage was enduring and strong, describing it by weaving his fingers together in a tight meld: “There was a tenderness ... no kisses and cuddles but always a unity ... *always*. If Arthur had a Kingship about him, Yvonne has a Queenship: there was a strength about her and a vision for Arthur and the children... they were the sort of people that keep a society together”. At the time of the move to Flask Walk, Hull recalls the mood in the household was optimistic. Although their living space had shrunk and facilities were limited (laundry was taken down the road to the local wash house) there was talk of expanding the family: “The story was they would have a child: a new bed, a new baby”.

The working relationship between John Hull and Arthur resembled the loose structure in the days of Beaumaris and Bob Langley. At the end of the week Arthur would simply ask: “How many hours have you worked this week, John? ... How much have you spent on materials, John?” and the wage would be settled. Arthur’s days started late. Always a fitful sleeper, Arthur would rise well past the hour commuters had settled at their city desks. Nothing happened in the studio until after Arthur strode out on the Heath. After a late breakfast he would set off, trousers tucked into his socks, his trousers held up by braces (he would never wear belts, believing they were bad for the circulation). Whatever the season, he would always be wearing paint.

Any letter-writing was done in the morning; when John wandered in, he would usually find Yvonne and Arthur sitting down talking. Work in the studio would begin around noon and for Arthur, more often than not, continue into the night. Lunchtime arrived around three o’clock. John would make a sandwich or pop out for a packet of ginger nut biscuits or a tin of baked beans. At the end of the day Arthur’s plate would be scattered with corners of paint-splattered food. Arthur would never eat the food he had been holding, knowing the blood-poisoning potential of the minerals, particularly cadmium and lead. Even in a domestic situation, with no paint on his hands, he instinctively discarded whatever food he had touched.

Paint was second nature; few understood it better. There is little wonder he continued to mix it himself, training John to grind the pigment and add the oil and the wax. “With five hundred pounds worth of basic materials”, Arthur once proudly reported, “I can make up fifteen hundred pounds’ worth of paint”.⁹⁶² Economy aside, by mixing his paint Arthur sought the highest quality and the greatest control: “There’s more consistency... You know what you’re getting”.⁹⁶³ He saw another world in paint: “Look” he would insist to Hull, “look into the colour ... there’s another dimension”. John Hull would never fail to be astonished by the alchemy Arthur achieved when he painted, his fingers digging into a handful of earth-coloured oil and pulling out “a pure thread of colour”. The pigment was like gold to Arthur, he hoarded it. On one occasion he bought half a hundredweight of colour, saying “I’m riding high, I must stock up for tomorrow”.

⁹⁶² “Arthur once proudly reported ...” *The Sunday Times*, 8 October, 1967.

⁹⁶³ “...he sought the highest quality” ... ABC archives, Sydney.

In June 1963 Arthur was back exhibiting at the Tate Gallery, in an exhibition organised by the Contemporary Art Society titled 'British Painting in the Sixties'. Many artists were called - sixty-seven in all. However, in the opinion of *The Sunday Times* art critic, Michael Levey, few deserved to be chosen. He reported that Francis Bacon stole the show, but the majority were also-rans (even David Hockney deserved merely a "mention"). Arthur Boyd, just two and a half years earlier a new boy in town, was now viewed as "famous ... familiar". It was Boyd's "magical glimmering world" (*Figure in a Landscape, Figure Catching Goldfish and Nude Washing in a Creek*) Levey found "impossible not to salute".⁹⁶⁴

Levey was substituting for the arch critic John Russell. At a prestigious dinner party given by the Neuraths, filled with the great and good of the art world, Arthur had been placed next to Russell. Aware he was in the hot seat, Arthur could barely pass the time of day. Talking about 'art' wasn't on his menu and Russell was taciturn, perhaps believing he was being snubbed. The seating arrangements proved an uncomfortable experience for all concerned.⁹⁶⁵ By October Russell was back at his desk, showing less enthusiasm for Arthur Boyd than his stand-in had done. Russell's review of Arthur's tile paintings at the Zwemmer exhibition in October of 1963 signalled the beginning of a distancing:

Arthur Boyd admirers will not wish to miss his new ceramic paintings at the Zwemmer Gallery. The imagery relates directly to the canvases and prints which have won him great popularity in recent years but the effect of the new medium is to simplify the image and bring it up closer to the picture plane. Mr. Boyd's darker fancies don't always fit with the festive dazzle of ceramics, but when he keeps to pure lyrical statement the candid and "forward" qualities of the medium serve him very well.⁹⁶⁶

Eric Newton, from *The Guardian*, described the world he saw in the tiles as "half mad ... mythological, always claustrophobic". He felt it was as if the artist "could never find his way out of a haunted jungle".⁹⁶⁷ The inhabitants of that jungle had been haunting Arthur's work since the 1940s. In almost every tile there were both subtle and overt connections.

It had become obvious to the English critics that they were revisiting Arthur Boyd's "intense, strange, world ... at once tempestuous and personal".⁹⁶⁸ By now they recognised Arthur's "creatures." They were familiar with the 'Old Man,' 'St. Anthony,' the 'Beauty' and the 'Beast', 'Diana', 'Actaeon', and the 'Kite' man. But Arthur's world stretched further than any British critics could see: perhaps in *Woman Wrestling with*

⁹⁶⁴ "It was Boyd's magical glimmering world ..." *The Sunday Times*, Michael Levey, 'The World of Art Painters of the Sixties,' 2 June, 1963.

⁹⁶⁵ "The seating arrangements proved an uncomfortable experience ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd.

⁹⁶⁶ "Mr Boyd's darker fancies ..." *The Sunday Times*, John Russell, 13 October, 1963.

⁹⁶⁷ "He felt it was as if the artist ..." *The Guardian*, Eric Newton, October, 1963.

⁹⁶⁸ "It had become obvious to the English critics ..." *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, Terence Mullaly, October, 1953.

Cat he travelled all the way back to Melbourne 1943, and to Perceval's *Boy with Cat*. Like the etchings, Arthur saw the tiles as "a summing up".

One pundit, reviewing the Zwemmer exhibition, believed Arthur's turning from canvas to clay was the modern artist's inventiveness in the use of media. But after the 'Brides', the 'Lovers', the 'Nudes', and after *Diana & Actaeon*, was Arthur casting around in other mediums as a means of reiterating the same story because there was no new fire to pull him back to the easel? Was he emotionally exhausted? He intimated as much to one interviewer "...some painters can perhaps keep going and they don't feel they wear out ...⁹⁶⁹

In May 1963, Arthur wrote to Tam Purves saying that he had tried "several times in the last year to paint" but that he "wasn't satisfied with the results".⁹⁷⁰ Perhaps there was something of the same angst that Len French experienced: "After a series of good paintings there's quite a fear ... will I be able to do this again?" Arthur told Purves that it was landscapes he couldn't paint and blamed the climate (it was a year of record snow falls) explaining he couldn't go outdoors (but that hadn't stopped him when he experienced the snow on the Heath in 1960). The truth seemed to be that his interior climate prevented it, as if he couldn't tear himself away from his "haunted jungle". Perhaps too the physicality of gouging metal and thumping clay not only offered a different outlet for the same subject but appealed to him as a way of venting his frustration, of helping him 'un-see' his "private frenzy".⁹⁷¹

Rosalind Humphries had on many occasions watched Arthur paint, together with Perceval and Blackman, out in the wild garden behind Charlie's studio. In that setting Arthur would laugh and be merry, but alone in the studio Rosalind saw a different painter: "Arthur was fierce, quick, tense". John Hull saw that too: "a quirkiness, a madness. Arthur would flip out when he was painting, he was in another space ... he was totally concentrated, the world would be collapsing around him, he'd carry on".

When Len French had visited Surf Avenue, Beaumaris, he had seen Arthur painting at night under "a big globe", executing "very attractive Wimmera paintings ... in a row, as much as four at a time ...". In London, John Hull watched the same "mass production, small ones, in a row". Throughout Hull's time with Arthur the Wimmera images were a constant, "they were his bread and butter". Arthur was aware that this drew criticism, believing most of the painters thought he was "... a commercial bum".⁹⁷² Not a poverty-stricken bum, however. In April of 1969 the Melbourne art dealer, Joe Brown would write "... as you well know I can send you the sum of seven thousand dollars for two Wimmera run-of-the-mill paintings at this very moment".⁹⁷³

⁹⁶⁹ "He intimated as much to one interviewer ..." Arthur Boyd, Hetherington interview.

⁹⁷⁰ "Mid-1963, Arthur wrote to Tam Purves ..." Arthur Boyd to Tam and Anne Purves dated 8 May, 1963, Bundanon archives.

⁹⁷¹ "...helping him 'un-see' "his private frenzy". Terence Mullaly, op cit.

⁹⁷² "Arthur was aware that this drew criticism ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

⁹⁷³ "Before the sixties closed ..." Extract of letter from Joe Brown to Boyd, Bundanon archives

John Hull saw Arthur paint particular landscapes he knew would sell. Arthur would say, "twelve of those and one picture for myself". Monetary gain aside, Hull believed that Arthur never found these paintings a chore: "He had a lovely confidence ... he saw energy in the landscape...he liked working on them". Samuel Palmer, over a century previously, wrote that "Italian air and Italian light, and the azure of an Italian sky can scarcely be imagined in England".⁹⁷⁴ Arthur's imagination was not so hard-pressed. He could easily conjure the heat-misted dome of the Wimmera and, at the twist of his fluent wrist, fill his grey English day with blue. Arthur's commitment to these landscapes is made apparent in 1964, when art lover and collector, Cedric Paynter, put together a specially commissioned group of Australian artists: Nolan, Tucker, Drysdale, Olsen, Williams, Wigley and Boyd. It was a high-profile event, with paintings touring every Australian capital city. When it came to being counted amongst his peer group, Arthur chose to submit *Wimmera Landscape*.⁹⁷⁵

While Wimmera landscapes were always executed in tempera, Arthur used a combination of oil and tempera on many of his large works. The mixed technique provided yet another symbol to help tell the story: oil the reality, the substance; tempera the spirit, the dream. In preparation, John Hull would gently score the hardboard with rough sandpaper, apply the gesso (chalk powder bound with rabbit skin glue and a little titanium) rub down, then repeat the washes and the smoothing, over and over again, as many as twelve times, creating a depth that would reflect colour back when the light hit the surface. Arthur insisted on perfection, holding each prepared board to the light, scrutinising the surface to see if he could discover a ripple. If he found the slightest lump or bump, his response would be: "That's no good, John", and the board would be rejected, with instructions to cut it up. "There was no debate".

In the studio Arthur issued orders without a second's hesitation. Once, in a conversation with a photographer employed to reproduce Arthur's work, he almost reduced the man to tears with his insistence that the colour be true. John found it necessary to pull Arthur aside and tell him to "cool it". Arthur would not, could not, accept the 5% colour leeway Kodak allowed. John believed if Arthur hadn't been driven to paint, he had the qualities to have been Chairman of I.C.I. or Lord King: "Arthur had ...the energy ... the ruthlessness ..." And, as Hull witnessed over and over again, he possessed the art of evasiveness: "Faced by a barrage of journalists" he believed Arthur could manoeuvre his way out, "without answering a bloody question".

If Arthur didn't see himself as a captain of industry, he had what it took to tread the boards. When dealers came to the house, he put on a show. A great flurry of cleaning would precede arrivals: a twenty-four hour panic, played to the tune of a whirring

⁹⁷⁴ "Samuel Palmer, over a century previously, wrote ..." Letter from Samuel Palmer to Samuel Giles, 1838.

⁹⁷⁵ "When it came to being counted amongst his peer group ..." Other paintings in 'The Viscount Collection' were: *Ceremony at the Rockface*, by Russell Drysdale; *Burke* by Sidney Nolan, *Summer in the You Beaut Country*, by John Olsen, *Gippsland Explorer*, by Albert Tucker, *You-Yang Pond* by Fred Williams, and *Government Reserve, Roebourne, North W.A.*, by James Wigley.'

vacuum cleaner.⁹⁷⁶ One of John Hull's duties was to purchase a bottle of whisky to fill a small decanter (its size matching the budget in the early days). This would be set on a side table and all the paintings from the studio, with the exception of the ones Arthur didn't wish to sell, carried into the front room. The ringing bell would signal the rising curtain. Only Arthur's footsteps would be heard on the stairs, down the long corridor: for the rest, silence. Meanwhile, Hull would be exiting the front room through the studio door, backwards, brushing up white shag-pile carpet as he went.

As negotiations proceeded, Hull would linger in the wings, waiting for instructions to move the paintings. At the same time he was keeping his eye out for the prompt that would signal the need for more whiskey. If the coded message came, he'd creep quietly out the back door, over the garden wall, through the neighbouring house, and back to the liquor store. When dealing began in earnest, John's description of Arthur's demeanour was "senile". He would give no response when questioned about price. Pointed, precise questions would be posed, and in return Arthur would mutter something vague, mumble something inarticulate. He would keep this up until he heard a figure, the one he'd been waiting for. Then -- snap -- the deal was done.

John Hull had seen Arthur's patient technique as early as the Whitechapel Retrospective. At a pre-exhibition meeting everyone had something to say about how the show should be organised, how the paintings should be hung. While the conjecture went on, the man who painted the pictures said nothing. Eventually, when everyone had exhausted their opinions, Arthur made a move. It would be signalled by a "characteristic" sign that John learned to recognise over the years: "It was just a little shift of the chair. I'd always wait for that shift ... then Arthur would say what he'd wanted to say".

Arthur had always conducted his affairs in the same manner: always polite, quiet, never pressing -- he saved his abandonment for his work. He believed acceptable behaviour, "good taste" in painting was extraneous, a problem. It didn't leave "room to make ... mistakes". He wasn't looking to create disorder for its own sake but he believed that, if a painting looked perfect, if you could look at a painting and see that there was nowhere that man could have gone wrong, that picture was "as dead as a doornail". Arthur preferred to follow the risk-takers of the renaissance: "They went beyond the prescription ... you want to be able to try something that might fail".⁹⁷⁷

According to Len French he had become "a different fellow in London than the fellow I knew in Beaumaris." The point of difference? "Confidence." French felt this to be a universal condition for his fellow painters after travelling to London:

...prior to that, we had a bit of a cringe about us...we hadn't seen real pictures ... the great painters like Bacon, that humbled you ... but I looked around at the rest ... the English painters, their little shows of ten pictures in a little gallery ... and thought 'that doesn't worry me'. I'm sure Arthur felt like that.

⁹⁷⁶ "A great flurry of cleaning would precede arrivals ..." Lucy Boyd interview, 29 June, 2000.

⁹⁷⁷ "He believed acceptable behaviour ..." ABC radio archives

Although Arthur never said so. Sure as Len French was about so many things, he could never be sure of Arthur. To French, Arthur always seemed "distant". Even Blackman, who spent a good deal of time with Arthur, travelling with him to Paris and Vienna; sharing rooms; learning to live with Arthur's ways, his habit of sleeping with the window open no matter the weather, complained to Jean Langley: "Arthur doesn't love me". Many confided in Arthur, but Arthur confided in no one: according to Yvonne, not even her. However, when it came to his paintings, Arthur sought out Yvonne's response, just as he had all those years ago, writing from the Army camp in Bendigo, needing her opinion on the deepest level: "... please try and tell me what sort of feeling you think my feeling for you is ..."⁹⁷⁸

John Hull never got into discussion about the subject matter of Arthur's paintings; anyone close to Arthur knew it was a dead-end occupation. When friends were tempted to ask what a particular painting might mean, Arthur closed down. Jack Golson, a friend of Arthur's from the end of the sixties onwards, would learn Arthur could not be drawn: "I got nowhere ... he'd circumvent ..."⁹⁷⁹ When Brian O'Shaughnessy wrote an insightful essay for the Whitechapel catalogue, Arthur's response was accusatory: "You're trying to psychoanalyse me". John Hull recalls that "if O'Shaughnessy would wax lyrical about a painting, Arthur would do his act, he didn't want to know..." Hull only ever witnessed Arthur seek the opinion of one person: "He wanted [Yvonne] in the studio at the end of the day ... if [she] came into the studio on that level, talking about the paintings, I would slip away".

Arthur was once reported to have expressed a dislike of women⁹⁸⁰ but, although some suggest he favoured the company of men,⁹⁸¹ his behaviour towards Yvonne certainly separated Arthur from the boys. Len French admitted "I don't particularly want to discuss my paintings with my wife", and added "I'm sure John Brack wouldn't have ... it's like a separate life somehow". This is one of Arthur's great differences. This is why, when moved, he could approach his canvas with such overwhelming immediacy. His life and his paint were indivisible - one free-flowing river.

"One doesn't change ... one elaborates on the past." Arthur Boyd⁹⁸²

The 1963 Zwemmer exhibition bought a new commission. Richard Buckle had been a long-time fan of Arthur's work since engaging his skills for the ballet *Renard*. Buckle

⁹⁷⁸ "However, when it came to his paintings, Arthur sought out Yvonne's response ..." Letter from Arthur to Yvonne Lennie, Bundanon archives

⁹⁷⁹ "Jack Golson, a friend of Arthur's ..." Jack Golson interview

⁹⁸⁰ "Arthur was once reported to have expressed a dislike of women ..." Arthur Boyd to Jean Langley. Jean Langley interview.

⁹⁸¹ "some suggest he favoured the company of men ..." Beryl Reid interview

⁹⁸² "One doesn't change...one elaborates on the past ..." Arthur Boyd, *The Scotsman*, Saturday 2 November, 1969.

was dance critic for *The Observer*, and he and Bryan Robertson were influential figures within the contemporary artistic community of London. Buckle had been impressed by *Elektra*; viewing Arthur's ceramic paintings at Zwemmer, particularly those with a Shakespearean theme, they struck him as perfect for his next project. Buckle had been appointed artistic director of celebrations to mark Shakespeare's quatercentenary (1564-1964) and was amassing a vast exhibition to be staged in a pavilion at Stratford-upon-Avon in April the following year. Every aspect of Shakespeare's life and work would be illustrated by hundreds of painters and sculptors. The play chosen by Arthur and Buckle was *Romeo and Juliet*.

In November, just a month after completing his exhibition, Arthur began work on this next commission.⁹⁸³ He confessed to being "either very mad or very keen". He was fully aware of how physically tiring the work could be, and spoke of "a nervous strain" that was "pretty grim".⁹⁸⁴ He gambled against the high odds of clay cracking. It was a delicate process that demanded patience; and, even though he would take "tremendous care", he dropped tiles. As he reported in his understated way, it was: "... a bit depressing seeing a week's work break in half at your feet".⁹⁸⁵ Yet Arthur knew the upside: he knew how the kiln could transform images on cold clay in flat colours into paintings of dazzling liquidity; like intensely coloured jewels, flowing but forever fixed, under a crystal sea.

The conflicted, loyalty-torn lovers attracted Arthur. The grief created by their opposing houses connected to the black man and his bride. One critic observed: "The young lovers looked as pathetic as any of Mr. Boyd's haunting aboriginals".⁹⁸⁶ In the midst of working for this exhibition, Arthur confessed that he too was divided, torn between two tribes: "I am a man with my heart in two places". He was discussing his longing to return to Australia, and his need to continue working in London. It was his hope that "these days one can live in two countries".⁹⁸⁷

Arthur had responded passionately to the "tragedy" of *Romeo and Juliet*, finding it "greater than *Macbeth* or any other of Shakespeare's plays". The element he found "most intriguing" was that "tragedy is caused by accident, or as some would say, fate".⁹⁸⁸ Arthur knew about providence, destiny, 'some consequence yet hanging in the stars': life's toppling shove to the most concentrated of line walkers. Arthur singled out the bad timing of Friar John's journey; the delay, the 'unhappy fortune,' that prevented the delivery of the all-important letter.

⁹⁸³ "In November, just a month after completing his exhibition, Arthur began work on his next commission". Letter from Arthur Boyd to John Reed, November 1963. "I am doing some *Romeo and Juliet* ceramic panels for Shakespeare festival next April."

⁹⁸⁴ "He was fully aware of how physically tiring ..." Alan Trengove, newspaper clipping without title of publication or date: 'A Call for Mr. Boyd'. Bundanon archives

⁹⁸⁵ "As he reported in his understated way ..." Ibid

⁹⁸⁶ "One critic observed ..." Ibid

⁹⁸⁷ "In the midst of working for this exhibition ..." *Woman's Weekly*, 8 April, 1964.

⁹⁸⁸ "The element he found 'most intriguing' ..." *Hampstead & Highgate Express and Hampstead Garden Suburb and Golders Green News*. April 24, 1964.

Arthur had experienced how accident and disaster can turn on a split second: thresholds of time where a beat changes everything. The pulse of a flame escaping the containment of the kiln. The instance of lockdown as the body surrenders to a shuddering seizure. The immeasurable space between the squeeze of a trigger finger and the shattering of a rabbit's face. The opening swing of a door unleashing a naked screaming woman, and the surprising wrath of his gentle mother. And the closing swing of that same door when, for the first time, the eldest son understood it separated his longing father from his mother's bed. Romeo's fate, like Actaeon's, turned on a flickering moment - the raising of Diana's eyes too early, the opening of Juliet's eyes too late. During his childhood, throughout the turbulent 1940s and 1950s, Arthur must have come to a realisation ... look or don't look, either way there was no happy ending.

Romeo and Juliet served to confirm Arthur's *idée fixe* - sex equals doom. Although Arthur was typically reticent: "... I can't really explain what I feel about the play in words" - strangely enough, on this occasion he afforded a rare glimpse of his visual intentions. The "romance" of *Romeo & Juliet*, he revealed, was in the composition of the two lovers, while the "tragedy" was symbolised by "the beast of death growing out of the poison cup".⁹⁸⁹ He also managed to describe his admiration for Shakespeare: "...the man's genius wasn't bounded by nations and continents...there's so much in [*Romeo & Juliet*] you could work on that same theme for the rest of your life..."

Arthur's heroes inter-connected. Vincent van Gogh once wrote: "Alone or almost alone amongst painters Rembrandt has that heartbroken tenderness, that glimpse into a superhuman infinitude that seems so natural there; you come upon it in many places in Shakespeare".⁹⁹⁰ The plays, for Arthur, had "the ingredients of pure art". He found the stories so rich and colourful and three-dimensional he likened the bard to "a potter-painter with words". The completed polyptych measured around 12 feet by 18 feet⁹⁹¹ and consisted of fifteen scenes (a large central panel of over six tiles, flanked on either side by two panels composed of an interior panel of four tiles and an exterior of three tiles).

Like the playwright he so admired, Arthur dug up past myths and histories, the bones of well-known tales, and fleshed them out with his own story. Yet, while Shakespeare explored a myriad of psyches through his words, he revealed little of the author. Arthur laid himself bare in paint. In the 1960s when asked if his symbols had remained constant throughout the years, Arthur agreed, but then went on to explain that, like organic matter, his symbols lived, that they were constantly "developing ... changing".⁹⁹² While Franz Philipp worked hard at finding connections to Shakespeare's text, he drew a long

⁹⁸⁹ "Although Arthur was typically reticent ..." Ibid

⁹⁹⁰ "Vincent van Gogh once wrote ..." Extract of letter from Vincent to his brother Theo, mid-year 1889.

⁹⁹¹ "The completed polyptych measured ..." The overall size reported by Franz Philipp in *Arthur Boyd* of 36 by 37 feet is in error.

⁹⁹² "In the sixties, when asked if his symbols had remained constant ..." Arthur Boyd, Schooling interview

bow.⁹⁹³ Arthur made the 'fearful passage of their death-marked love'⁹⁹⁴ his story. Any direct relationship to the play was to be found in the theme of love thwarted and denied.

Symbols and forms are transposed from the 1944 painting, *Head in a Cup*. Given that the forlorn male figure in this early work resembles Merric, could the cup be read as a poisoned chalice? Certainly Arthur would have been aware of the undrinkable mulberry tea given to Doris by Merric on their first day of marriage. By 1963 the cup has passed to other hands. This later version shows a distinctly different pair of lovers, seemingly affected by a love potion rather than a poisoned concoction. *The Hammock* lovers reappear, closer still than the lovers of the 1962 paintings, and quite separate from the fraught hammock lovers of the forties. These lovers fuse into oneness. Caught between two worlds – with the half-arc of the tree bower and the grotesque beast – their union spans the divide between life and death. The meltingly entwined lovers from 1962, also reappear, little changed.

Throughout the fifteen scenes, suffused with nocturnal blacks and blues and a golden luminous light, the lovers come together, are parted, and connect again. In some scenes a third and fourth figure enters. The topmost outer tiles are of particular interest.⁹⁹⁵ They appear to be 'set' pieces, possessing both a drawn curtain and the footlights of a stage. In the left tile a light source falls from a kerosene lantern that was seen attracting moths in *Shearers Playing for a Bride*. The lantern now illuminates a pair of lovers; the man in the missionary position dominates. There is an audience: the face of a blue-black man, a man in darkness, looms in the foreground and gazes towards the scene, grieving, tears flowing. The lovers on the right side (an intentional pun?) are cushioned by a sea of blue and bathed in moonbeams. Nothing here is harsh or artificial. The woman has reversed her slab-like pose and is now in complete partnership with her lover. In contrast to the left tile painting, here is both nature and nurture: arms and hands reach out to cradle and connect and the woman's breast is exposed rather than her pudenda. These lovers play out the scene for themselves alone. There is no outsider. As one critic noted of the earlier lovers in the tiles, "this is not a voyeur's record of the facts of sex but a poet's vision of its spirit".⁹⁹⁶ When questioned whether the lovers in the tiles were more sensuous and less guilty than previous lovers, Arthur replied, "Yes."⁹⁹⁷

The exhibition spanned the summer of 1964, and re-opened for the summer of 1965. In the first year over 360,000 people trooped through the vast hangar, but by the following

⁹⁹³ "While Franz Philipp worked hard at finding connections ..." Arthur, commenting on Franz Philipp's work, said circumspectly: "The writing is marvellous. It's a scholarly work. I think from the writing point of view it is the most erudite ... nothing to do with the paintings but the way it's written ..." Chalker tapes.

⁹⁹⁴ "Arthur made the 'fearful passage of their death-marked love' ..." Prologue, Chorus: *Romeo & Juliet*.

⁹⁹⁵ "The topmost outer tiles are of particular interest". Although the position of the tiles changed in the hanging in the permanent gallery hanging, this is the sequence originally described to Franz Philipp. Philipp had written to Arthur asking: "How does the whole thing assemble? There are seven tiles in each 'wing but which on right which on the left? A small photo or sketch would help greatly." Letter from Philipp to Boyd, 21 December, 1965. Bundanon archives.

⁹⁹⁶ "As one critic noted of the earlier lovers in the tiles ..." Derrick Grigs, *The Guardian* 15 April, 1964.

⁹⁹⁷ "When questioned whether the lovers in the tiles ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

year the number had dropped to 200,000. Richard Buckle, later to call this his “doomed Shakespeare Exhibition”,⁹⁹⁸ had presided over a loss-making exercise to the tune of over one hundred thousand pounds. In the hope of recouping something from the financial failure, almost the entire exhibition was put up for sale by Sotheby’s. The surreal ensemble included six twenty-foot-high Yeomen warders, fashioned out of vermiculite and dental plaster; for good measure, Queen Elizabeth I¹ and her courtiers were thrown in. One lot offered a huge muscular figure of a pensive young Shakespeare, and another a sixteen by twenty-nine foot painting of the Spanish Armada. *The Times*, previewing the auction, was delicately scornful, indicating no remorse at the loss of the looped recording of a baritone singing “*Greensleeves* for perhaps the 54,000 time”.⁹⁹⁹ No doubt his warbling had proved irritatingly bizarre enough to conjure Falstaff’s ludicrous cry: “Let the sky rain potatoes, let it thunder to the tune of *Greensleeves*...” It was only “Sometimes”, according to *The Times*, the visitor “... find[s] himself transported into the world of Shakespeare.” The singular optimistic note in the report was directed towards Arthur Boyd: “the panels and figures in the *Romeo and Juliet* section may sell easily and well”.

The prediction proved correct. Sydney art dealer, Frank McDonald, spent five wasted hours, back and forth on the train from London to Stratford-on-Avon, in the hope of purchasing the ceramics.¹⁰⁰⁰ They went for more than McDonald “dare pay.” The ‘*Romeo & Juliet Suite*’ of tiles was purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria for installation in the new Centre that was still in the process of being completed.¹⁰⁰¹ They paid five thousand pounds sterling.

Joe Brown, the art dealer, had been instrumental in bringing the tiles to the attention of the director of the National Gallery of Victoria, Eric Westbrook. Brown had first met Arthur in the English summer of 1964, introduced in a letter by a mutual friend, Arthur’s solicitor, William Lasica. On that particular trip, no doubt Brown saw the *Romeo & Juliet* tiles on display in Stratford. Brown was a reliable, canny, efficient man with a keen artistic eye, who was a stayer. If he said he would do something, it got done. Over the years he would prove a staunch ally to both Arthur and his extended family.

Throughout the 1960s, the number of times Arthur personally put pen to paper and wrote a letter from start to finish barely reached double figures. The canny and less stubborn

⁹⁹⁸ “Richard Buckle, later to call this his ‘doomed Shakespeare Exhibition’” Richard Buckle, *Art & Artists*, ‘Variations on a theme of titian (2)’ September 1971.

⁹⁹⁹ *The Times*, previewing the auction was delicately scornful ...” *The Times*, 24 September, 1965.

¹⁰⁰⁰ “Sydney art dealer, Frank McDonald ...” After the original *Romeo & Juliet* ceramics had been sold, a request was made for another exhibition. Arthur then repeated the series on perspex panels. He admitted to a journalist (tbs): “I did a whole *Romeo & Juliet* on [perspex] ... not satisfactory ... quite effective but not very satisfactory.” Interviews were conducted with Frank McDonald in Sydney September 2002, April 2006, and Italy May 2003. All subsequent quotes are derived from these sources.

¹⁰⁰¹ The ‘*Romeo & Juliet Suite*’ of tiles ...” The purchase of the *Romeo & Juliet Suite* was put into motion by Joe Brown who presented them to Eric Westbrook, Director of The National Gallery of Victoria. The acquisition was motioned and approved by the Women’s Committee of the new Centre on 19 May, 1965, and a recommendation submitted to the Building Committee to pay Arthur’s asking price of five thousand pounds sterling.

among family and friends began addressing correspondence to Yvonne, allowing her to pass on their messages and enquiries. Across business letters and the letters of friends, Arthur would perhaps be moved to scratch out a few thoughts and leave it to Yvonne to construct and type the reply. In some instances Yvonne would even sign the letter for him. Plea letters would begin in an understanding mode ('you're busy, I expect ...') then move on to cajoling ('how can you be this busy?') and finally reach an hysterical pitch ('write ... or else!'). It was Yvonne who would eventually apologise and explain. Arthur's only response to his neglected friends, if they ever got within shouting distance, would be, "I send you my thoughts in the air".

Jean Langley would never receive a personal letter from Arthur. May 13, 1963 after viewing Arthur's show at the Australian Galleries, Jean wrote to the "Boys". Nevertheless, she neatly managed to inform Arthur that she had now dismissed the two remaining Johns in her life. The relationship with John Sinclair, she reported, was platonic but "quite mad ... John S. lives on one side of the house and Jane and I and Baby live on the other". As for John Hull, she complained that, although they corresponded regularly, there was scant news: "his letters say little of what is happening to him, but I feel I have made a great ruin of his life and his struggle is great". Finally, she related an outing she had made with Sunday to the Australian Galleries to see Arthur's paintings. Although she found it "marvellous to see the paintings again", she had two reservations: she disliked the self-portrait of Arthur, feeling he had made himself "look like Hitler",¹⁰⁰² and she longed for the return of *The Hunter*: "The one sad thing at Rose Cottage is the blank wall where the Hunter did once hang".

According to Jean Langley, this was her favourite among all of Arthur's works. Arthur, she said, had promised it would always stay with her, telling her that she was one of the few people who had really *seen* the painting, loved it, understood it.¹⁰⁰³ When Jean travelled to London, the painting travelled with her. When the Whitechapel Retrospective was being staged, Arthur wanted it included. Jean was reluctant to let it go.. To allay her fears, Arthur agreed to record its provenance on the back and in his hand wrote that the painting belonged to Jean. Jean received no response to her letter, not by proxy, or through friends or family. A year passed and Jean wrote again, addressing her letter solely to Arthur this time. She had raced home from an exhibition of Arthur's works, staged in Melbourne,¹⁰⁰⁴ to sit down and pour out a letter full of joy and praise and love for the works. In this letter she once again made an impassioned plea for the return of *The Hunter*. She received no reply.

As John Hull tells it, he and Arthur had been working side by side in the basement of Hampstead Lane, preparing for the Whitechapel exhibition. When John noticed the

¹⁰⁰² "Although she found it 'marvellous to see the paintings again' ..." Franz Philipp concurred with Jean Langley's opinion of Arthur's self-portrait, describing it as "brutal."

¹⁰⁰³ "Arthur, she said, had promised it would always stay with her ..." Jean Langley interview: "The day he took it away I said 'I'll never see it again' and he replied 'Oh, yes you will.' I think he had a ruthless streak ... being a painter was foremost in his mind".

¹⁰⁰⁴ "She had raced home from an exhibition of Arthur's works ..." Arthur's 1964 retrospective at M.O.M.A

inscription on the back of *The Hunter*, he drew it to Arthur's attention: "That's got Jean's name and address ... Mentone ... on the back". With that, Arthur picked up a coin and began erasing the inscription. Hull then handed Arthur a stanley knife, instructing: "You'd better have this if you're going to do it". Arthur took the knife and proceeded to scrape it off. In time, Arthur would compensate Jean with other paintings, but *The Hunter* would never hang on her wall again.

If revenge is a dish best eaten cold, Arthur must have experienced a sweet thrill when, after making varied numeric calculations on numerous pieces of scrap paper and backs of old letters, he realised he was able to approach the landlady who had taken him to court and present her with an offer for 13 Hampstead Lane. On his arrival in London he had only just managed to find the funds to rent part of the house. He could never have dreamt that in just four and a half years the entire dwelling would be his. One aspect of the sale troubled Arthur. It would seem that he not only believed in fate, but in suspicious signs and bad omens. In April of 1965, he wrote to the Borough Engineer:

I have just purchased the house in Highgate known as 'Grove Lodge,' 13 Hampstead Lane. I wish to change the number from 13 to 11 if possible or alternatively to any other number available.¹⁰⁰⁵

His unlucky draw on the Highgate map could not be altered and the address of the house remained unchanged, as did the interior.

Although much of the decoration and furnishing inherited from Mrs Ashbee was haphazard, little was done to make the interior any more desirable: the black and cream wallpaper emblazoned with blackbirds stayed, as did the now less than white shag-pile carpet in the front room and the bright orange lino on the kitchen floor. Arthur had a fine eye for antiques, but some in the family believed Yvonne's communist values repelled thoughts of gentrifying.¹⁰⁰⁶ While Yvonne wished to shrug off her bourgeois background, Arthur had been sneered at and stigmatised for being bohemian in his childhood. Now he taught his children how to shine their shoes. He liked everything to be "tidy, nice, proper".¹⁰⁰⁷ When Australians, such as Rupert Murdoch or Anne Purves, threatened a house call, Arthur would cover everything in dust sheets and make the excuse that decorators were in the throes of transforming the place. Like his brother Guy, Arthur had felt the chaos of Open Country and hankered after the comfort and the aesthetics he had experienced as a child when he had stayed with his grandparents in Sandringham.

¹⁰⁰⁵ "I wish to change the number from 13 ..." Extract of letter from Arthur Boyd to council, Bundanon archives

¹⁰⁰⁶ "... some in the family believed Yvonne's communist values ..." Polly Boyd interview, Helena Boyd interview.

¹⁰⁰⁷ "He liked every to be "tidy, nice, proper". Lucy Boyd interview.

However, there is no doubt that most importantly to Arthur, his house was a home. To the writer, Taner Baybars, accustomed as he was to the small dimensions of his own flat, 13 Hampstead Lane was a “fairytale” house. “Happiness came oozing from the walls ... I remember the kitchen and the smells coming from the kitchen, the children buzzing around, and Arthur’s studio looking out onto this garden ... it was a very positive feeling ... domestic family and creativity altogether”.¹⁰⁰⁸ Baybars had been invited over to explain the theme of his recently completed, about to be published, book, *A trap for the burglar*.¹⁰⁰⁹ He was hoping Arthur would agree to illustrate the text. Baybars had first seen Arthur’s work at the Whitechapel Retrospective and had been so moved by *Angel Spying on Adam and Eve*, it had triggered the composition of a poem. A photographer friend, Oswald Jones, known as ‘Ossie’, was a young man who occasionally took photographs of Arthur’s work, had been the go-between. Now they all sat together, the men and their wives, drinking tea and discussing the book. As Baybars explained to the gathering that day, the work confronted his own, very real fear: “I was terrified of being robbed of my identity ... the one thing a burglar couldn’t take away, but at that time I felt the danger was very close”.

Although Baybars felt Yvonne was more interested in what the book was about, it was Arthur who insisted he must read it before committing. Arthur got back to Baybars without delay. He told him he liked the book and agreed to do the illustrations. He asked no questions about the text and offered little response. Baybars remembered him talking about “the mystery” he found in the book, “maybe he used the word ambiguity”. Baybars understood: he found Arthur’s paintings “in the same vein”. Yet for all the complicated allegory in Arthur’s work, he found his execution swift and spare: “Arthur was marvellous ... very much like Picasso, so economical, four or five lines and you have a woman asleep on a chaise lounge”.

While Arthur and Taner Baybars both delighted in disguise, in the mask of metaphor, *A trap for the burglar* left *The Times* reviewer tangled in “elaborate parallels”, so bound up by “layers of double entendre” he sounded like the victim of a robbery himself. Although he admired Baybars’ “splendidly barbed observation of the little lies and innuendoes of married life”, he found the “ambiguity which shroud[ed] every thought and action” was “sometimes too tortuous to be tolerated”. As he explained to his readers: “It is about being burgled, first in the literal every-day sense of one’s possessions being stolen, and then in every metaphorical way imaginable – of one’s wife, one’s unborn baby, one’s peace of mind, happiness...”¹⁰¹⁰ Arthur’s illustrations of entwined human forms had served to further bind and knot the narrative. A restriction had been put on the deal. The drawings would never leave Arthur’s possession. Those chosen for the book

¹⁰⁰⁸ “Happiness came oozing from the walls ...” Taner Baybars interview, France, November, 2005.

¹⁰⁰⁹ “Baybars had been invited over to explain ...” *A trap for the burglar*: Taner Baybars a novel illustrated by Arthur Boyd’, Peter Owen, London, 1965.

¹⁰¹⁰ “While Arthur and Taner Baybars both delighted in disguise, in the mask of metaphor ...” *The Times*, 3 June, 1965.

were to be photographed by Jones in Arthur's studio.¹⁰¹¹ Baybars found Yvonne, "lovely, very intelligent: a custodian".

When the project was completed, Baybars took copies of the book around to Arthur. In exchange Arthur pressed drawings into his hand, with the instruction not to mention it to anybody. Baybars believed: "Arthur would have given anything away". Even in Beaumaris when life was still a struggle Arthur would give tubes of paint to Charles Blackman, and white lead and sharpened bamboo quills to Mirka Mora. But now he had reached a point in his life where he could afford to give work away, and this trait would grow in proportion to his fortune. Like his father forcing his best pots into the hands of departing guests, very few friends or acquaintances of Arthur's went away from his house empty-handed. If necessary, if the way was blocked, either by his friends insistence they could not accept such a gift, or (as with Doris) by Yvonne's disapproval, Arthur would resort to subterfuge. Some would open their car boots on their arrival home to find a series of etchings, or a painting, hidden under an old blanket.¹⁰¹² Others would be presented with valuable lithographs bundled up, like fish and chips, in newspaper.¹⁰¹³

After a visit to the Boyds in London, Doug and Anne Cairns flew all the way from Highgate to their apple orchard before they discovered that the cardboard cylinder Arthur had thrust into their hands on departure, telling them it contained a calendar, actually protected an important canvas.¹⁰¹⁴ John Hull, in the latter half of the increasingly 1960s, learnt that if he had done Arthur a special favour, or he hadn't been in work for some time, he could not leave his coat lying unattended without inevitably finding three or four hundred pounds secreted in the pocket. When Noel Counihan visited London in the sixties, Arthur not only shared his knowledge of dry point but gave Counihan the expensive copper plates and the assistance of John Hull in the printing of his work.¹⁰¹⁵ Although Sidney Nolan was by no means in need of financial assistance, Arthur would insist that he could not leave without armfuls of copper plates.

Arthur's giving was ingrained and showed in his dedicated willingness to be hospitable. There were few rules in his house but when people came to stay the children knew without asking that they would give up their beds for the guests. John Hull saw Arthur's generosity daily: "He always wanted to feed people, always asked if you had had

¹⁰¹¹ "Those chosen for the book were to be photographed by Jones in Arthur's studio." In 1966, Frank McDonald, of Clune Gallery Sydney, held an exhibition of prints and drawings by Arthur Boyd, David Hockney and Brett Whiteley. The drawings submitted by Arthur were illustrations for *A Trap for the Burglar* selling at around ninety pounds each. Critic Elwyn Lynn reported that Arthur's "unwavering vision" looked "more obsessive than dedicated when compared to the playful, cool eclecticism of David Hockney" and the quality that Hockney and Whiteley shared of "a throwaway, natural ease and a very positive use of what some call negative space."

¹⁰¹² "Some would open their car boots on their arrival home ..." Nadine Armadio interview: Sandra McGrath interview.

"Others would be presented with valuable lithographs ..." Don Featherstone interview.

¹⁰¹⁴ "After a visit to the Boyds in London ..." Anne Cairns interview. This was a work from the 'Potter' series.

¹⁰¹⁵ "When Noel Counihan visited London in the sixties ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

enough, always waiting to push that little bit extra onto you". Following Merric's example, Arthur would entertain the local tramp. He became such a regular that the children gave him the nickname, Fatty. And Arthur would be just as courteous and deferential to 'Fatty' as he was to any other guest, ushering out the best teacups and fussing over heaped plates of biscuits. Arthur did not explain to his children, as some fathers might, that he had adopted his father's custom.

Just as he never explained the situation that occurred, one summer holiday, as he drove his children in the Bedford van through Europe. As a young man, driving David and Mary through the Victorian countryside, Arthur had dealt with a similar circumstance, but in a different way. After repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, asking his siblings to stop quarrelling, he slammed on the brakes, told everyone to get out, and drove off to paint in peace, returning at the end of the day to drive them home. But now, exasperated beyond endurance with a car full of his own squabbling children, he stopped the car, got out, wrenched a branch off a tree, rolled up his trousers and began beating his own leg. Jamie was horrified, and suffered immense guilt.

When Arthur described this strange, frightening custom of Merric's to an interviewer years later, it was apparent he too had experienced the same feelings as Jamie. Yet the suffering spiralled on down through the generations:

...(it) was much worse than punishment. We had a big plum tree outside the back door and he used to pick a switch off the plum tree about two foot, three foot long, and he would then proceed to roll up his trouser leg and make the guilty person watch him. He said, 'I want you to see that I'd much rather hurt myself than to touch you.' So he'd proceed to give his legs terrible whacks. This had an awful effect but it was quite effective because none of the children wanted to see him damage himself ...¹⁰¹⁶

It is likely Arthur's self-inflicted punishment happened in the summer of 1964, after Open Country had been sold and destroyed, when the memory of Merric pressed close, and home seemed further away than he could ever have imagined.

It was the year that the mulberry tree, his father's pottery, the kiln, the studio Arthur had built with his own hands, the grove of elms beside it, the bedroom he had been born in, the frieze garlanding the walls of that room, the window of that room twined with rose vines, the skylight that shone light on the bowed heads of his mother and father as they sat drawing and painting in the Brown Room, the fireplace that burned with over thirty years of Arthur's memories; all these had been broken and bulldozed, leaving nothing behind but a single tree standing in what was once a mature, wild orchard of peach, apple, pear and plum. The trees had been sawn into logs and tossed over neighbouring fences. The building that had been home and shelter to some of Australia's greatest artists had become rubble. In its place would rise a rabbit warren of concrete flats.

¹⁰¹⁶ "This had an awful effect ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

The walls of Arthur's father's house had fallen, but from 1964, until the end of the decade, Merric would strongly influence Arthur's works. His memory would rise in the shape of saint and king, lover and potter, and become the subject of some of Arthur Boyd's most acclaimed works.

CHAPTER 15

And the walls came tumbling down

“It’s hard to see to one’s affairs from this remoteness”

Letter from Arthur Boyd to John Reed, 28 April 1966. Bundanon archives.

From 1963 onwards there were many exhibitions of Arthur Boyd's work.. By 1964, Rudy Komon was exhibiting in Sydney alongside Kym Bonython in his new gallery, and Tam Purves's demands and requests were subdued by the high-pitched interest of gallery owners from Oxford to Brisbane. Frank McDonald from the Terry Clune Gallery in Sydney had come knocking on the door of Flask Walk looking for landscapes. After Arthur's first exhibition at Zwemmer, Michael Chase was calling with orders for clients who wanted works repeated, in the same style, in different sizes. As Arthur's reputation gained strength, so too did the grip on many of his 'loaned' works.

Even the Australian High Commission in London had become tenacious. In the mid-1950s Martin had lent *Sugar Loaf Hill* to Australia House. After its removal for the Whitechapel retrospective Martin made enquiries about getting it back. In response, a brace of Machiavellian missives, both bearing the same date April 5 1963, were sent from the Office of the High Commissioner for Australia¹⁰¹⁷:

I send you a copy of my letter to your uncle about his painting *Sugar Loaf Hill*. I thought I should ensure that your uncle has no doubts about our appreciation of his gesture in making his painting available to the High Commissioner some years ago and that he would agree, as soon as you are able to release the painting, to its being returned to the High Commissioner's possession..

To Martin:

I would like to assure you that the High Commissioner has been very grateful to you for your generosity in making your painting available, and we are hopeful that as soon as Mr Arthur Boyd is able to release the painting you will be agreeable to its being returned to Australia House and retained in the High Commissioner's possession.

It is unlikely that generous Martin, in prosperous days past, would have pursued the matter but both his health and his financial situation were beginning to fail. The fortunes of nephew and uncle were swiftly reversing.

Richard Buckle had also become a custodian with a reluctance to release his charge. When noises were made about the return of the work that hung on the walls of The Globe, Buckle had been unresponsive. Arthur must have felt he could not pester Buckle further, but it was John Hull took matters into his own hands. Commandeering the Bedford van he headed for the theatre, strode in, picked the work off the wall and drove it home.

Collecting works in Australia proved more complicated. Since the mid-1940s Arthur had lent paintings. They had hung on the walls of the Sinclairs' Rose Cottage, Camo Jackson's house, and Georges and Mirka Mora's flat. In those lean times the pictures

¹⁰¹⁷ All letters quoted throughout this chapter have been either sourced from Bundanon archives, Reed papers, SLV, or *Letters of John Reed*: ed Barrett Reid and Nancy Underhill, 'Defining Australian Cultural Life', 1920-1981, Australia: Viking, 2001.

had been sent out into the world in the hope that a passing visitor would be inspired to buy. Many works, of course, rested with the Reeds.

In 1962 the National Gallery of Victoria presented an exhibition of paintings titled 'Rebels & Precursors.' Confining the 'angry decade' to 1937–1947, they reduced the participants down to six painters: Tucker, Vassilieff, Bergner, Boyd, Nolan and Perceval. The catalogue introduction made a point of singling out Albert Tucker for his "hours of time" so "generously spent ... tracking down and collecting works so that his colleagues might be properly represented ..."

Arthur hadn't quite seen it that way. He told Grazia Gunn in the 1980s:

Bert and John were the only two people organising it and I wrote and asked if these works we sent ... they were in Australia ... be included in the exhibition. These pictures weren't shown ... I don't know how, or who, picked out the pictures ... I don't understand why they were left out"¹⁰¹⁸

There had been complications. In a letter to Alan McCulloch, 4 May, 1962¹⁰¹⁹ Arthur related that the 'Rebels' exhibition had originally been planned for November 1961, and at that time he had sent out "quite a number of paintings". But, due to the delay in the timing of 'Rebels' some of Arthur's works were needed for the Whitechapel retrospective in June 1962 and were shipped back to England.¹⁰²⁰ "The reason I am tell you this is that I feel that this 10- year period of my work has been of necessity divided up and ...neither here nor in Melbourne will I be fully represented...one always wants to appear in the best possible light".

In the final selection Arthur was represented by twenty-seven works. The weight fell on the side of portraits and pastorals, with only around a quarter of the works devoted to expressionistic war and post-war works. Robert Hughes was moved to comment on the inadequacy of Arthur Boyd's selection in his critique of the show: it was, he felt, 'impoverished'. At the same time he observed that, next to Nolan, "both in importance and weight of representation", came Albert Tucker.¹⁰²¹ The 1962 *Rebels and Precursors* exhibition was seminal to the Australian Modernist Movement, as art-historian, Richard Haese later highlighted. Arthur had every reason to wish to be represented as fully as possible. History was being made and Arthur was being written out of it.

At the beginning of November 1962, the first exhibition over, a travelling 'Rebels' was being organised. Phyllis Boyd wrote to Yvonne and Arthur expressing indignation at the cavalier treatment of Arthur bestowed on him by the director of the National Gallery of

¹⁰¹⁸ "These pictures weren't shown ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes. Unfortunately Arthur does not name these paintings.

¹⁰¹⁹ "In a letter to Alan McCulloch ..." Extract of letter from Arthur to McCulloch taken from what appears to be a carbon of a draft letter. Bundanon archives

¹⁰²⁰ "But, due to the delay in the timing of 'Rebels' ... It is not clear what these works were, or if all the works sent out were then sent back.

¹⁰²¹ "At the same time he observed that, next to Nolan ..." Robert Hughes, 'Rebels and Precursors: Melbourne Painting 1937-47' *Meanjin Quarterly*, September, 1962. Hughes cited the demands of the Whitechapel retrospective as reason for the impoverished selection of Arthur's work.

Victoria: "We feel it is most unfair of Westbrook not to let you put more paintings in the show, Arthur".

The following year, with a retrospective planned for the Art Gallery of South Australia as part of the Adelaide Festival of Arts, Arthur was determined to seek out his South Melbourne paintings, to ensure that this time they would not be ignored in a corner or forgotten in a store room. When he wrote to John Reed querying the whereabouts of his early works, an epic series of letters begins. The ball, though always politely tossed, is never dropped by either party.

In August 1963 John Reed wrote to Arthur:

I am quite ashamed that I have been so long in replying to your letter ...according to our records, the Museum owns the followings paintings of yours – *Progression, Butterfly Man, Crucifixion, The Baths South Melbourne, The Cripple*¹⁰²², *The Lovers, The Stockman, The Hunter, Christ Walking On The Water*. Most of these you have generously given us yourself, and even now I have some doubt about *The Baths* and cannot recollect the circumstances of its acquisition. Does this by any chance belong to Bert? I am sorry to be so indefinite about such a vital matter, but with our lack of equipment, staff and space it has not been easy to keep everything as clear as one would like... I doubt whether we have any of your paintings at home now other than the lovely new one and 2 or 3 very early ones, including, I think, a self portrait. These would probably date back to the 30's and belong to you. I cannot now remember how they came to Heide.

With the location of certain works cleared up, the question looming large in Arthur's mind must have been: if *Cripple, Butterfly Man* and *Crucifixion* were in the possession of MOMA, why were these pictures not exhibited in 'Rebels & Precursors' exhibition.

Arthur's reply dated 10 September, 1963, moved on. It did not argue ownership: "Thank you for sending me the list of my work owned by MOMA" except to say: "I can't remember either exactly how many of the early pictures I have at MOMA." One point was not hedged: "I do know that Bert Tucker doesn't own *The Baths South Melbourne*. Neither does he own any other painting of mine, through a sale gift or exchange with me ..." Arthur also asked John to continue seeking out missing pictures: "It seems pretty important to me at this second retrospective exhibition to properly represent my early work

Reed replied immediately:

Georges and Mirka have 2 of your early paintings ... The Street Scene (with Man and Dog) and the large *Melbourne Burning*. The third one, which, I think, is the Sunflower one you mention, was given to John Perceval for the Rebels show. With regard to *The Baths*, please feel quite free to make your own decision about

¹⁰²² "According to our records, the Museum owns ..." It is to be assumed that John Reed meant 'The Cripples'

it. It is included in the list of paintings given by you, but I think this was probably because we had no other record of its ownership. You have already been extremely generous to us.

By the last week of November 1963 Robert Campbell, the man responsible for the retrospective, was rounding up paintings to be included. Arthur wrote to Reed that he had sent Campbell an:

original list of preferences ...any of the *Hunter* pictures, for example, and the two or three that are perhaps still with Georges and Mirka. Also, *Progression*, *The Fountain*, *South Melbourne*, *The Man with a Sunflower*, *Factory Girls*, *Jewish Lovers*, *The Cripples*, *Self Portrait 1939*, and *The Hunter* (the large one I have one smaller one) *Lovers by a Creek* . . . It is quite possible that I'm wrong about the whereabouts of some of those 1943 pictures that I believed were with you.

The Adelaide retrospective in March was a huge success: The *Sydney Morning Herald* going so far as to say Arthur's paintings provided "the focal point" of the entire Festival.¹⁰²³ Reed now organised for the exhibition to move on to MOMA.

Yet in the last week of November 1964, Arthur was still pushing Reed to track down works among those people who were "either 'minding' work of mine or who have somehow or other had it left at their houses in the past ..." This letter contained another pointed comment: "Of course I am mainly interested in getting a good record of the work owned by you and Sunday and by the Museum ..." Given Arthur's unusual persistence, he was a man with either a very short, or a very long, memory.

With all the exhibitions over, at the beginning of December, Reed wrote that he has only just discovered a stash of Arthur's paintings at Heide: "...five of them, all very early ones; two portraits – one a boy, one a girl – a landscape with a long figure lying right across it, a large church and houses – and a small dark beach scene with boats... these of course are all yours." A week later Reed wrote again and informed Arthur that "Mirka says that Perceval took the *Man Holding a Sunflower* for the 'Rebels and Precursors' exhibition and she has not seen it again." He had continued to unearth more pictures at Heide: "Sunday has now discovered a small batch of drawings and two paintings, one of which she says she thinks you gave to Nolan."

Arthur approached Franz Philipp: "...I am still hoping that when Nigel Buesst's prints arrive they will contain some of those 1943 pictures (*The Man Holding a Sunflower* and others that I believe George and Mirka still have)."

On 27 May, 1965, after resigning from the museum, John Reed, prompted by Sunday, wrote to Georges Mora, now Chairman of Museum Sales Sub-Committee:

¹⁰²³ "The Adelaide retrospective in March was a huge success:" *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, NSW, March, 1964.

"As you know, many of the paintings on the Museum's 'free' list were donated as a personal act of friendship ... a particular instance of this is Arthur Boyd, who gave three important and valuable paintings which are on this list. It has always been a matter of concern to me that these paintings, quite recently given, should now be sold to meet debts; and whatever the legal position, I am sure this was not contemplated by these particular donors. I have, however, participated in the present plan, which involves the sale of some of these paintings, because I saw no alternative"

He then suggested the "release to us" of works by Nolan, Blackman and Vassilieff. The plan was that the Reeds would arrange sales and give the net price to the Museum. While the Reeds ensured their own personal collection was returned to them, no such plan was proposed on behalf of Arthur. More particularly, the phrase used by Reed, "quite recently given", seemed at odds with his initial need to consult "records" of how and when MOMA came into possession of the paintings. It would appear that on closing day a sacrifice had been called for and the works of Arthur Boyd had been offered up.

In November, Arthur contacts Reed:

It is a long time since we have heard from you. I suppose you have now left the directorship of M.O.M.A. We have not heard who has taken over from you or whether M.O.M.A. is to be disbanded. I wonder after having heard one or two rumours about the fate of the paintings. One rumour was that they were to be presented to a provincial gallery. You know how anxious I have been to trace other paintings of that period of my work. I seem to remember we agreed when I gave the paintings to M.O.M.A. that they were to go back to the artist if ever M.O.M.A. closed down.

At the beginning of December, Arthur wasn't the only artist scrabbling for his paintings. Reed writes to John Perceval admitting that "the Museum has lost *Jack-in-a-Box*". *The Gang Plank* has also mysteriously disappeared. Reed blames the museum storage as "always so hopelessly inadequate – and at times unavoidably haphazard."

Reed reported back to Arthur December 10: Is it really so long since I wrote?" The museum, he said, was still "technically in existence" awaiting a final decision at the next General Meeting. "In the meantime our collection has come back to us and the rest of the paintings are in store." Reed assured Arthur that he has heard nothing of a provincial gallery idea; and, as for any verbal agreement between himself and Arthur, his memory had failed once again: "Unfortunately I cannot remember any qualification when you so very generously gave the paintings but I do very definitely feel that whatever your wish is it should be respected." Reed's help extended to sending explanatory letters of the situation to existing board members, Georges Mora and Barrett Reid, with "copies of the relevant part" of Arthur's letter. His only suggestion now was that Arthur solicit the Hon. Mrs Simon Warrender, who was now in charge of the museum's affairs.

Just over a week later Arthur approached Mrs. Warrender:

When I gave the paintings to John Reed to help him build up a collection for the proposed museum I believed we had a verbal agreement that if the museum did not actually get underway my paintings would be returned to me. It was my personal association and friendship with John Reed which prompted me to make the gift.

Mid-January of 1966, a reply arrived, written on MOMA letterhead and in the hand of Mrs Warrender: "John Reed decided to request the return of his own collection" but, she assured, Arthur's paintings were safe and "in the vaults of the Bank of Adelaide pending some decision on our future... In the event of dissolution your pictures will be returned to you, until then they are quite safe. However, should you demand their return before then there is no reason why you should not have them".

Arthur than made a decision he would regret. No doubt finding the arrangement helpful, he declined the hassle of pick up, delivery and storage, and chose to leave the works at the Bank of Adelaide. On 19 January, Arthur wrote: "Dear Pamela, I was very glad ... my paintings are being held ... the only circumstance in which I would want to request the return of my pictures would be for a proposed retrospective exhibition. Until then I am happy to leave them where they are."

Several days later Arthur sent a letter to Franz Philipp, informing him that it was not until his 1953 retrospective at the Peter Bray Gallery that the Reeds became paying supporters. Until that time Arthur stated, they were "sympathetic and hospitable friends rather than patrons". Then he qualified this by explaining that at that show they bought *Christ Walking on the Water*, a small painting. Their first "large scale purchase" was the sculpture, *The Thirty Pieces of Silver*. Earlier works in the Reed's possession, such as *Progression* and *The Kite*, South Melbourne ... had been, Arthur explained, "semi-gifts – i.e. sold for token payments".

One month later, panicked by the news the Museum had not closed, Arthur wrote to Warrender:

I heard that the museum has not yet been officially disbanded and I have decided to ask that the works which I lent to the museum collection in its early days be now returned to me, as you suggested I might do in your letter of the 10th January. I am particularly anxious to assemble all my work of the early forties, a large proportion of which I lent to the collection. John Reed owned one which I believe he also lent to the collection. I know that with the exception of possibly one painting lent by John Reed all other work of mine in the museums collection was lent by me. I did not sell anything to the museum nor as far as I know was any work of mine purchased by the museum through any other source. So I presume that anything of my work being held now by the museum now is available for return to me. There would be nine or ten at least, not including drawings.

The response from Warrender is silence.

April 28 Arthur made yet another appeal to Reed. "As you know all the work of mine donated or lent to the Museum with the exception of that which was donated by you and Sunday, was given on an understanding that in the event of the Museum's disbanding I could have it back." Undeterred by the brick wall erected by Warrender, at the end of April, Arthur writes again, offering to "assist" in speeding "the delivery of the works from their place of storage."

Warrender replied immediately. "The pictures are now well housed in space made available to us at the National Gallery pending further use. It is not possible for me to touch this permanent collection." She greatly regretted that some 'death-wisher' had encouraged Arthur to remove his pictures on the basis that the Museum no longer existed; it had simply gone into a "coma".

From Reed:

... you will remember that when you first asked for your paintings to be returned I told you I could not recollect that you had given them conditionally but that I thought your case was unique, having regard to the value of the paintings and your exceptional generosity, and that your wish should be agreed to... I think that (as you imply) if you had been here you could have got them.

Reed concluded that Arthur's best hope was seeking legal counsel and offered a recommendation.

While Arthur battled on, John Reed remained withdrawn within the walls of Heide: he had kept his paintings, but lost his museum. In a bitter and disappointed letter to Georges Mora, written in April, he decried his successors:

...we did laugh at your grotesque picture of the so dynamically resurrected M.O.M.A, with its sure and brilliant future. It was so ably supplemented by a 3 page letter from Pamela, assuring us that we would be 'honoured' in due course – and in the meantime asking for the loan of our paintings. What a fiasco. These people are so oblivious to everything except what lies on the surface that they can hardly fail.

March 1967, Franz Philipp urged Arthur to send an air-letter or cable to put pressure on John Reed, explaining:

He has consistently evaded my request to have access to that material which still belongs to you, e.g., the portrait of Barbara Hockey. I have tried about three times and will try again, but since it is your property some pressure from you would help. I would suggest in fact that all works (pictures, drawings, titles) belonging to you and held by him should be handed over to me; if you wish I will pass them on to Guy.

Six years later John Reed wrote from Heide on 11 February, 1973:

I will be sending off to you in the next few days 2 of your old paintings, one an early landscape with a big forked tree in the foreground (which Sunday is almost sure you once gave to Nolan), and the other the Murrumbidgee convent (I think) with a bridge leading to it. It has been lovely to have had them at Heide for so

many years and to have felt ourselves as belonging to them in some way, but now it would make us happy, in spite of the parting, to know they were safely at home with you again."

The final word goes to Yvonne Boyd when, in 2003, she offered: "Bert Tucker and Nolan got their pictures back but we never did ... they presented Arthur's paintings to the Victorian Gallery. At least they are there, but you might wonder how they got there because they never bought them."¹⁰²⁴

During the 1960s another rescue mission ran on a parallel track. Once again it would involve Reed in a major role, and resulted in yet another confused and blighted rescue.

When Martin Boyd sold the Grange at Berwick not only had a strong family link to the past been lost but Arthur's beautiful mural had passed into strangers' hands. The final owners of the Grange had not purchased the house for its old world charm, nor for the glorious views it afforded, but for the surrounding land – to quarry.

By the 1960s if those a'Beckett ancestors could have seen the state of the once-genteel Grange, they would have been shuddering. To the south and the east, the over-burden from the quarry had created watch towers, rising high up beside the house. Barbed-wired blackberry bushes rolled across the battlefield of a garden and foot-soldiers of elm suckers advanced towards the house. Shingles were missing from large areas of the roof where blasts of wind forced the corrugated iron to lift. Floorboards had been torn up and windows smashed. Plaster lay crumbled under the old mantle where *The Assumption* section of the mural still rose above all the earthly decay. A small section of this work had been cut away with a power-driven handsaw. Teeth marks from that saw encircled a section that had proved too difficult for the plunderer to remove: a small bird painted next to Arthur Boyd's signature.¹⁰²⁵

In December of 1963 Robin Boyd wrote to Arthur:

There is a move to Save For The Nation, or for MOMA., or something, your mural at The Grange. We have examined it from the point of view of slicing up the plaster into 'tiles' about 12" square, removing them and refitting them into a room built specially to take them – reproducing the same proportions – somewhere suitable (Como?) in the city. We think it can be done. And should be.

Fred Romberg and Robin Boyd approached John Reed.

John Reed wrote to Arthur, February 1964:

We are pushing ahead as fast as we can with the plan for the removal of your mural, but as you can imagine there are all sorts of complications...it will take

¹⁰²⁴ "The final word goes to Yvonne Boyd...." Interview Yvonne Boyd.

¹⁰²⁵ "By the 1960'2, if those a'Beckett ancestors could have seen ..."Details on the condition of the Grange found in a letter from Leslie Van de Sluys to Arthur Boyd, 25 April, 1966. Bundanon archives.

careful planning and handling and quite a lot of money, and we do not yet know whether financing could be arranged.

These few opening sentences would prove both ironic and prophetic. The management of the project would become a cat's cradle of complication.

Further into the month Reed wrote that Rowlands Quarries had given the mural to MOMA. The Museum could not give the mural a permanent home, it was not "a practical proposition". However, he would exhibit the mural before it left for a permanent site. Como, he suggested, was worth consideration. He advised that Fred Williams had agreed to supervise the removal of the mural.

In March Arthur wrote to Reed approving of "tiles" as a way of removal. Romberg and Boyd submitted a detailed account of how the removal should be conducted, but insisted that ultimate success would depend on the amount of care taken, only adequate finance would ensure that specialists of the highest skill and competence were engaged in this demanding work.

In April John Reed informed Arthur that MOMA was not in a position to finance the project, and "to an extent, our interest is only a transitory one as we do not expect to be the ultimate owners of the mural ..." Reed now suggested the best result would be reached by removing the walls in their entirety.

In June Reed wrote that Fred Williams had left the country and Reed asked Arthur if he could recommend a substitute. The Vice-Chancellor of Monash and his wife were "quite satisfied that they want the Mural" and "there is every prospect of them finding the money."

This plan came to nothing because of "slight complications". The complications according to Reed, involved Fred Romberg and Robin Boyd who had "hoped to get the job for the building at Monash which is now intended to house the Mural, and were rather bitter that they had been passed over". Romberg and Boyd, granted a commission to design a library at Ormond College, now proposed to incorporate a major section of the mural (but not the whole) into their design. This offer was accepted, with Ormond writing to Monash confirming the agreement. According to Reed, all of these transactions were conducted without reference to him. In the same letter Reed went on to tell Arthur that "Fred also surprised me by saying that he did not know that the Museum had acquired the rights to the Mural from the quarrying company ... but I am pretty sure I told you this and either him or Robin also." He added:

The Museum Council has always taken the view that our part in this transaction should be recognised in a monetary way, and it has proposed that this shall take the form of a fee payable by whoever gets the Mural. We told Monash of this at the outset and it has always been part of our negotiations. I think I have told you about this already, but I may have omitted it.

"Complications" seems to be Reed's term for 'monies.' In July Reed reported on a meeting with Fred Romberg and informed Arthur: "It does seem unfortunate that complications are involved which might make it difficult for everyone to be quite objective". The possibility of Como being a suitable home for the mural had resurfaced. Reed explained that when he had suggested the Como idea to Daryl Lindsay his response had been "positively negative". Reed then assumed "further discussion was impossible" with The National Trust; but he now admitted he "may have been wrong in assuming Daryl's authority in regard to Como" for, when Fred Romberg approached Brian Lewis, Professor of Architecture at the University of Melbourne, he had found him most enthusiastic. This was a problem for Reed: "The Museum is virtually committed to Monash." Nevertheless, he had told Romberg that "Como built in the same period as 'The Grange', even though in a different style, was probably the best permanent home for the mural".

From London Arthur wrote alerting Reed that he was expecting a visit from Robin Boyd. He was, he said, "looking forward to hearing what [Robin] has to say." He tells Reed he would "naturally like the mural to be kept whole and in the same proportions" but he does not like the idea of the mural being at Como.

Brian Lewis wrote to Reed telling him he has written to Alan Rowlands, whom he assumes, represents the owners of the Grange. "With your help it might be possible to preserve both the house and the mural, and the mural in such a setting would be an immense public attraction. You obviously know everything about the matter, and your help would be greatly appreciated." Lewis's letter to Rowlands states: "If the house could be made weatherproof and protected, I feel that the National Trust would be very interested in its preservation. A suitable tenant could be agreed with you, and the whole unit kept as a working exhibit rather than a museum. Would your company be willing to collaborate?" Reed forwards these extracts to Arthur and expresses his surprise: "... Brian Lewis knows we are at present in charge of negotiations." Reed responded to Lewis's efforts by virtually ignoring them, and continued on with his negotiations with Monash.

Arthur explained to Reed, after his meeting with Robin, that he would greatly prefer to see the mural remain intact at the Grange in its original surroundings, if the National Trust were interested. Como had become his second preference; or another public gallery, provided it is re-erected in its original proportions.

Reed replied that another "awkward position" had occurred. An excerpt from a letter Robin Boyd had written to Fred Romberg, in which he stated Arthur had given him "complete freedom to do with it [the mural] what I think best" - had been read out at the Council meeting. Reed, miffed, pursues negotiations with Monash and ignores the National Trust proposition, dismissing it as "merely Brian Lewis's idea ..."

In September Reed informed Arthur the news is "fairly negative". Monash had decided against incorporating the mural into their non-denominational religious centre. They were still considering it for some other part of the university. Regarding the National

Trust, Reed got the impression that, "Brian Lewis was over confident ... the Trustees are sufficiently interested to make a survey of the situation, and even if they cannot do anything about the house they will probably still throw their weight behind us in helping to find a permanent home for the mural itself." "Robin", Reed concluded, "has not been in touch."

A story appeared in the *Age* headlined 'Treasure House'. The piece led: "A boarded-up, deserted house on the Princes Highway beyond Dandenong contains a minor art treasure..." It described Arthur Boyd as the "now-celebrated Australian artist" and gave a valuation of the mural as "in excess of two thousand pounds". The story revealed that plans to have the mural cut off the walls and transported to a museum have had to be scrapped because of the high costs involved. It divested MOMA of autonomy:

Now the London-based Mr. Boyd and local artists have started a campaign to save the 100-year-old house and its valuable contents. The National Trust has been called in as well as the Museum of Modern Art. The idea of converting the house into an art museum is now under consideration.

By October Reed, no doubt smarting from this article, appeared to be backing off. He wrote to Arthur: "There is no more news about 'The Grange', and it would seem that Monash have lost interest. Our best hope now is the National Trust; but they are moving slowly, partly, I think, because of a change in office bearers".

Not only did the publicity appear to rankle Reed, it spurred no action from any other quarter. Perhaps trying to distance himself from alternative plans and schemes, Arthur later wrote to Reed: "I'm rather sad to hear that the Grange mural project has not got any further. I have heard nothing myself".

1964 had seen a flurry of activity but now support fell away. Six months passed. On 15 May, 1965, Franz Philipp reported:

The frescoes are far more beautiful than I had remembered them, but some damage has already been done, both by the wetness of the wall and by human (?) hand. Fortunately none of the main parts are damaged. I was horrified at the state of the house; as soon as I can find the time I shall contact Fred Williams (who, I hear, also wants to take some action) and the National Trust. I do indeed feel very strongly about this and promise you to do what I can.

In December, Yvonne elicited Robin Boyd's advice:

A friend has told us that the mural at the Grange is still intact though the rest of the house is far from it... Arthur still believes it would be possible to get it off the walls and he has considered paying for it himself but I feel the expense would be beyond us. ...I feel the very least we must and can ensure is that a really good photographic record is made of the mural, very soon. Do you feel there are hopes for its removal? The Romeo and Juliet ceramic triptych that was commissioned for Stratford last year is coming to Melbourne as you probably know. Perhaps it will stimulate interest in the preservation of the Grange mural, a no less important work I feel.

In March 1966 Franz Philipp informed Arthur he had “again been out to the Grange, this time with David Lawrence who is the restorer at the N.G. The Assumption has been damaged.” Arthur replied: “About the mural and your information on it. I have written to a Mr. Joseph Brown, a good friend, and a buyer of my paintings in connection with the mural. I have suggested that he puts up the money for removal and the National Gallery be offered the option of buying it”.

Boyd wrote to Joe Brown informing him that the present owner of the quarry “doesn’t care what happens to the house or the mural.” Brown visited the Grange and found it “completely gone to ruin”. The mural itself he believed “magnificent”. In his view, “70%” of the mural was in “excellent condition”.

In April Arthur responded: Arthur asked if Brown would send a sketch of the walls, and added “of course I would like to save as much of it as possible, even that in a poor condition, because I would like to repaint the parts that are damaged when it is reassembled”.

By October 1967, Brown wrote that sections of the walls would be removed. He hoped “that nothing else has happened to the portions of the mural I think can be saved, since I last saw them. I will not enlarge on this as I do not wish to build up your hope until I see the mural sections ...”

In December Brown informed Arthur: “...it was gratifying to see what there was left of it, safely stored. ...It is quite amazing considering the fact that the work was over a considerable period exposed to the hands of the vandals and thieves and the ravages of weather, and time, most of what we have saved is in excellent condition”

January 1968, Arthur replied to Brown “It is very good news that the mural is safely stored with Rudders... Once again I would like to thank you very much indeed Joe for all the work you personally have put in to this job...” Brown had offered his services gratis.

Fifteen months later, in April of 1969, there was talk of hopeful plans. Brown told Arthur: “I have just returned from a meeting of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board which, in this instance, comprised Sir Daryl Lindsay, William Dargie and Jim Mollison ...it gives me immense pleasure to be able to advise you that the salvaged portions of the Grange mural have definitely been purchased by them for the price of six thousand dollars...”

In July Brown advised Arthur that the mural sections have been sent to the store of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board. According to Brown, James Mollison (director of the soon to be completed Australian National Gallery in Canberra) had told him, “plans are afoot to place the mural in a separate room in the new Gallery ... in more or less the same style and dimensions as it appeared at the Grange. They are toying with the idea of employing an artist to link up with the missing sections if this meets with your

approval.” He also reported that large-scale blow-up photographs were being considered as stand-ins for the parts of the mural damaged or broken beyond repair.

The 5 March 1970, brought yet another promise of a home. The secretary of the Art Advisory Board (W.R. Cumming) wrote to Arthur from the Prime Minister’s Department thanking him for presenting the National Collection with a fragment from the Harkaway Mural. “The Board looks forward to the day when it joins the Mural which ultimately will be housed in the proposed Australian National Gallery”.

Almost twenty years later when pressed by a journalist from the *Age*, a search revealed four panels stored in a Canberra warehouse. “Some conservation work had been done to prevent the frescoes deteriorating further, but there were no plans to put them on display”, an information officer said.¹⁰²⁶

Through the din of all these words, it was almost possible to hear the steady drip of apathy, year after year taking its toll on the mural, beating out a last post for lost history. Arthur would later say that the destruction of the Grange and the mural put him off a lot of aspects of Australia that he wouldn’t have worried about before. For all the good intentions, there had been a lack of passion and of care - instead, there was a leaning on the shovel, a laid-back Australian attitude of ‘no worries ... she’ll be right.’

In 2007 the fragmented mural remained stored at the NGA. Talk was still ongoing of resurrecting the mural, and displaying it in a room of its own.¹⁰²⁷

For all the destruction and loss that came with the 1960s, one particular ending would have been particularly hard for Arthur to bear.

At the beginning of the decade, after the death of Doris, Hatton and Lucy moved back from Queensland with their three sons to live at Open Country. Those Murrumbidgee residents able to see beyond the tall hedge and through the leafy branches of the park-like garden may have caught glimpses of a silver-headed man in a long white potter’s coat and a small-framed, delicately-boned woman with a gentle lilting voice, who addressed everyone as ‘darling’. If these passers-by had lived in the area long enough, they may have caught their breath for a split second, believing that Merric and Doris had returned; that they had never really put down their clay or their brush.

The trees in the wild garden had grown as tall as spires, rising high above the roof tops, but very little else had changed. Life at Open Country was still as disregarding of

¹⁰²⁶ “When pressed by a journalist ...” Geoff Maslen, *Age*, 23 August, 1989.

¹⁰²⁷ “In 2006, the mural remained stored ...” If the mural is ever restored it will be a vast undertaking for according to Deborah Hart, curator of Australian painting at the National Gallery, less than half the mural remains.

convention as it had ever been, with material needs secondary to the nurturing of creative work. The house had passed its mid-century mark. Always in need of maintenance, it was now desperate for it. The cats, which had multiplied under Doris's gentle rule, were still flourishing and roamed freely through the house and garden. Piano and violin still drifted through the air. Neighbouring children were still warned not to go near the strange house. When Lucy had been a girl in Murrumbreena, due to her father's dark Spanish looks, she had been told by a local to "get back to your own country".¹⁰²⁸ Now, when she unpinned her long silver hair, rumour flew amongst the children that a witch lived in Wahroonga Crescent. Economics were still an ongoing problem. Laurence, at the age of twenty-three, was a piano student and a struggling actor, appearing in the odd television play and making small change on radio. Robert ('Rob', 'Bunny') had turned twenty-one and was a full-time potter. Paul, sixteen, was studying violin. When it became apparent it was impossible to survive on the meagre income drawn from pottery classes and exhibition work, Lucy asked Guy to arrange a small mortgage.

Some of the press reports in December 1962 leading up to the Becks' first joint show after their return from Queensland, would have simply served to support the locals' belief that weird happenings occurred at Open Country. The headline in the *Age* read: "Chops aid pottery" and went on to report that the Becks ate more chops than any other meat because they had to keep the ash box full. Hatton explained: "We burn all sorts of things in the incinerator, not just bones, because the odd things you get in ashes give some marvellous effects and weird colourings".

The story had been designed to float the idea that Open Country be turned into a "special" museum. Perhaps this notion had been driven by the efforts at this time being put into saving the Grange. Without doubt it was spurred by the Becks' dire finances. While *The Age* photograph showed "the house almost hidden by old trees and shrubs," Lucy supplied the proud story of Pavlova's famous visit to the house, in the late 1920s, when Merric had been given the honour of creating a pot with her image. Much was made of the artistic dynasty and the works of art scattered around the property, both inside and out. By way of sizing up the jumble of houses in the grounds the article listed "twelve rooms", adding: "still not nearly enough for all the Boyd treasures". The Boyd family had now officially become an "Australian institution – with the various brothers and sisters and other close relatives gaining fame here and overseas".

Now brothers and sisters were huddling together, pens to aerogramme paper and ears to telephones, discussing who would be willing to give up their share of the house in the interests of Hatton and Lucy staying on as curators of Open Country. The Becks' financial situation had worsened to the extent that they could not meet mortgage payments. David and Arthur, communicating from London, had no hesitation in agreeing to waive their share of the property in the interest of Lucy and Hatton. The Percevals, however, according to Phyllis, were short of cash and Mary had said "we really need that money." Guy, who "didn't believe in people getting something for

¹⁰²⁸ "When Lucy had been a girl in Murrumbreena ..." Interview Mary Nolan.

nothing",¹⁰²⁹ didn't approve but agreed to give half his share. However, there was little time to ponder a resolution. After the Becks' exhibition of pottery bought no financial success, at Guy's urging a decision was reached to sell the property. Destruction was swift. In just over three months Open Country was sold, converted to a company, 'No. 8 Wahroonga Crescent Pty. Ltd.',¹⁰³⁰ and wiped off the map.

As a gauge of Phyllis's feelings, in her letter to Yvonne on 13 April 1964, the following report is rated last in a list of other domestic news:

It seems they didn't sell Murrumbeena to the Chadstone Development Company (they are well known for preserving trees) – they have built a couple of blocks .. near us where they pulled down the houses but ... effectively left most of the trees). Lucy said they sold it to another Co., who offered a bit more – they have completely stripped it ... Lucy is very upset and Guy said it made him feel a bit ill seeing all those trees lying there...."¹⁰³¹

During the demolition Guy had received a telephone call informing him that paintings were being found. In Merric's room and the lean-to kitchen, a couple of Arthur's works had been turned back-to-front to line the wall. A bonfire was being fuelled with some of these works, along with books, letters, a draft of a book by David, mementoes and other family memorabilia. Guy arrived in time to rescue Merric's wheel and a Berwick painting of Arthur's (years later fetching \$285,000) before they were thrown onto the fire.¹⁰³² A photograph album was saved by a kindly neighbour and later given to David Boyd; a few salvages but, as David recalled, "so much stuff was lost".¹⁰³³

David, in London with Arthur, was "heartbroken". Arthur never spoke about his feelings; they would have gone far beyond saying. It was left to David to make a public statement, in which he confirmed Arthur's deep concern that Murrumbeena was lost."¹⁰³⁴ As for Lucy, within a month Guy was writing to his brothers about her breakdown: "I have some bad news about Gibby she has had a nervous collapse: she spent almost 2 weeks with Hatton's sister Greet but she Greet found the strain too much so she is now back in Boronia being looked after by Hatton. I am sure this condition was brought on by the strain of having to give up Open Country ..."

Joni Mitchell had not yet sung her lament, "You don't know what you've got till it's gone"; but, when the green space of Open Country disappeared under two-storeys of concrete, the majority of the community of Murrumbeena echoed that sentiment and

¹⁰²⁹ "Guy, who 'didn't believe in people getting something for nothing' ..." Interview Phyllis Boyd.

¹⁰³⁰ "In just over three months Open Country was sold ..." The title to Lot 10 was purchased, 23 March, 1964.

¹⁰³¹ "As a gauge of Phyllis's feelings ..." Extract of letter from Phyllis Boyd, Bundanon archives

¹⁰³² "Guy arrived in time to rescue Merric's wheel ..." Phyllis Boyd, letter to Yvonne Boyd, 13 April, 1964, Bundanon archives. Interview Phyllis Boyd, 29 November, 2000. Sandringham.

¹⁰³³ "A photograph album was saved ..." David Boyd interview.

¹⁰³⁴ "It was left to David to make a public statement" Colin Smith tapes.

grieved for the lost parkland. Some continued to find fault with the Boyds, blaming them for not saving the house.¹⁰³⁵

¹⁰³⁵ "Some continued to find fault ..."Interview June Dillon, 28 January, 2005. Dillon recalled various Murrumbena residents criticizing the Boyds for not saving the house.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Days on fire

Title owed to Theodore Roethke's *In a Dark Time*: extract:

"What's madness but nobility of the soul

At Odds with circumstance?

The day's on fire!"

"When we have passed a certain age, the soul of the child that we were, and the souls of the dead from whom we spring, come and bestow upon us in handfuls their treasures and their calamities"

Marcel Proust, *La Prisonniere*: quoted by Martin Boyd in the opening sentence of his autobiographical novel, *The Cardboard Crown*.

"You don't know what people suffer," Arthur said, when discussing his father's epilepsy.¹⁰³⁶ The small boy who had been deeply embarrassed by his father was now a middle-aged man and head of a family himself. From this position he was making new connections with his distracted, distanced father: a man he never saw smiling.¹⁰³⁷ Merric's retreat into his private world had begun in earnest after the kiln fire and the birth of Mary. As Mary grew she became aware that "people made great concessions" for her father, particularly her mother. She spoke of her father as through he was trapped, both in time and place. He was "caught in an earlier age ... there was a fiery side to his nature that he tried to keep continually at bay".¹⁰³⁸ By the late forties Merric appeared to have "almost no interest in the 'outer world'".¹⁰³⁹

The pain for Arthur must have been the impossibility of getting close, knowing that true understanding could not be received, nor given, by either side. Arthur had come to realise that his father "must have suffered enormously".¹⁰⁴⁰ From a very early age, tucked in beside his mother, the trauma Arthur experienced around him was considerable: "...My father wasn't allowed to share a marital bed with my mother, so this must have been quite a strain on both of them probably, but probably more on my father. He would spend this very long time saying goodnight because he didn't want to leave. He wanted to stand at the door and he'd say, "Goodnight, goodnight" and that would go on until my mother would have to get up and shut the door very gently..."¹⁰⁴¹

The young bucks, the regulars of the Brown Room in those post-war years, found the story of Merric's enforced celibacy incredible shocking.¹⁰⁴² Merric banging on the locked bedroom door was a story told to the world. But Merric's penis attached to the fly-wheel of his potter's wheel, so as to pull it backwards and forwards, was a story that seemed beyond fanciful. Yet Arthur had etched this ambiguous image ("the fact of the thing was painful") this "unashamedly personal episode" from his father's life.¹⁰⁴³ He confirmed it was literal by offering a less than factual explanation: "he had to remain celibate, there were no contraceptives in those days".¹⁰⁴⁴ In another drawing, Arthur

¹⁰³⁶ "You don't know what people suffer ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

¹⁰³⁷ "You never saw him smiling" Arthur Boyd describing his father to his grandsons in *Testament of a Painter*

¹⁰³⁸ "Mary grew aware" Mary Nolan interview.

¹⁰³⁹ "By the late forties ..." Letter from Max Nicholson to Yvonne Boyd, from College of Education, University of Baghdad, 7 December, 1967. Bundanon archives

¹⁰⁴⁰ "The only thing that really relieved him ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

¹⁰⁴¹ "My father wasn't allowed to share ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

¹⁰⁴² "The young bucks ..." Tim Burstall interview.

¹⁰⁴³ "He had drawn this "unashamedly personal episode" *Arthur Boyd*, AGNSW Retrospective Catalogue, 'Works on Paper' Hendrik Kolenberg. See etching: *Potter with Wrist Watch Throwing* Reference No. 69 in *Arthur Boyd, Etchings and Lithographs*, Lund Humphries, in association with Maltzahn Gallery, London. 1971. Hendrik Kolenberg is senior curator of Australian print, drawings and water colours at AGNSW.

¹⁰⁴⁴ "He confirmed it was literal ..." Discussing these works Arthur said: "Some of them are much more explicit ... where his penis is attached to the potter's wheel ... the actual angle ... that's called a crank ... when you push your foot goes backwards and forwards ... the fact of the thing was painful.... That was a way to pull (his penis) backwards and forwards, but because he had to remain celibate for quite a large

portrays a child as a watcher: “a little spying one ...learning”.¹⁰⁴⁵ What torments did Arthur witness through those years? With that question in mind, Arthur’s words, “you don’t know what people suffer”, take on a circular form and reaffirm his maxim that every man is a victim. Look or don’t look; either way there was no happy ending.

And what of Doris? Always supportive, not only of Merric but of the entire family. Always willing to nurture the lonely who felt set apart, protective of her babies and vigilant with the grandchildren, scooping them up into the sanctuary of her bedroom during any Brown Room fracas. That was the public Doris. An extract from a prose poem called *Revelation* undated, but written and signed in Doris’s own hand, gives a glimpse of her inner life: “Let me feel the warm touch, the kindling of the flame of Life – which surely cannot flicker on alone, in grim unrest, stumbling, groping, through the barren years till Death, all merciful at last shall bring relief – my heart dreads the creeping chill of darkling years – Why must I suffer thus?”¹⁰⁴⁶

The physical appearance of Doris and Merric belied their characters: one looked strong, one was strong. “My father was a very intense Celt. He had flashing brown eyes, deep brown ... was tall. My mother was a gentle Irish Anglo Saxon ...”¹⁰⁴⁷ But finally, “You don’t really know what your parents are like – I don’t think you can ever have a solid idea”. That conclusion didn’t stop Arthur searching.

Dedicated students of Arthur’s work (relating to biblical themes, legend, poetry, plays) were in no doubt that he “refused to take his subject matter literally”; that myth and story were merely “absorbed and reconstituted” and used as “an excuse to paint.”¹⁰⁴⁸ Art historian and curator, Daniel Thomas, noted: “Even after he moved to London in 1960 the themes of man, family, beast and landscape changed little, they were only enriched by contact with the art of the museums”.

One particular museum served to trigger a series relating to ‘man, family, beast’. Although Arthur had seen William Blake’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar before, one particular day as he was passing through the Tate Gallery this famous image of a deranged tortured creature, crawling on his hands and knees, brought Arthur to a full stop. He found it “a very, very strong drawing” – the outcast always Arthur’s strongest meat. The ‘Book of Daniel’ in the Old Testament, tells a strange and fantastical story of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon who reigned from 605 to 561 BC. This great

part of his later life ... there were no contraceptives in those days ... my mother was warned not to have any more children after Mary ...” Pearce tapes

¹⁰⁴⁵ “In another drawing, Arthur portrays a child as a watcher ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

¹⁰⁴⁶ “An extract from a prose poem ...” Poetry written in Doris’s handwriting, Bundanon archives.

¹⁰⁴⁷ “My father was ...” Arthur Boyd to senior curator of Australian art at AGNSW, Deborah Edwards, Interview Bundanon, 11 March, 1993.

¹⁰⁴⁸ “Dedicated students of Arthur’s work ...” William Packer, ‘Arthur Boyd’s Nebuchadnezzar Paintings’, *Art and Artists*.

builder and ruler created a city of golden temples and hanging gardens, so lavish and astonishing that it was regarded by the Greeks as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. A clay cylinder in the British Museum describes the city as Nebuchadnezzar saw it; an “everlasting fortress”. In all his worldly might Nebuchadnezzar pictured himself as creator, invincible, placing himself above God. For his sin of pride he was exiled for seven years into the wilderness. Forced to dwell with the beasts of the fields, he sprouted hair like feathers and nails like claws and was driven to insanity.

Blake’s colour print of 1795 “started a train of thought” and prompted Arthur to source all he could on the Babylonian King’s fall from grace, finding “themes” that “interested”.¹⁰⁴⁹ It is typical of Boyd, as it was of William Blake, to insist on an ellipsis embracing both saint and sinner; the left and the right arcs arms to cradle all opposites and contraries, to complete Blake’s notion that ‘all that lives is holy’. The observation made of Blake by his biographer Peter Ackroyd, that “no one could have single-handedly created such an elaborate and distinctive mythology without a stubborn sense of uniqueness and self-certainty”,¹⁰⁵⁰ applied equally to Arthur, who had been raised by a mother who had imbued him with great creative confidence and a father whose personality blazed with uniqueness.

After the failure to rescue the mural from the Grange Arthur felt sad and didn’t want to go back to Melbourne for a long time. The destruction of Open Country would have only deepened that sadness and mingled with thoughts of a lost father. A father who, with a battered wicker chair for a throne and Open Country for a realm, was “not a subject for exact measurements and explanation.”¹⁰⁵¹ Sometime in the Italian summer of 1964, three other men who defied analysis - Arthur, Nebuchadnezzar and St. Francis - met and merged with the memory of Merric.¹⁰⁵²

In July and August 1964 once again the Bedford dormobile rolled along behind the O’Shaughnessys’ car, the odometer on its way to clocking up one and a half thousand miles on another summer holiday. Brian O’Shaughnessy was a fanatic about European landscape and towns and Arthur was happy to let him pore over the Baedeker guide and plot the course through the major sites of art and the history to be found on the minor roads of Europe. At one point O’Shaughnessy would map out a guide to Piero della Francesca’s paintings. So much planning and forethought went into his itineraries that he gave Arthur a copy of Schubert’s famous impromptu, Deutsche 935 - a suitable soundtrack, he believed, to prepare Arthur for the viewing of the Ardenne. The Black Forest, O’Shaughnessy recalls, was at its best that summer and during their journey, on one of their stop-offs, Yvonne remarked “Arthur’s going mad about all this”.

¹⁰⁴⁹ “Blake’s colour print ...” Arthur Boyd to Frank McDonald, letter date June 1967.

¹⁰⁵⁰ “The observation made by William Blake ...” Ackroyd, Peter. *Blake*: Minerva, Great Britain, 1996.

¹⁰⁵¹ “A father, who, with a battered wicker chair for a throne ...” Quote by T.S. Boase on St. Francis tbs.

¹⁰⁵² “Sometime in the Italian summer of 1964 ...” In a letter to Brian Johnstone June 8, 1967, Arthur writes: “The idea of Nebuchadnezzar [sic] as a theme began with a series of pastels done in 1964.” As with the etchings and drypoints the subject (Nebucadezzar) [sic] is used simply to trigger off ideas for the paintings.” Bundanon archives.

Arthur's nephew, Robert Beck, joined the family on this trip and helped Arthur occasionally with the driving and setting up the tent. "If Arthur saw a farm that looked rather nice, he would pull up and ask the farmer if we could stay the night in the paddock". Rob enjoyed Arthur's careful, slow driving: "It was a good way of seeing the country". These touring summer holidays, with the Italian coast as the final destination, would continue with the O'Shaughnessys throughout the sixties. It worked two ways: the young would have the beach and the ocean to play in and their parents would be in striking distance of great works of art.

The Boyds and O'Shaughnessys formed the core in whatever town was chosen as the final stopping point. They would set up camp in large old flats and others would fly down and rent places nearby. Friends and relatives poured in. Uncle Martin, relatively local, on several occasions journeyed from Rome. Older and frailer now, but with bristling moustache and upright frame still draped in tailored garb, he looked every inch the retired English major. Max Nicholson roared in, in his dashing M.G., on leave from his teaching duties at the University of Baghdad and not yet hounded out over his proclivity for young males. A string of friends connected to Melbourne University appeared: Margaret Paul, Mabel Taylor, David Armstrong. One particular summer boasted so many philosophers and psychiatrists that, to an outsider, it would have appeared to be an academic conference. The year Tim Burstall joined the group the volume of O'Shaughnessy's debates was ratcheted up. Brian O'Shaughnessy and Arthur would insist on eating out most evenings. Under the awnings and vine-covered trellises of the little beach restaurants the various families would gather together: the children would select what they wanted, while the adults drank dry yellow wine, ate fresh fish and broke crumbly bread together. There would be a regular table of around twenty; on those occasions when the numbers swelled, it would take almost as long to divide the bill as it would to consume the dinner.

In 1964 they stayed on the Adriatic coast in the less than chic but decorative fishing village of Casal Borsetti, twelve miles north of Ravenna, where there was a safe sandy beach garlanded with fishing nets. That summer Arthur journeyed to Florence to visit the Uffizi Gallery and to the Villa Barbini, revelling in Titian and Piero della Francesca. Because of the proximity it was a summer filled with the Ravenna mosaics. Both the Boyds and O'Shaughnessys took turns babysitting and that year Yvonne and Arthur managed to take a few days off on their own. Heading off for Assisi and Gubbio, Arthur packed pastels in his working kit for the first time.

Polly maintains that her father never had a holiday: "Dad was always painting, especially if we went on holiday because there would be more subject matter." But generally, Yvonne recalls Arthur in a relaxed mood, enjoying the sun and the talking and mixing with the people who stayed or dropped by. A friend of Red's, a psychoanalyst and fellow South African, Irma Pick, visited with her little boy. Tom Rosenthal, the young art critic and publisher at Thames and Hudson, appeared on the beach. Rosenthal, who had met Arthur through Walter Neurath, would become a collaborator and a life-long admirer of Arthur Boyd. But twenty-five year old Rosenthal, with his deep voice and far deeper gravitas, was considered by both Arthur and O'Shaughnessy to be old,

sage-like, before his time. When Rosenthal appeared on the beach, his shirt open and masses of black chest hair exposed, Arthur exclaimed: "Oh! Look! All that hair and not a grey one amongst them". Brian O'Shaughnessy thought this kind of remark typical of Arthur's barbed humour.

Maria Clark, another friend who shared those summer holidays, found Arthur's ambiguous utterances "rather Delphic ...he always put on the show of the village idiot but he was very bright... he was always quizzical, you never knew what he was getting at."¹⁰⁵³ Maria first learnt of Arthur through Max Nicholson. She saw Arthur's paintings hanging on his walls and heard how Arthur, "the reluctant soldier ... wasn't doing much in the way of helping the army". In 1943, when Arthur was living in Fitzroy he visited Maria and was immediately attracted to her husband's collection of framed prints: Van Gogh's chairs and apple blossom; Cezanne's apples and oranges, and his *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. Without a word Arthur picked them off the wall, one by one, and silently studied them, turning them all to an angle of forty-five degrees.

Maria arrived in London the same year as the Boyds and, with her three children more or less the same ages as Polly and Jamie, the families became close. When Polly's A-levels loomed, Maria tutored her in English. Polly's affection for teacher and subject showed in good results. Maria loved being in the company of Arthur and Yvonne, believing them well suited: "They were an absolutely symbiotic pair...he was long sighted, she was short sighted". Throughout the years she would stay in almost every house the Boyds ever owned or rented. After being entertained by them, at the end of most evenings Maria, by her own admission, was "always half cut". A ritual would follow: Arthur would pronounce Maria unfit to drive and she would be pushed up stairs to bed by her concerned host. In Italy, with no roads to negotiate, Arthur would still fuss and worry, always escorting Maria safely back to her room and not leaving until he had lit the mosquito coil. Maria had no memory of Arthur painting or reading on these summer holidays. He swam, he drew, and "he spoke of Merric as a saint-like figure". Maria, listening to Arthur's recounting, concluded Merric sounded "like Dostoevsky's idiot".

Six centuries earlier Francis of Assisi must have sounded like an idiot to many of the inhabitants of his village. He had been born into a respectable and prosperous family, was well-educated, a knight with hopes of glory; a young man who delighted in the pleasures of the world. He chose to deny it all, to abandon his fine clothes, his suit of armour, his women, his inheritance, his search for greatness.

Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, Francis cast himself out into the wilderness, to embrace with all humility and much fear not only the beasts of the fields but the tormented lepers: those shunned, set apart, forced to live outside the walls of Assisi in *lazzaretti* (quarantine shelters). Did Arthur make connections? The colony of Australia outside the British Empire. The colony of shanty towns in the Simpson Desert outside ancestral sites. The

¹⁰⁵³ "Maria Clark, another friend who shared those summer holidays ..." Interview Maria Clark, London, 12 August, 2000. All subsequent quotes from this source.

colony of epileptics in the early 1900's outside the sight of the good citizens of Melbourne. And the colony of Open Country outside the suburb of Murrumbena..

After visiting Gubbio and Assisi, Arthur produced many drawings and sketches and one or two pastels, completing the majority of the St Francis series when he returned to London. When he described the two Umbrian towns he could have been comparing the past religious, formalised renderings of Franciscan imagery to the fierce and earthy expressions that he would contribute to the corpus. Rather than Assisi, it was Gubbio that appealed to him. He had found the architecture of Assisi "light" but Gubbio "a bit overwhelming, a bit powerful".¹⁰⁵⁴ Like the wolf, the city had a wild, unbounded quality; something which Arthur in his art and Francis in his life sought to understand, accommodate, and finally embrace.

The St Francis collection connects like an ancient family photograph album. The delicate pastel scenes, illusory as aged snap-shots and as clouded as memory, prompt a need to expand the story beyond the frame. Francis's coat becomes a patchwork quilt like the quilt Yvonne stitched for the studio bed. The paling fence has been seen before through the Brown Room window, as have the half hoops, and the kiln oven, and Merric's chair. The proud, upright man expounding his views is reminiscent of Merric taunted by the Murrumbena children. The figure curling in upon himself in embarrassment or fear could be Arthur as a child. The curving back of the tortured figure echoes Merric's sculpture of the Prodigal Son, and the deformities conjure the frogs in the Murrumbena streets, the malformed kittens, and John Perceval's withered leg. The man embracing the lamb suggests the gentle Merric, just as the rod recalls the switch he pared from the plum tree.

The connections to past lovers are clearer. There are the peaceful *Lovers in the Grass*, the buffeted and falling bodies of *Diana and Actaeon*, and the tragically prone pose of *Romeo and Juliet*. But despite the separations and the partings, the lovers have never been as delicately and gently portrayed. They are buoyed by drifts of soft grasses and cloudy feathered beds. Bodies float and hands flutter; fingers lace, not with water now but fine drifts of misty hair. No eyes watch here, they are locked in deep-sleep memory. The voyeur, or the would-be lover, has turned away. In *St Francis When Young Turning Aside* one hand is held up to his eye. Is this his seeing eye? Viewing the work from a forty-five degree angle can we see what St. Francis is turning from? Is it the earthly dream of paradise: two halves forming a complete whole? Or is this an amalgam of two distinct characters: one fair and blue-eyed, the other dark of eye and hair: one wide awake and of the world, the other belonging to the world of dreams.

But when the dark devours the light, nightmarish dreams unravel in spiralling, ram-horned swathes of incompleteness - of grief, rejection and punishment blacks and reds dominate. Blood pours like rain. Bodies are still airborne but are now contorted by maelstroms; whipped and burned and tossed by lightning rods and thunderous fury. Peace is found after a baptism (*St. Francis Cleansing the Leper*), a crucifixion (*St.*

¹⁰⁵⁴ "He had found the architecture of Assisi 'light' ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

Francis with the Stigmata Appearing to the Pope) and a communion (*St. Francis Kissing the Hand of the Leper* and *St. Francis Kissing the Wolf of Gubbio*). In these works fear and revulsion of the other is confronted, accepted, and embraced. Arthur lived it all. In one interview, he spoke of St. Francis's attitude to the lepers, as though painter and saint were intimates: "He really hated lepers. He had to nerve himself to do the job."¹⁰⁵⁵ In the pastel *The Wolf of Gubbio with St Francis* the wolf is disguised not as a lamb, but as a saint. He wears the flayed skin of St Francis. It was the reverse of an image Arthur had seen from the windows of the pottery in the late forties, early fifties. A man, bent low, his back hunched, carried a carcass into the Murrumbidgee butcher shop. It was a goat. Its chopped, crippled legs dangled at the rear of the man and its head, pulled almost over the man's head, seemed to negotiate the pathway with its cold, dead eyes.¹⁰⁵⁶ Man and beast entwined, both predator and prey interconnecting. Just as nature punishes man, man punishes nature. Just as Australians love the kangaroo, celebrate its existence and make it emblematic of the country, at the same time they feed its flesh to their domestic cats and dogs, and fashion its pelt into toy koalas – imitation koalas being a necessity, since the trees that are critical to the survival of real koalas had been felled for the building of the family home. Arthur's reaction to that Murrumbidgee street scene had begun unravelling in the 1950s with his ceramic tile, *Man Carrying a Carcass*.

Arthur had been aware of the legend of St Francis since his childhood. Francis's beliefs were echoed in the faith of his parents: in a disregard of possessions, and an unequivocal acceptance of their fellow men and all living creatures. "Animals", as one critic noted of Arthur's works, "are usually on equal terms with the rest of us, and sometimes rather more".¹⁰⁵⁷ From Arthur's sketch of the 'grasshopper army' and the image of St Francis cradling the animals, which he had sent to John Reed while stationed in Bendigo, it is apparent that Francis had been on his mind during World War II, as he was in the 1950s when Arthur executed the tile painting, *St Francis in a Cornfield*. In the sixties amid another war, St. Francis the peace seeker, had been brought to his attention again by Tom Boase, Professor of English and Medieval Art and President of Magdalen College, Oxford.

Boase was a man of influence in the art world, at one time heading the Courtauld Institute of Fine Art in London, and taking chairs on many boards of major British galleries. The two men had known each other since Boase had paid a visit to Beaumaris in 1956. The professor's accent was so acute he pronounced boys 'byes'. Yvonne found him "good natured" and "frightfully, frightfully donnish". Arthur, "never intimidated by academia" took Tom Boase in his stride.¹⁰⁵⁸ Besides, Boase was a long-time fan. Not only had he admired Arthur's work when he viewed it in Australia, but had praised him to the Oxford rafters when, in 1949, he had found several of his canvases hanging in the rooms of the young Australian poet and writer, Geoffrey Dutton. "He is a nice bird,

¹⁰⁵⁵ "In one interview he spoke of St. Francis's attitude to the lepers ..." Arthur Boyd, *The Sunday Times*, 8 October, 1967.

¹⁰⁵⁶ "It was a goat ..." Arthur Boyd, Deborah Edwards interview.

¹⁰⁵⁷ "Animals", as one critic noted ... "Now!", 'Recapturing the outback in the Heart of Suffolk', November 28, 1980.

¹⁰⁵⁸ "But Arthur, who was 'never intimidated by academia' ..." Yvonne Boyd interview.

Boase is his name", Dutton had written to the Boyds.¹⁰⁵⁹ Geoffrey and his wife, Ninette, had met up with Arthur just before the war through Denison Deasey and Max Nicholson. They formed an instant and mutual attraction for each other. The paintings Boase had viewed hanging in Dutton's sitting room were the result of these long, interlinking friendships. A landscape of Mt Martha had been a gift from Denison; a view of the convent in Murrumbena the Duttons had bought from Max, and a Rosebud tree had been a wedding present from Arthur himself.

Boyd and Boase had resumed their acquaintance well before June 1964¹⁰⁶⁰ but in that month, just before he left for Italy, Arthur had tried to arrange a catch-up lunch date with his scholarly friend. Boase had written a book on St Francis in 1936, as part of Duckworth's 'Great Lives Series'. Just before distribution, the warehouse was bombed and all the remaining stock burnt, leaving Boase with one proof copy. When Boase related this story to Arthur his immediate suggestion to the august historian was: "Do it again".¹⁰⁶¹ On returning from Italy, Arthur made contact with Boase and arranged a dinner at home in Flask Walk, in November of 1964. The pastels and drawings that Arthur bought back from Umbria, particularly the *Wolf of Gubbio* and some St Francis pastels, were presented to Boase that evening¹⁰⁶². Boase, according to Arthur, "liked them." Perhaps spurred by Arthur's energy, Boase now agreed to Arthur's suggestion of beginning again, this time using Arthur's illustrations.

Later in 1965 after completing twenty-one gloriously coloured pastels Arthur had to take his own advice and start all over again. Thames and Hudson rejected the pastels on the grounds of cost: colour prints would be too expensive. Arthur wasted no time on regrets and, without a firm commission, simply turned around and repeated the series, using the medium of lithography. He chose lithography because it seemed closely allied to pastel in feeling. It was linear, the effect of the litho crayon against the smooth limestone was like putting pencil to paper. The lithographs strengthened the play between dark and light, and perhaps here Arthur was consciously making a bow to his father and his lifelong obsession: "Let there be light", Merric would always say.¹⁰⁶³

¹⁰⁵⁹ "He is a nice bird, Boase is his name ..." Extract of letter from Geoffrey Dutton to Arthur Boyd, Oxford to Murrumbena, 15 February, 1949. Bundanon archives.

¹⁰⁶⁰ "Boyd and Boase had resumed their acquaintance" Extract of letter from Boase dated 24 June, 1964, in which he thanks Arthur for an etching, and talks about trying to "meet again soon when you get back."

¹⁰⁶¹ "When Boase related this story to Arthur ..." Arthur admits to reading *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*. in a letter written to Franz Philipp, 25 January, 1966. He reports: "I suggested to [Boase] when he came to visit my studio and saw a few pastels I had done on the St. Francis theme, that he should bring it out again with my illustrations. [He liked them] ... I developed the theme after Boase's visit." University of Melbourne archives. Philipp boxes.

¹⁰⁶² "The pastels and drawings that Arthur bought back from Umbria ..." In a letter written by Arthur Boyd to Margaret Garlick, dated 13 February, 1968, Boyd informs that Boase saw the pastels in his studio. This was the first meeting after Arthur's return from Italy.

¹⁰⁶³ "The lithographs strengthened the play between dark and light ..." Interview David Boyd.

Early in January 1966 Walter Neurath left Hampstead Lane with a set of twenty-one black and white lithographs of St. Francis under his arm.¹⁰⁶⁴ Boase was "excited ... immensely impressed..." believing the lithographs told him "more than they did in colour and some of them are very brilliant indeed."¹⁰⁶⁵ Towards the end of August, Boase, after a "long talk" with Walter Neurath obtained a go-ahead for the project.¹⁰⁶⁶ Boase then asked Arthur for an explanatory list to guide him through the images..¹⁰⁶⁷ The expert and scholar of St Francis admitted, "I know some of the subjects – the wolf for instance – do not come in my text and must be inserted". Arthur's free-fall through the legend had confounded him.

Both Arthur and Yvonne were dedicated pacifists, 'Peaceniks' well before the 1960s term was coined. In September 1963 Bertrand Russell wrote to them personally, thanking them for their support in the struggle against nuclear war. Arthur had made a donation to an exhibition at Woburn Abbey, which Russell noted would be "an outstanding event, which your own work enhances."¹⁰⁶⁸ When President Johnson, in the following year dramatically increased US military intervention against North Vietnam, the peace movement became busier still, with nine years of bitter protest ahead.

Polly and Jamie's generation had been the first to grow up under the threat of nuclear war. Even in supposed 'peacetime', life at the moment of its greatest potential could be cut short. President Kennedy's assassination in November of 1963 proved that, as did the threat of the Cuban missile crisis. Protest marches were the order of the decade and flags flew for civil rights and against the Vietnam War.

As a concerned Australian in London, Arthur did what he could to influence politics at home, giving works, money, time. On Australia Day, 1966, on the one-hundred-and-

¹⁰⁶⁴ "Early in January 1966 ..." The following month Arthur sent Boase a set, generously telling him that they were a gift. Boase's reaction was: "Of course I would like to have the lithographs, but that is much too tremendous an offer. However I hope I can keep them for the meantime, in the hopes that Thames and Hudson begin to move."

¹⁰⁶⁵ "Early January of 1966, Walter Neurath left Hampstead Lane ..." The high quality production of the St. Francis lithographs was due to the printer John Watson. Watson had worked for the prestigious Ganymede Press, printing for Kokoschka and Henry Moore, and producing Nolan's series of lithographs, *Leda and the Swan*. It is highly likely Arthur had viewed Kokoschka's lithographs of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* which were on show at the new Marlborough Gallery at the time.

¹⁰⁶⁶ "Boase was 'excited ... immensely impressed ...'" It is interesting to observe the pecking order in the production of the 'St. Francis' works. On September 9, a letter arrives for Arthur from Thomas Rosenthal (signed 'Tom') advising Arthur that Tom Boase recommended the royalty income from the sale of the book to be divided into a ratio of 70% to Arthur and 30% to himself. Without consulting Arthur Thames and Hudson (Walter and Tom) took it upon themselves to conclude this was "a fair arrangement and in consequence have drawn up a contract which Tom Boase has already signed."

¹⁰⁶⁷ "Boase was the bearer of this good news ..." Extract of letter from Boase in Oxford to Arthur in Hampstead Lane dated 17 February, 1966.. Bundanon archives

¹⁰⁶⁸ "Arthur had made a donation ..." Extract of letter from Bertrand Russell to Arthur Boyd, Bundanon archives

seventy-eighth anniversary of the settlement of the country, he and other like-minded expats found little to celebrate. Arthur signed his name to a petition urging the government to immediately withdraw the fifteen-hundred Australian troops fighting in Vietnam. Ironically, the same words of protest would be repeated by Australians almost half a century later: "We believe nothing at this time could be more dangerous for Australia than its uncritical commitment to the policies of Britain and America ..." ¹⁰⁶⁹ However, Yvonne and Arthur's notion of peace went further than politics. Their belief could find expression in the words of British playwright David Hare, commenting on world conflicts raging at the turn of the twenty-first century: "It scarcely matters which way you choose to behave in a war. It will reach you and destroy you whichever way you think about it".

In April 1966, on Menzies' retirement, Harold Holt became Australia's Prime Minister. His run was brief. He drowned at Portsea in the waters off the Mornington Peninsula ('the killer coast') the following year. Supporting the US President as passionately as Sir Robert Menzies had supported the Queen, one of Holt's most memorable legacies was his adoption of the slogan: "All the Way with LBJ".

As the war escalated, and Jamie approached his eighteenth birthday, his parents had become increasingly anxious. Over the years they had continually made false starts for home. Berths had been reserved and then cancelled as commissions and exhibitions interfered with plans. Now the threat of conscription kept the family firmly placed in England.

In January 1966 while Arthur was busy protesting, he was finishing off the series of St. Francis lithographs that were taking longer to complete than he had expected. Tom Boase would consider these works a "remarkable interpretative tour de force" believing "nothing hitherto in Boyd's work has quite matched this prolonged intensity". ¹⁰⁷⁰ But Boase had no idea that these black and white images were about to burst into a fierce fire, enflamed by oil, and a series of the most prolonged intensity was only just about to begin.

Arthur shared a similar ethic to van Gogh. Both men craved the release of work: Vincent was always driven "to do so much better still ... sometimes with a kind of fury". ¹⁰⁷¹ Arthur had laboured at etching, ceramics, pastels but, as he completed the lithographs, he was "longing to get to real painting again". ¹⁰⁷² When he returned, he tore into the paint with a fury, his hands over the canvas like a concert pianist deprived too long of his grand piano. Given the impact, the size, and the range of sustained but varying notes, this group of paintings, to be known as 'Nebuchadnezzar' was worthy of a symphony. These works would eventually be universally hailed, with one critic declaring the series

¹⁰⁶⁹ "Ironically, the same words of protest would be repeated ..." Extract from protest letter written by Virginia Spate, Lecturer in Art, Bath Academy of Art, Wiltshire. Bundanon archives.

¹⁰⁷⁰ "Tom Boase would consider these works ..." T.S.R. Boase, Introduction, *Arthur Boyd*: Franz Philipp

¹⁰⁷¹ "Both men craved the release of work ..." Extract from letter written by Vincent van Gough to his brother Theo, May 1883

¹⁰⁷² "Arthur had laboured long ..." Extract of letter written by Yvonne Boyd letter to Harold Metz, January 1966.

to be “one of the triumphs of modern figurative art”.¹⁰⁷³ The first half of 1966 Arthur would produce an enormous number of ‘first series’ paintings.

In October 1967 Nebuchadnezzar was still pouring out of Arthur’s studio, the larger paintings filling the downstairs rooms and the smaller works climbing to the upper floors. He was “just polishing off the last of thirty-five pictures” to be exhibited at the Adelaide Arts Festival the following year. *The Sunday Times* gossip writer, ‘Atticus’ in October of 1967 visited Hampstead Lane, where Arthur was photographed dwarfed by a vast canvas, sketching a stoat and Nebuchadnezzar in flames. Arthur had obliged the reporter by setting up a new canvas and drawing solely for the camera. As always, finding it impossible to speak about his work, Arthur goofed his way through the interview, telling the reporter he wasn’t sure that grass eating proved Nebuchadnezzar mad: “A lot of doctors believe that he was merely suffering from a deficiency in greens”. The story detailed Arthur’s works as “a massive sequence – almost a giant strip cartoon – featuring King Nebuchadnezzar”; but the article was ultimately dismissive. The headline read: ‘King Size’, but the final overwhelming question for the reporter was -- why the stoat?

Arthur was always willing to play the clown. Despite his ever-increasing fame, he was never pompous enough to consider that people should ‘get’ his paintings. Never pressing anything on anyone, except a gift, Arthur would allow and welcome whatever anyone believed they saw. Perhaps he was hoping for an explanation that would make sense of the problems he consistently tried to ‘unsee’. During one of Gunn’s interviews, after a flurry of debate, Arthur confirmed he welcomed contrary opinion: “I don’t want the thing affirmed for me”.

Brian O’Shaughnessy would say of Arthur: “he had loads of antenna ... he was hypersensitive ... almost a bit occult in a way ... he had a spring bubbling up in his head, he was full of fantasies.” Thumping his heart with his fist, O’Shaughnessy added, “Arthur had a feeling of density here”.¹⁰⁷⁴ Take these qualities into account, it is unsurprising Arthur felt the world a frightening place and found it difficult to read the newspapers: “I don’t want to be cut off and have nothing to do with what’s going on but, if you took it to your heart, which is what you should do, you’d go stark staring mad. The wars, the starving people...”¹⁰⁷⁵

During 1966 and 1967 Arthur couldn’t escape the world; even the local news in the *Hampstead & Highgate Express* was horrific: ‘Growing old in terror ...’ ‘suicide after the sack ...’ ‘Miss Mary Best was found dead in a gas filled room ...’ ‘man plunged thirty feet to his death ...’ ‘man loses eye in pub brawl...’ ‘Twenty-seven year old soldier from Hampstead killed this week while serving with American Army in Vietnam.’

¹⁰⁷³ “These works would eventually be universally hailed ...” Elwyn Lynn, *The Australian*, ‘The Weekend Review’, 15-16 January, 1994.

¹⁰⁷⁴ “Thumping his heart with his fist ...” Brian O’Shaughnessy interview, London, 2001.

¹⁰⁷⁵ “Arthur felt the world a frightening place ...” Arthur Boyd, Schooling interview.

All the suffering was like a razor scraping against Arthur's always raw nerves: "If you really wanted to do something about it, you'd just throw up your hands in horror and scream and run down the street".¹⁰⁷⁶ In Arthur's description he makes visible that anguished man whose simplified lineaments flail through so many past works from 1940 and *The Escapists*, to South Melbourne's *The Baths*, to Open Country's *The Mockers* and on to the 1950s and the Beaumaris figure hanging, both crucified and lost, rising and redeemed, over the altar in the church at Yallourn.

His walks on the heath were Arthur's great release. Cygnets, pikes, herons, coots, moor hens gathered around the ponds; the rolling, tree-filled spaces stretching for miles without touching tarmac, were populated by squirrels, foxes, and rabbits. He found this green and watery shelter, just four miles from the city, "extremely beautiful ... a joy".¹⁰⁷⁷ For a man who was obsessed with metamorphosis and with that fearful final changing from flesh to dust, an event that took place on Arthur's beloved heath some time on Friday, 28 April 1967, had a profoundly disturbing effect.

After the police and firemen had gathered, after motor-scooters and trucks had cordoned off a wild green section of Hampstead Heath, after the coroner's report and the inquest the following month, there was still only the scantest detail about the deceased, nothing to explain why this man had chosen to end his life in such a deliberate and horrific way. The only facts were that the man had reached his thirtieth year, and had left nothing behind in the world but a plastic can thought to have contained petrol with which he doused himself, and a torn postcard signed "Lynch". It was assumed, in that particularly anti-Irish time, he was "an Irish vagrant". Newspaper reports compounded the horror, offering their own callous, metamorphic titles for the nameless man: *The Daily Mail* dubbing him a 'Human Torch',¹⁰⁷⁸ and *The Hampstead & Highgate Express*, a 'Burning Log'.

In Arthur's imaginative mind, so apt to conjure form within form, the peaceful heath would be forever changed. How often now when he walked out in the winter mist or summer haze or in the half light would his blood freeze, convinced for that suspended moment that a fallen branch, or rock, or clump of bushes, might be the shape of a twisted, agonised man? Arthur needed to feel for everyone and everything, believing that "once you break the possibility of connection, then you go mad".¹⁰⁷⁹ His empathy was both his gift and his burden. After viewing Nebuchadnezzar, one critic was moved to declare: "I have never seen such strong evocations of loneliness as here".¹⁰⁸⁰

¹⁰⁷⁶ "If you really wanted to do something about it ..." *ibid*

¹⁰⁷⁷ "He found this green and watery shelter ..." Arthur Boyd, Schooling interview.

¹⁰⁷⁸ "Newspaper reports compounded the horror" *Daily Mail*, Saturday, 29 April, 1967. The four-line report read: "Human torch death: Police believe that a young man found burned to death on Hampstead Heath yesterday poured petrol over his clothes and set light to himself."

¹⁰⁷⁹ "Arthur needed to feel for everyone and everything, believing" Boyd, Arthur. *The Australian Magazine*. 'The uncertainty of Arthur Boyd.' Deborah Jones.

¹⁰⁸⁰ "After viewing Nebuchadnezzar, one critic ..." Richard Smart, *Arts Review*, Vol. 25, No. 11, June 1973.

Although Arthur would label this tragedy an anti-Vietnam protest, in the months following the self-immolation there was no further elucidation in the press: the man's death remained a mystery.¹⁰⁸¹ Perhaps Arthur felt it was a 'cover-up' by those pro-war, denying the oxygen of publicity to those anti-war. Or, because this incident occurred well into the first series of Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps Arthur's imagination already stimulated by the world-wide pictures of saffron-robed Buddhist monks sitting still and silent in the lotus position while they fed themselves to raging balls of fire had confused this suicide with "some form of protest about Vietnam".

Arthur saw madness in the act of self-immolation, to "kill yourself for a belief in the future ... to make a protest by "doing something equally as bad" he believed was "a terrible, horrible thing to do".¹⁰⁸² Perhaps also he associated the suicide with the Vietnam protests that happened in the days immediately following the incident on the Heath.¹⁰⁸³ Madness was rife. In 1966 President Johnson, by way of arguing for an acceleration of the war informed Congress: "The war in Vietnam is not like other wars. Yet, finally war is always the same. It is young men dying in the fullness of their promise. It is trying to kill a man that you do not know well enough to hate. Therefore, to know war is to know that there is still madness in the world."¹⁰⁸⁴ Words that contort with greater madness when you consider they belonged to the man who sanctioned napalm, the chemical fire that burned flesh.

Arthur had been stunned by the "ghoulish" treatment of the suicide on the Heath. *The Times*, seemingly attributing no importance to the man's death, failed to report the event. The newspapers that picked up the story seemed almost as uninterested. Arthur felt the press "very unmoved", and he countered the insensitivity by trying to understand the tortured man's psyche:

It seems to me that you might imagine you were on fire if you were mad. Either you imagine you are mad if you are on fire, or if you are on fire that you're mad.

¹⁰⁸¹ In most literature it is stated that Arthur's prime motivating force in the creation of 'Nebuchadnezzar' was a 'series' of self-immolations on Hampstead Heath. After extensive research in local and national newspaper archives this writer found only one daily newspaper report, a few mentions of this single incident in the Hampstead & Highgate local paper, and not one memory of any self-immolations from any of the local inhabitants of Hampstead and Highgate, many who belonged to the 'Hampstead Society' and whose habit it was, during the sixties, to take daily walks on the heath.

¹⁰⁸² "Arthur saw madness in the act of self immolation ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

"It was a terrible, horrible thing to do" Arthur Boyd, Schooling interview.

¹⁰⁸³ "Perhaps he associated the suicide with the Vietnam protests ..." 29 April, 1967, *The Times* reported Cassius Clay (recently re-named Muhammad Ali) was facing a prison sentence of five years or a fine of up to ten thousand dollars for refusing his draft. His defence: "I have searched my conscience and I find I cannot be true to my religion by accepting a call." And on May 1, a Vietnam 'March of Shame' was staged, with protestors walking on Downing Street. *The Times* reported: "'Queen Kathleen'... Kathleen Farr, a grandmother... presented a mock medal to Mr. Manny Bunkett, impersonating an Australian soldier who had fought in Vietnam." Her speech, tongue in cheek but deadly serious, explained that in her role "as the arch symbol of English Propriety" she was setting her "seal of official respectability on the wicked obscenity of this war." The 'queen' was summoned to Bow Street Court.

¹⁰⁸⁴ "The war in Vietnam is not like other wars ..." An extract from President Johnson's State of Union address to Congress, 12 January, 1966.

Another thing that you might feel is that you are changing colour. ...that you were going half pink or half red or half purple. These are the sort of things that you might imagine.¹⁰⁸⁵

Despite Arthur contributing much of the Nebuchadnezzar series to anti-war protests, his obsession to understand a mind that consciously welcomes pain, would have been deeply rooted in memories of his father. Years later, as an elderly man, he revealed how he sought to understand the notion of "self-inflicted punishment", reasoning that those who practised it were so bedevilled by the world they believed the solution was "to do something equally bad to themselves."¹⁰⁸⁶

Just as St Francis feared disfigurement, afraid that he would be transfigured into a hunchback, did Arthur's fear of inheriting his father's genes still plague him despite the assurance by the army doctors that epilepsy came through the maternal line? And what of the maternal line? Did Arthur ever learn of the verdict of temporary insanity that was recorded on his grandfather Gough's death certificate?

During this time, according to Rosalind Humphries, Arthur would talk a lot about death, "mainly in relation to war and waste" and about his father: "He'd make a joke of his father's craziness ... although he never said he was frightened of ending up like his dad, I had a hunch that was his concern". Just as so many of Tennessee Williams's plays were constantly linked to his fear of inheriting the unstable mind of his sister, Rose, perhaps Arthur was seeking similar expression: the possibility of a cathartic expulsion. In the following quote, Arthur could be describing both father and son; both sufferer and fearful inheritor: "I have tried to convey in the paints a general feeling about the things he would have done and felt when he was mad or thought he was mad."¹⁰⁸⁷ Once, when asked about his state of mind when executing portraits of his father or mother, Arthur responded: "You're stopping yourself going mad ... by unseeing it. It's there, so the best way to expunge it ... apart from curing the disease ... would be to paint it out of your system ..."¹⁰⁸⁸

"I try to connect everything", Arthur said.¹⁰⁸⁹ He was aware of the works of Emily Dickinson. Amid memories of his father, protests against the war, and fear of his own sanity buckling, would Arthur have found resonance in her verse?

*"Much Madness is divinest Sense –
To a discerning Eye –
Much Sense – the starkest Madness –
'Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail –*

¹⁰⁸⁵ "It seems to me that you might imagine you were on fire if you were mad." Schooling interview.

¹⁰⁸⁶ "Years later, as an elderly man, he revealed ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

¹⁰⁸⁷ "The idea of Nebuchadnezzar as a theme..." Extract of letter from Arthur Boyd to Brian Johnstone, dated 8 June, 1967. Bundanon archives,

¹⁰⁸⁸ "You're stopping yourself going mad ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

¹⁰⁸⁹ "I try to connect everything", Arthur said. *The Australian Magazine*,. Op cit.

*Assent – and you are sane –
Demur – you're straightway dangerous –
And handled with a chain.*"¹⁰⁹⁰

To Arthur's 'discerning eye' parallels abounded. Over and over again he found poems and stories overlaying circumstances and experiences in his own life. As one critic blithely noted, "[Boyd] is not concerned however with the military prowess of the Chaldean ruler or his achievement – as history records – of making Babylon one of the wonders of the ancient world, but with the legend of mental disorder and grass eating."¹⁰⁹¹ How was this stranger to know of the day the cupboard was so completely bare at Open Country that Mrs Thornton was reduced to trying the bizarre experiment of cooking grass? Few could begin to guess at the connections Arthur made between his father and that ancient king. However, the critic was in no doubt that Arthur cast much of Daniel's words aside, sidelined the parable against pride, and bent the story his way - keeping the symbols that suited, and creating his own. As Arthur admitted, his tale of Nebuchadnezzar was spun around "the theme of madness".¹⁰⁹² That, the critic couldn't miss.

Arthur hid behind these ancient and well-known stories like an actor would hide behind his costume and his script. They were a vehicle that allowed him to "say or do things and get away with being [himself] inside." He believed you would "probably get more damaged" if he were "trying to tell people seriously what you thought, or what they should think..."¹⁰⁹³ Apart from flying down the street screaming, his answer to tragedy was that of a doctor with his scalpel and twine on the losing side of a battlefield - "to still go on with the business of getting down to your paint and picking up your brushes." Like Rembrandt, the painter he rated as a magnificent "dissector", he attempted to cut through the mayhem and the pain.¹⁰⁹⁴ His hope was that he "might be creating some sort of image, or something that will affect somebody in some way."¹⁰⁹⁵

Vietnam, the Buddhists, the unknown man on the Heath - all of these instances of the human form engulfed by fire may have influenced Arthur's depiction of flesh in flames. But what were the other connections, "themes"? Did Arthur recognise the new-world Nebuchadnezzars -- the Presidents and Prime Ministers, intoxicated with their might, their empires? Did the ancient words of Daniel conjure Merric?: "*And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken*". 11:42 Yvonne believed many works of Arthur's Nebuchadnezzar "would recall his father's face".¹⁰⁹⁶ The celestial constellation, 'The Seven Sisters,' appear in several

¹⁰⁹⁰ "Much Madness is divinest Sense-" Emily Dickinson, 435.

¹⁰⁹¹ "As one critic blithely noted ..." *The Times*, 29 October, 1969.

¹⁰⁹² "As Arthur admitted, his tale of Nebuchadnezzar was spun ..." Arthur Boyd, Schooling interview.

¹⁰⁹³ "He believed you would "probably get more damaged ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹⁰⁹⁴ "Like Rembrandt, the painter he rated as a magnificent 'dissector' ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

"Rembrandt loved dissecting things, he was a dissector right through ... but a romantic."

¹⁰⁹⁵ "His hope was ..." Anthony Schooling interview.

¹⁰⁹⁶ "Yvonne believed many works ..." would recall his father's face" .October, 1999, Yvonne Boyd to Brenda Niall.

Nebuchadnezzar; far more wondrous than any earthly seven wonders. In Greek mythology and in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses,' they represent the daughters that wept at the suffering of their father, Atlas, and were transformed into a constellation known as the 'Pleiades'.

Or was Nebuchadnezzar to do with Arthur? *His* fear of madness? *His* isolation? By the end of 1967 Arthur had been seven years in exile: his ambition, in part, preventing the return to his country. Had he begun to feel the weight of success: the pressure that comes with the plaudits, the prizes, the gold? When asked if there was an element of self mockery in Nebuchadnezzar, Arthur affirmed it: "Yes ... that's true enough ... you shouldn't I suppose do that but if in the process of being able to mock yourself a bit I suppose you produce a picture that's not bad".¹⁰⁹⁷

"The king ... said to Daniel ... art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen ...?" 11.26. To view the first series of Arthur Boyd's Nebuchadnezzar¹⁰⁹⁸ is to wonder if the painter, like Daniel, had been charged with interpreting a panoramic dream. It is a fevered dream, a subterranean delirium; one thrashing vision after another, as Nebuchadnezzar's reason unravels under nature's tyrannical rule. Winds bludgeon, rain stabs, seas beat, quicksands pull, fields and forests bind and imprison, birds dive-bomb, beasts attack, and the firmament throws down furious fireballs. Nature's victim lies low, crouches, crawls, runs, but cannot escape. The wrath of the elements is relentless. He begs, he weeps, he pleads, but the promise of comfort, of beauty, of love, of release, is either denied, distant, spied upon, or potentially disastrous. And yet, for all the discordant, fearful strangeness there is a sense of something almost recognisable within the ravishing palette infused with rose-madder, almost graspable within the rapturous layering of paint. Something in the ethereal human form as it is absorbed by the waves, dissolves in a wheat field, and vaporises like an incandescent, streaming star into the ether, that "evokes so sweet a Torment – such sumptuous – Despair".¹⁰⁹⁹

A trio of kings appear in this series: Merric, the King of Open Country; the Lion, the King of the Jungle; and Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. While Arthur was painting these works he became a constant sight at a second-hand shop in Highgate. He would make regular pilgrimages up the hill to the village to stare fixedly into the glassy eyes of a stuffed lion.¹¹⁰⁰ Rather than the lion being associated with Daniel's miraculous escape from the lion's den, this store-caged, forever-bound creature resonated with the mighty who have fallen, the noble who have been brought low. Here was the other side of the story: man's prideful abuse of nature. Here was the king of the animals, driven from his wildness and cast out into civilisation. All were victims: The beast, a victim of

¹⁰⁹⁷ "When asked if there was an element of self-mockery in Nebuchadnezzar, Arthur affirmed it ..." ABC sound archives, Sydney.

¹⁰⁹⁸ "To view the first series ..." *Nebuchadnezzar: Arthur Boyd, with a text by T.S.R. Boase*: Thames and Hudson, London, 1972. This book illustrates 34 colour plates.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Emily Dickinson, 505.

¹¹⁰⁰ "He would make regular pilgrimages up the hill ..." Interview John Hull. "The lion came into existence ... in a junk shop at the top of Hampstead lane ... a stuffed lion ... [Arthur] would go up and look at it constantly."

man's vainglory. Nebuchadnezzar, a victim of a wrathful God. And Merric, a victim of nature, brought to ground by a punishing gene.

Arthur once explained: "I have worked fast and I've worked slow...in the same way that you don't always like running along the street ... you like to walk along sometimes, stroll other times, hold your head up other times, and let it fall other times...as the mood takes you".¹¹⁰¹ When the 'mood,' the inspiration for Nebuchadnezzar, took him, Arthur flew. Yvonne was acquainted with how her husband's ideas would "jell very suddenly when he begins",¹¹⁰² but it left John Hull breathless. Arthur worked fast and loose. One critic felt Arthur had caught "the dream of a moment ... as it stirs";¹¹⁰³ another that the artist had translated "madness" through "a rage of paint".¹¹⁰⁴ Arthur believed he was "more likely to get one good picture out of twenty" than if he did only one.¹¹⁰⁵ "By working flat out" he reasoned he gave himself "a chance to explore every aspect of the idea."¹¹⁰⁶ He found it "much better to do a lot and then sort them out".¹¹⁰⁷ He acknowledged that "an enormous amount of failures" was "one of the penalties of the way I do things".¹¹⁰⁸

Fellow artists, like Len French, were astonished at Arthur's speed and output. French was a painter who insisted on anchoring his board, holding it down heavily, while Arthur would say, "No, you must let it move". While French would stare fixedly at his canvas, unable to begin, thinking his "idea wasn't big enough" he found Arthur's approach "compulsive". Although Arthur's paintings poured out, they had been brewing, in the form of drawings and dry points, for a very long time.¹¹⁰⁹ When French saw Nebuchadnezzar he was riveted: "The use of paint ... now that was paint ...you were in it... it was coming out of something". French believed that Arthur had developed "a power ... a power that must have shocked him".¹¹¹⁰

When Arthur was working on the Nebuchadnezzar series, John Hull had become Arthur's daily factotum once again; employed now, not through any sense of favour, but because Arthur thought him "a very good technical man" who worked "marvellously".¹¹¹¹ John Hull had taken time off to return to school and get his life in order. When he re-established contact with Arthur it was through a letter, early in 1966.

¹¹⁰¹ "As Arthur once explained, 'I have worked fast ...' Schooling interview.

¹¹⁰² "Yvonne was acquainted with how her husband's ideas would jell ..." Extract of letter from Yvonne Boyd to Harold Mertz, January 26, 1966. Bundanon archives.

¹¹⁰³ "One critic felt Arthur had caught ..." Richard Smart, *Arts Review*, Vol. 25, No 11, June 1973.

¹¹⁰⁴ "another that the artist ..." Edwin Mullins, 'Boyd on the Wing,' *The Sun*, London, tbs

¹¹⁰⁵ "Arthur believed ..." Schooling interview.

¹¹⁰⁶ "By working flat out ..." *The Sunday Times*, 8 October, 1967.

¹¹⁰⁷ "He found it much better ..." Schooling interview.

¹¹⁰⁸ "He acknowledged that ..." *The Sunday Times*, op cit

¹¹⁰⁹ "As with the etchings and drypoints the subject (*Nebuchadnezzar*) is used simply to trigger off ideas for the paintings". Extract of letter to Frank McDonald from Arthur Boyd, 8 June, 1967. July of 1967 Clune Galleries showed some seventy drawings on three themes: *St. George and the Dragon*, *Ancient Mariner* and the *Potter and his Music* together with two tapestries.

¹¹¹⁰ "French was a painter ..." Interview Len French

¹¹¹¹ "When Arthur was working on the Nebuchadnezzar series ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

He wrote of Jean describing her as another form of potential self-immolation: "Big Mum in the south of the world [was] still playing with fire...she has asked me to go to the south."¹¹¹² but he told Arthur he did not want to "get his fingers burnt" again. Despite words spoken, or unspoken, between the two men after knowing Arthur for over thirty years John Hull concluded: "Arthur had the power to do whatever he wanted to do, but he contained it ... perhaps he wouldn't be able to paint like that if he hadn't".

Arthur didn't approve of possession, even though his paintings suggest he was well acquainted with that desire. Discussing Nebuchadnezzar, Arthur explained the king's weakness as he saw it: "He wanted to possess everything ... he wanted to possess people, he wanted to possess animals ... he wanted to be them." In the case of the lion, he wanted "its power and fierceness".¹¹¹³

The first series of Nebuchadnezzar was, according to Hull, the second. The first images were scraped off the canvas and the oozing oil deposited in a big old wooden tea-chest with a hole cut in the top. To John Hull's eyes Arthur's first attempts were all about "sexual energy, thrusting: just sex". Arthur would scrape the oil off the canvas into the chest, as if he was disposing nuclear waste, saying, "It's too strong for the world ... they can't take that". Then he'd paint over the canvas again.

Hull also observed that, if Arthur felt his painting was working well he wouldn't let it out of his sight. He would be all over it, protecting it, on his knees examining it, saying to Hull, "You've touched it, you've smudged it". If he was having lunch in the kitchen on the first floor, he'd struggle up the stairs carrying the soaking-wet, five-by-three foot canvas with him and prop it up somewhere, on the mantel sometimes, then with his head positioned low and at a parallel angle to his plate, shovel in the food, all the while never taking his eyes off the canvas. This obsessive behaviour would last around twenty-four hours and then he would release the work.

Apart from the fires of war and the fire of madness, the series boils with the fire of sex. There are no females turning into delicate, flighty fireflies, illuminating misty darkness. No woman plays a leading role. Nature is the cruel mistress. In *Nebuchadnezzar On Fire Falling Over A Waterfall* the king plummets, like a doomed Icarus being irradiated by the sun, towards the sexual cleft in the landscape. His burning hot eyes, locked on the object of his desire, echo those of the black ram who lures him towards his downfall. A rainbow of testicles streak across the canvases: in *Nebuchadnezzar On Fire Fallen In A Field*, they flame red; in *Nebuchadnezzar With Crows*, they blaze yellow; in *White Head of Nebuchadnezzar With Crow*, they burn blue. Magenta, yellow, and cyan – the primary pigments depicting the primary element, the fire of creation, Doris's "flame of life." Nebuchadnezzar's sexual torment is made manifest through the physicality in the application of paint, the "heavy ... terribly heavy" impasto; and the moulding of the

¹¹¹² "He then describe Jean as another form of potential self-immolation ..." In response to Hull's letter Arthur replied "like to see you sometime..."

¹¹¹³ "Discussing Nebuchadnezzar ..." Arthur Boyd interview, with Tim Fischer, Janet McKenzie, Canberra, June 1993.

genitals, like a potter might mould. In the nineties, when discussing *Nebuchadnezzar Running In The Rain*, Arthur was in no doubt of his state of mind at the time: "It was fairly ... fairly *felt*".¹¹¹⁴

The 'Nebuchadnezzar series' connected the present to the past. The majority of the canvases were, intentionally, the same dimensions as Titian's *Diana and Actaeon*. The same size window into which to peer and find, once again, tormented scenes of nature's push and pull. The motif of the hooked-shaped tree, used in the landscape of the 'Bride' series, was deliberately reintroduced. This tree, which in the Australian bushland further ignites a fire by creating a draft through its hollow stem, here fans the fire of Nebuchadnezzar's agony. *Nebuchadnezzar's Head In A Wave* is set on a beach in Suffolk. Arthur had noticed how the English shoreline was different to Australia, dropping down steeply, forming a pebbly wall: "Any flotsam that hits ... goes backwards and forwards". Arthur saw it as a form of torture, perhaps linking it to the motion of the pottery wheel. The phantomish, round, nebulous shapes particularly in *The Gift of the Lamb* bear a resemblance to Merric's numerous drawings of dogs and puppies. The great birds swooping down Arthur admitted were a connection to his father and his obsessive drawings of black birds. But perhaps there was another deeper, needier connection. In the biblical paintings and works of the late forties, birds were about the only aspect of Arthur's work that Merric had reacted to, commented upon.¹¹¹⁵

Like minutes to the hour, around and around the symbols go. The flowers that grew from the dead husband now sprout from Nebuchadnezzar. The King, Arthur revealed, "won't last long ..." as he contorts himself around his gold, he has already begun to "disintegrate ... to rot ... and make very good compost". Nebuchadnezzar's body, bent double, in a half-hoop, is like Arthur's bent tree branch "that goes sinking back down into the earth" on its vegetative cycle. Arthur predicted that he was on his way to becoming "bogged down"; sooner or later to become "a container for flowers".¹¹¹⁶ Here is temporal man. His feeble flesh, so swift to decay, inanelly trying to possess and protect gold, one of the longest-lasting, brightest substances on earth; just as a hunter might foolishly kill and stuff a lion in an attempt to possess its strength and shining power.

In Nebuchadnezzar there is the suffering of those who see (*Nebuchadnezzar with Crows*) and the suffering of those who can't see (*White Nebuchadnezzar (Blind)* and *White Dog on a Starry Night*). Nebuchadnezzar's madness will be cured, the artist tells us, by the fire of "electric therapy" and a "crash back to earth". St Francis's redemption from the passions of the flesh will involve a turning away, a casting of eyes from earthly desires. Despite the prognosis of pain and denial, one British critic ventured that, looking into

¹¹¹⁴ "In the nineties, when discussing *Nebuchadnezzar Running In The Rain* ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

¹¹¹⁵ "But perhaps there was another deeper, needier connection". In relation to his father and his reaction to Arthur's paintings, Arthur discussed a painting that would sit in the Brown Room -- *The Expulsion*. "My father used to draw that bird ... he used to like that little bit ... I don't think he took much notice of the rest, but he liked that ..." Arthur Boyd, Peace tapes. "[*The Expulsion*] used to sit against the wall [in the 'Brown Room'] I remember my father drawing that, he used to like the sharpness, the nice sharp beak". Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹¹¹⁶ "The King, Arthur revealed ..." Arthur Boyd. Fischer/McKenzie interview.

the works, there could be found “many starting points for an investigation into our own fears and understanding of life”. He concluded that from the Australian desert a prophet had come: “Arthur Boyd’s vision may give us sight”.¹¹¹⁷

¹¹¹⁷ “He concluded that from the Australian desert ...” Richard Smart, ‘Arts Review’ Vol. 25, No 11, June, 1973.

CHAPTER 17

It's Time

*"Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange"* The Tempest

"Gimme sum budder willya?" The children have the most revolting Aussie accents ... they constantly demand some sort of social diversion...TV has taken over in the American manner of the mighty dollar..." Tom Sanders, after living with his family in England and France, had written these words of warning to the Boyds on his return to Melbourne in 1962.¹¹¹⁸ It formed a pile of one. The Boyds could have papered a room with airmail letters cajoling, pleading and demanding their return date to Melbourne. Friends asked if they had forgotten the sweetness of the wattle-scented air, the blossom on the banksias, the sea turning lilac in the spring? How could they possibly stay away so long? When were they coming home? When ... when... WHEN?! The Boyds wrote they were homesick for gum trees but their replies – which had begun with "in-a-few-months" and then expanded to "should-be-next-year" - had become, after eight years, irritating for all concerned.

In 1968, it was time for ten-year old Lucy-Ellen to visit her birthplace, and for twenty-year-old Jamie and twenty-two-year-old Polly to be left to fend for themselves. At last, on 1 April, 1968, Yvonne and Arthur finally kept a date with a shipping company and sailed for Fremantle on the *Orcades*. This time they could afford an outside cabin with a porthole. And this time Arthur, with two hands to grasp one child tight, could afford to subdue his fear of offspring slipping through the ship's railings.

The Arthur Boyd now returning to Australia, over eight years later, had put on a little weight, gone completely grey and had only a slightly better wardrobe. A small change had occurred around the eyes; his eyebrows had become bushier, their inverted V shape far more pronounced, giving the effect of a permanent state of questioning. But his fame was such that he would appear as a completely different man to compatriots' eyes. Since his departure, reports of his progress had been filed as regularly as the shipping news. Anything about Arthur Boyd, from critical reviews to Jamie tobogganing on a snowy Hampstead Heath and the minutiae of how many people gathered around his English Christmas table, was newsworthy. Apart from this transient news-of-the-day fame, Arthur's success had been set more permanently, in Times Roman, and in stone.

The previous year, a monograph devoted to the work of Arthur Boyd had been released in London and Australia by Thames and Hudson. It scrupulously and lavishly detailed his works, from Rosebud's landscapes to Umbrio's St. Francis. It was a publication of such quality it set a benchmark of excellence. Arthur was returning home a master of his craft in all media – etching, pastel, oil, ceramics – and this had been made abundantly clear, not simply in the effusive British reception over the past eight years but by a Viennese refugee, a traveller on the *Dunera* and an old friend of twenty years, Franz Philipp.

It had begun when Yvonne put on her "best clothes" and caught the Tube into the office of Walter Neurath to suggest his company publish a book on Arthur's work. Walter and his wife Eva were not just social friends, but the Boyds' neighbours. Yvonne believed

¹¹¹⁸ "Gimme sum budder willya?" Extract from letter written by Tom Sanders to Arthur Boyd, 7 December, 1962. Bundanon archives.

Eva “had lots of acumen” but Walter was “a little more diffident”. This door-knocking demanded a step out of character for Yvonne, an act of bravery. Thames and Hudson had already published a volume on Nolan and in 1964, at this point in Arthur’s career, Yvonne believed “it was time”.

Franz Philipp had not been the Boyds’ first choice of author. Arthur admitted he had originally approached Joe Burke: “I asked him if he would write the thing and he said he would not have time to do that ... I don’t know whether I just asked Franz Philipp myself... he was very, very thorough indeed”.¹¹¹⁹ Philipp’s thoroughness created surprise, then consternation.

Some time around the beginning of November 1964 plans were made to get the production underway. Before Arthur spoke to Philipp, he spoke to Tom Boase, asking him to write an introduction. At this point, Thames and Hudson were expecting Franz Philipp’s text to take a “few months to complete”.¹¹²⁰ The few months would stretch to a few years, and that time would be filled with urgent trunk line calls, desperate telegrams, delayed deliveries, and letters that produced misunderstandings by crossing mid-air. Given the initial, absurdly tight deadline, apparently no one realised how mammoth was the task of detailing Arthur’s already vast output. Catalogues of every exhibition required hunting down. Hundreds upon hundreds of works had to be located. Only when they had been successfully traced could the process of selection begin. Of the works chosen, a great number needed to be photographed. Although many people, including university researchers¹¹²¹ and dealers such as Tam Purves, helped enormously, the job of cataloguing (850 final entries) demanded a vast amount of energy and time. Compounding this, Philipp was juggling “an almost completed El Greco manuscript” together with his full-time job as senior lecturer in Fine Arts at Melbourne University.

When Philipp began seeking biographical detail, the Boyds referred him to other sources: to brother Guy, to sister Lucy, to past interviews. Direct questions were answered with a minimum of detail. When asked if Bernard Smith’s statement that the Boyd family were “devout” was correct, the only reply given was: “Bernard Smith’s statement about the family being devout could stand, though it mightn’t be the word I would choose”. No chosen word was offered. Philipp’s initial attempt at garnering information brought a broadside against a colleague, a lecturer in Fine Arts, Margaret Garlick. She was a critic of Arthur Boyd that other critics saluted as one of his best.¹¹²² Philipp had asked for a reaction to her quote regarding *Laughing Heads*. ‘Garlick had opined that the “profiles are ugly, simplified cartoon faces with accented eyes and noses:

¹¹¹⁹ “Arthur admitted he had originally approached Joe Burke ...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes

¹¹²⁰ “At this point, Thames and Hudson were expecting Franz Philipp’s text ...” Letter from Patricia Lowman, secretary to head and owner of Thames and Hudson, addressed to T. Boase, 11 November, 1964.

¹¹²¹ “Although many people, including university researchers ...” Jocelyn Gray a former colleague of Philipp’s assisted in the early stages of compiling the catalogue and bibliography, both in London with the Boyds, and Melbourne with Philipp.

¹¹²² “She was a critic of Arthur Boyd ...” Patrick McCaughey, *The Age*, ‘Arts and Entertainment,’ 25 June, 1968.

a Jewish caricature". The reply, "I never thought of any painting I did as caricature", was the prelude to a lambasting. Arthur's response seemed uncharacteristically discordant: "Miss Garlick," the letter continued, had "a chip on the shoulder ... a slightly aggressive attitude", similar to the "brashness and journalese" that "Robert Hughes had when I last read his work".¹¹²³ Words and phrases in Garlick's work, considered "over persuasive ... not quite related ..." were quoted. Among them were: "degraded ... debased ... extreme perversions ... bestial ... copulating ... obsessed ... subversion .. unwholesome ... frenzied ... rape ... carnal".

Despite the Boyds' displeasure Philipp's final manuscript revealed him unbowed: there could be no escaping the frustrated, melancholic, despairing sexual sagas. Where Phillip believed certain words or phrases related to Arthur's work, he used them; not only repeating shunned sexual descriptives but roundly fleshing out their bones. Eight months into the project, Philipp received a cable from Arthur:

"I am desperate about text am afraid T and H may drop the whole thing already four months late."¹¹²⁴ A letter followed, explaining: "You may think my cable sounded abject ... I admit my agitation is because, if the book does fall through, I will be the chief loser. You did after all promise to have the text in their hands by a certain time – 4 months ago. ... I implore you, Franz, to get the text to them by mid-September at the latest".

Philipp's restrained response came almost a full month later: "I haven't written until now because the letter I would have had to write might have been rather distressing. Fortunately your dark forebodings did not come true." The publishers, it seemed, were understanding of the author's concerns. Phillip reports on "a most friendly and co-operative" letter from Thames and Hudson that was "full of encouragement".¹¹²⁵

At the end of 1965 the Boyds were at last reading text but only half of it. Philipp still needed biographical detail; amid other unanswered queries, he was yet to receive the promised account of Arthur's grandfather. After Philipp complained direct to the publisher, the Boyds wrote asking him to detail his dissatisfaction. The Boyds' reply admitted there had been "occasional points on which we differed, mainly on the emphasis that was desirable" and concluded, along the same lines as so many missives already had: "I don't want Thames and Hudson to lose interest now which I often fear, as the time drags on, is quite possible".¹¹²⁶

As Philipp's exacting and methodical process continued, Boase stirred the pot, writing in February 1966: "I hope they are bringing some pressure on the Australian author of your life, as it is more than time that that was appearing". Yvonne anxiously went knocking on Thames and Hudson's doors once again because, as Arthur admitted, he "didn't feel like doing it". Although Arthur, when asked, had no recollection of his wife originating

¹¹²³ "The response that followed from Arthur seemed uncharacteristically discordant ..." Bundanon archives.

¹¹²⁴ "Eight months into the project the Boyds sent a cable reading ..." Telegram 21 August, 1965.

¹¹²⁵ "Phillip reports on "a most friendly and co-operative" letter ..." University of Melbourne Archives, Philipp papers

¹¹²⁶ "The Boyds' reply admitted ..." Bundanon archives

the book contract, this trip made by her to the publisher remained clear in his memory: "Yvonne said, 'Can we hurry this up at all? Neurath took the trouble to get me to cooperate with Franz Philipp, although I would gladly have done that anyway ... it was taking so long.'" ¹¹²⁷ In May of 1966, Boase submitted his draft introduction. The Boyds immediately approved it, with only one small change to a detail involving the Antipodean Manifesto. For some reason Philipp was not presented with this copy until September. Upon receipt of it he declared a state of emergency.

In his first trunk call conversation with Philipp, Arthur had presented Boase as a fait accompli. ¹¹²⁸ No doubt everyone was clear about the prestige that came packaged with the name of the President of Magdalen College. Perhaps Philipp had been kept in the dark over being second choice, but now he railed against Boase's ten-page essay which, he asserted, used information from Philipp's text, "sometimes inaccurately" and sometimes "contradicting" without acknowledging his source. Philipp found this to be "to say the least rather curious, and not in accordance with literary and scholarly decorum". ¹¹²⁹

There were, of course, mumblings of Philipp being 'difficult' by the publisher and those under attack, but Philipp had had his share of difficulties from the outset, when the Boyds had sent the first draft of the first section, complete with pencilled alterations and comments, directly to the publisher and neglected to pass on their comments to Philipp. Now apologies were forthcoming all round. Thames and Hudson, "embarrassed" by the situation, told Arthur they were "sorry" about the whole mismanaged affair, and the Boyds in turn relayed their regrets to Philipp. The publishing house wrote to Arthur stating that the only way "to resolve the situation" was for Arthur to make a special trip to Oxford to soothe the newly ruffled scholarly feathers of Boase.

After deletions here and insertions there, plates were delivered to the printers at Easter of 1967. By the first week of August that year, in an apartment on the Italian seaside, in the village of Terracina, Arthur and Yvonne were holding an advance copy in their hands. Yvonne's response was subdued. Rather than excitement, she felt relief. She worried over the unsaleable price (nine pounds, nine shillings) and the limited size of the print run, but felt that as the excitement cooled and "events become less 'spresso'" they might become "very gratified" by the existence of the book. The fact that they could present Uncle Martin with this accolade, making him a gift of their only other copy when they visited him in Rome, must have produced a good deal of satisfaction.

In the 1990s Arthur would say, tongue firmly in cheek, that there had been a general feeling amongst the critics that the scholarliness of Philipp's text had "been wasted ... that ... riches were lavished ... you really didn't deserve". ¹¹³⁰ Arthur elaborated on this

¹¹²⁷ "Although Arthur, when asked, had no recollection ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

¹¹²⁸ "In his first trunk call conversation with Philipp ..." Extract of letter from Philipp to Trevor Cracker, Thames & Hudson, 1 September, 1966.

¹¹²⁹ "Philipp found this to be "to say the least rather curious" Extract of letter from Philipp to Boyds, Bundanon archives

¹¹³⁰ "In the nineties Arthur would say ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker interview

theme: "...it was described by Australian critics as far too good for the painter. I don't think they could stomach the seriousness of the text, because it demanded a lot of joining and connections".

This was not so. Max Harris had promoted the book as more spectacular than any in the Thames and Hudson series, eclipsing the publications on Nolan, Dobell and Drysdale. Another critic found Philipp's interpretation "most able and painstaking", but commented little was revealed about "Arthur Boyd the man".¹¹³¹ Elwyn Lynn noted this was the first time an extensive monograph had elevated a living Australian painter to historical importance. His criticism was that the minute itemisation would "make it difficult for the ordinary reader"; he also observed that, while Philipp supported the opinion of academics such as Hoff, Garlick, Smith and Anderson, he cast a cursory, often accusatory, eye towards the magazine and newspaper critics. Alan McCulloch's "constant championship of Boyd", Lynn noted, had been relegated to a footnote.¹¹³²

Given the Boyds' lean and fitful correspondence to their friends, many of the old crowd wondered if they had met the same fate. Certain question marks punctuated the thoughts of the Boyds as they set off for their first, long-promised return to Australia in the English spring of 1968. How would home look? How would it feel?

According to Alan McCulloch 1968 was "the psychological time" for Arthur to return home: "your stocks" he wrote, "have never been higher."¹¹³³ Franz Philipp's "beautiful book," as McCulloch described it, had just been launched, and Arthur's exhibition of Nebuchadnezzar oils at the Bonython Gallery in March had been, in his view, "the big hit of the Adelaide festival". The American critic, Clement Greenberg, at that time considered the world's leading avant-garde voice, having ventured the opinion that "the destiny of Australian contemporary art appears to be in the hands of a small group of painters over 40",¹¹³⁴ placed Arthur at the head of his shortlist of important contemporary Australian painters.

When Arthur left Australia in 1959 with the brouhaha of the Antipodean Manifesto still fresh, he had written to McCulloch from the ship, saying he would take his advice and "stay out of the political arena". McCulloch now believed the Nebuchadnezzar series offered "a damn powerful answer to the abstractionists and anti-artists and minimalists". Arthur, by doing and not saying, had provided an anti-abstractionist argument that no academic prose could begin to match.¹¹³⁵ He had also written warning Arthur: "You'll

¹¹³¹ "Another critic found Philipp's interpretation ..." Pat Rappolt *Adelaide Advertiser*, 13 January, 1968. 'Disturbing Vision of Arthur Boyd ...'

¹¹³² "Alan McCulloch's 'costant championship of Boyd,' ..." Elwyn Lynn, *The Bulletin*, 27 January, 1968.

¹¹³³ "1968, Alan McCulloch believed ..." Extract of letter from McCulloch, to Boyd, 13 March, 1968. Bundanon archives.

¹¹³⁴ "The American critic, Clement Greenberg ..." As reported in Alan McCulloch's article 'Art' *Herald*, Melbourne, 6 June, 1968.

¹¹³⁵ "McCulloch now believed ..." Extract of letter from McCulloch to Boyd, Bundanon archives, 26 March, 1968.

scarcely know Melbourne I fear, everything's changed, the old Nat'l Gallery of Vic is on the way out, with collections etc., now going across to the new Centre at full speed...life is much more complicated than in those halcyon days at Cape Schanck".¹¹³⁶

Time had changed the personal fortunes of many of Arthur and Yvonne's friends: careers had died or atrophied, and finances were dire. Keith Nichol was working as a clerk to support his wife and new baby. Joy Murphy, Yvonne's old Surf Avenue neighbour and art-school buddy, had been forced into selling her beloved painting of Arthur's *Mentone Pier*. Valued at around three and a half thousand dollars. Joy had been saddened but relieved by a bank account back in the black and wrote to say: "Thank you Arthur for becoming famous". In the face of mortgages, school fees and inflation, Arthur Boyd's paintings would increasingly become too expensive to keep. From this point in time, through the coming decades, the majority of Arthur's friends and family would reluctantly cash in his works.

Almost since his return in the early sixties, Tom Sanders was finding life back in Australia, apart from his work and his kids, "dull". His reviews had been bad and sales slow; so much so that he was reduced to living with his large tribe in "a two bedroom box". He petulantly repeated Barry Humphries snipe: that a spell at the Sanders house was "living like an Italian family." Despite Sanders state, he knew of one more miserable than himself. Stacha Halpern, he reported to Arthur, was "trying to scratch by with pottery poor bugger and seems absolutely bewildered out here". Halpern too was bored and, unable to arrange any exhibitions, was bruised by lack of interest.¹¹³⁷ Tom concluded that their old mate "would be much better off, starving, in France, although he is not actually starving here."¹¹³⁸

Guy Boyd was doing well, exhibiting at Australian Galleries and Leicester Galleries in London and living in Brighton, in one of Melbourne's elegant, 1890s, iron-laced houses. It was perfect for a large family, two-storied, with eleven-rooms. Despite its rambling size, the studio, in the large back garden, was where Guy now sculpted, working late into the night while his brood of five children were sleeping. When Arthur, Yvonne and Lucy arrived in July, they didn't stay with Guy and Phyllis; instead they hunkered down in the Brighton Savoy Hotel.

In the 1950s Arthur had been the poor relation. Back then, when he had offered to give Phyllis and Guy a painting in exchange for the weekly money they had paid him, Phyllis assumed the driving seat. She had taken charge of the commission, declaring she would like a painting of a subject from Arthur's Central Australia sketchbook. She described in detail what she wanted retained and what she wanted included. When Arthur presented his painting to Phyllis, she turned it down flat: "He'd taken no notice of me". When she

¹¹³⁶ "He had also written warning Arthur ..." Extract of letter from McCulloch to Boyd, 13 March, 1968. Bundanon archives.

¹¹³⁷ "Halpern too was bored ..." Extract of letter from Phyllis Boyd letter to Yvonne Boyd, 31 December, 1967. Bundanon archives.

¹¹³⁸ "Tom concluded that their old mate ..." Tom Sanders to Arthur Boyd, January 1967. Bundanon archives.

told Arthur, "That's not what I want",¹¹³⁹ his retort was a solitary "Oh". Obviously Arthur had no intention of painting to Phyllis's orders.

In 1956 or early 1957, as Arthur struggled to carry his second offering into Guy and Phyllis's house, Yvonne rushed ahead of him warning Phyllis: "You won't like it, you won't like it ... it's so big ..." Yvonne was right. Phyllis's reaction closely resembled that of her baby daughter, who took one look at the painting, burst into tears and crawled rapidly out of the room. Once again, Arthur shouldered his rejection and carted off his work, soon to be titled *Half-Caste Child*. By Arthur's third attempt, Guy had stepped in, insisting Phyllis could not turn down another painting. The work she reluctantly accepted was *Phantom Bride*. In the seventies, the sale of that single painting would facilitate their family's move to Canada.

On their 1968 rolling tour, lasting six months and crammed with old faces and old memories, Arthur would inevitably be reminded just how far his career had progressed. But despite the heights Arthur would achieve, he would always remain the same self-effacing, gentle man who wanted nothing much more than a quiet life in which to paint. The math governing four modestly-sized suitcases - packed for three people, travelling for half a year, covering all imaginable social occasions and journeying through all climates - added up to a simple, if not frugal, lifestyle. A 'social' life held no interest for them. Family and close friends were their only concern. During their time in Sydney and Melbourne, despite their new-found wealth, they hired modest cars and checked into inexpensive motels.

Arthur worked intermittently: he sent a brace of wet paintings from Melbourne to the Sydney art dealer, Rudy Komon, heralded by a warning "I cannot stress strongly enough how wet these pictures are ... the paint is very thick ... they will not have dried by the time you get them".¹¹⁴⁰ And he completed several portraits: one a series of Joe Brown and another a series of Anne Purves.¹¹⁴¹ But work was relaxed, allowing Arthur time to enjoy what art critic Patrick McCaughey deemed his "triumphal procession." It was the return of the conquering hero, beginning with the laudatory reception at the Adelaide Arts Festival of Nebuchadnezzar, which was then repeated in Sydney, and finally Melbourne. McCaughey, borrowing T.S. Eliot's phrase, claimed the Nebuchadnezzar paintings possessed "the unpleasantness of great painting".

Melbourne presented an endless stream of dinners, lunches, teas, drinks. Their diary was filled with names from the 1930s to the 1960s: Tam and Anne Purves, Valerie Herbst (Peter was travelling), Ursula Hoff, Helen and John Brack, Neil Douglas, Margarette 'Maggie' Forster, Joy Murphy, Tom Sanders, Kate and Hal Hattam, Barbara and Bert

¹¹³⁹ "When she told Arthur ...": Phyllis Boyd interview.

¹¹⁴⁰ "Arthur worked intermittently ..." Extract of letter from Arthur Boyd to Rudy Komon, 20 October, 1968, Bundanon archives. It discusses 'red and black figure by waterfall' and figures in a forest with black birds'.

¹¹⁴¹ "And he completed several portraits ..." Immediately following a fire that raised the Purves's home, a fire which destroyed many paintings, Arthur captured Anne Purves on canvas. Once again Arthur was on the spot ready to capture the highly charged emotional state of his sitter.

Tucker, Noel Counihan, Pat and Ann Boyd, Beth and Stacha Halpern, and Barry Humphries, back in Australia on tour. In Sydney they were lent the Woollahra home of the Blackmans for a week, saw Peter O'Shaughnessy perform, and were feted by art dealers.

When it came to a reunion with the Burstalls there was less of a time lag. After the Burstall's stay in London, the Boyds had welcomed eighteen-year-old Jamie Boyd into their troupe as they travelled across America on Tim's Harkness Scholarship. Tim had studied acting and cinematography under Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio and later worked with director Martin Ritt and Paul Newman on *Hombre*. When Tim and Betty decided to return to Australia, Yvonne had asked: "Get it ready for us will you?" In 1968 the Boyds were still roaming but the Burstalls were comfortably back in place. Although it had only been three years since they last all gathered in London, Yvonne felt that Betty appeared "more serious" and Tim "perhaps a little reckless"; but together they demonstrated "the same stability" that they had "always projected".¹¹⁴²

The Boyds drove down through Arthur's old Rosebud landscapes, following the roads his bicycle had rattled along thirty years before. They stayed with their great friends, the Cairns in their rambling orchard farmhouse, imbued with the scent of apples and open fires, they fell asleep to the beat of rain on the tin roof and woke to views of Western Port from their bedroom window. On the way home they dropped in on Alan McCulloch, and were fortified by a sherry lunch and the beautiful singing voice of Sue, the McCullochs' musical daughter.

Pies and pasties were being eaten on laps at Phyllis and Guy's house when Jean Langley dropped by with a bunch of welcoming flowers for the Boyds. The sight of such ordinary fare for a homecoming horrified Jean. Such was Arthur's willingness to please, to accommodate those around him, that it never occurred to Jean that Arthur may have looked forward to a good old Aussie meat pie. Jean's brother, Rob Langley recalled Arthur giving Jean's house a wide berth one lunchtime. Arthur's explanation: "We'll probably get a lettuce leaf there, let's have a meat pie instead".

A visit to the Reeds had been planned for the last Sunday in July. Jean Langley saw herself as the go-between, a conduit between friends she held dear but who had little in common. The Reeds lavished their care on Jean. When John Sinclair began harassing her, Reed arranged for an injunction. They gave her a twenty pound a week stipend for six months, to help get her painting school started. And through the years they would buy her a house, a car, driving lessons, and champion the publishing of a book illustrating her watercolours of wildflowers. Soon after the Reeds invited the Boyds out to view their new home, Sunday was on the phone asking Jean Langley to join the group, to buoy it up, saying "she wasn't quite sure how easily it would flow ..."¹¹⁴³ The Boyds shared the Reeds' apprehension. The day of their visit they found themselves with time to spare before their appointed hour with the Reeds. Such was the formality of

¹¹⁴² "Although it had only been three years ..." Extract from Yvonne Boyd's diary, Bundanon archives.

¹¹⁴³ "Soon after the Reeds invited the Boyds ..." Jean Langley interview.

the relationship that, after eight years' absence, they chose to linger around the neighbouring hillside rather than make an early arrival.

'Heide II' completed in 1967 was, like the Reeds themselves, uncompromisingly modern, sophisticated, handsome and challenged convention. In Yvonne's diary entry of that day she records a pleasant afternoon but Jean's observations ran entirely contrary. She returned home "terribly depressed" after a "dreadful afternoon", believing the reunion a failure. She laid the blame on Sweeney, the Reeds' adopted son and now gallery owner. He had "talked and talked and talked ... bullshit of the worst possible order" and she had felt "Arthur was irritated beyond measure and Yvonne looked as if she'd shoot [Sweeney]."

The following morning, Jean kept the girls home from school to guard against the feeling that she was "in danger of suicide". Sinclair had not given Jean financial help for some time, and she had no money. "I had no firewood, it was absolutely freezing, I had no food ... I never, ever, ever asked Sun and John for a penny ... ever, or told them my troubles, ever." That day, absolutely desperate, Jean and the girls rolled newspapers up tight and burnt them to keep themselves warm. As they huddled around the pathetic fire, there was a tap, tap, tap at the window. There stood Arthur, clutching a little bundle of paintings: two had hung in Doris's bedroom, and there was a little self-portrait and one of Rosebud cottage. Jean had been holding herself together for the sake of the girls, but now she burst into tears saying: "I can't offer you a cup of tea. I've got no milk. I've got no food. I've got no money." Arthur immediately pressed money into hands and soon they were all sitting around having a cake-laden morning tea.

By far the grandest occasion on the Boyds' social calendar during their trip back occurred on August 20 1968, a date that saw bow ties being wrestled into place all over town. It was the official opening of the new premises of the National Gallery of Victoria at the Victorian Arts Centre. The dress code on the embossed invitation instructed 'dinner jacket with decorations.' Among the Governors, Sirs and Excellencies, among the alphabet of personages, the KCMGs, MLAs, KBEs, DSOs, MCs, EDs, KStJs, DBEs, there was a certain A.Boyd, Esq. His invitation had been sent to the Brighton Savoy Motel. Perhaps someone noticed on that glittering occasion that Arthur's lapel was unadorned, for in little over a year Bert Tucker would be exclaiming: "Never thought I'd see the day when I'd be mixing with aristocrats like Nolan and yourself".¹¹⁴⁴ January 1970 Arthur would receive the Order of the British Empire in recognition for his services to art.

When Arthur arrived back to the crisp autumn air of London in October of 1968, he must have felt he had never been away. Life immediately resumed its breathtaking pace.

¹¹⁴⁴ "His invitation had been sent to the Brighton Savoy Motel ..." Extract of letter from Tucker to Boyd, Bundanon archives.

Before the end of the year a retrospective at Richard Demarco's Edinburgh gallery had been finalised for April 1969, and he had accepted a commission for a vast mural. In the same year he would exhibit in seven galleries, with three running concurrently in London.

The year 1969 generated a great deal of press, from Scotland to London, from sound bites to in-depth articles. It was the first time Nebuchadnezzar had been exhibited in the UK and the only retrospective staged since the Whitechapel, seven years previously. Accusations of insider trading could perhaps have been levelled at the continual effusive reviewing by Arthur's publisher, Tom Rosenthal. However, the reviews from less involved parties echoed Rosenthal's sentiments and, with minor blimps, were celebratory. The Scottish reviewers revelled in the Demarco retrospective and "a treble welcome" was extended by the critic of *Art & Artists*, who considered London "lucky to have such a generous chance of Boyd viewing" and described the artist as a "traditionalist revolutionary" who "while adhering to the old masters ... brings his own aestheticism to Freudian implications".¹¹⁴⁵

Arthur's West End extravaganza, staged at galleries sited within a short distance of each other, proved an easy totter for sherry-drinking art lovers. One temperate critic considered the affair "over-indulgent – even for an Australian". Maltzahn Gallery handled Arthur's graphic work; Hamet Gallery the pastels and drawings; and Tooth's Gallery dealt with his most recent paintings. The majority of the works at Tooth's were either recent, or earlier works, of Nebuchadnezzar. Others were odes to Doris and Merric.

After revisiting Melbourne, and after reviewing the vast collection of Merric's drawings (saved from Open Country and stored under the stairs at the Brighton home of Phyllis and Guy), Arthur had been moved to express memories of his parents: so many of his father that these works were named 'The Potter series.' *Early morning, figures on a beach* lyrically conjures Merric and Doris, embracing by the shoreline, in their courting days at Rosebud. In *Pottery on fire*, the romantic embrace has become one of need and compassion. Merric, felled by the pottery fire, kneels at the feet of Doris and clings to her skirt like a child. Over and over, in paintings and etchings, like a continuing tumble, Merric is shown falling and crashing, often beside his kiln. According to Arthur the pots were broken or smoked or something had gone wrong. Those sickening moments never left his memory. The small boy, standing, crouching, helpless; like the black dog, a mute witness, a bystander with no control. But in *Merric Boyd drawing at Rye* it is his father's fear, not his own, he seeks to express. The son paints the father painting. Merric sits by the seashore, amid a bouquet of blue: blue of ocean, blue of sky. But the beauty of the day is marred, as every day for Merric must have been, by the prospect of obliterating dark descending. A black cloud, Arthur's symbol for the threat of an impending seizure, hovers over Merric's head.

¹¹⁴⁵ "The Scottish reviewers revelled" Oswald Blakeston, Arthur Boyd, *Art & Artists*, 25 October, 1969.

Arthur juggled exhibitions on both sides of the world and never once took his eye off the presentation. In February 1970 a working relationship was renewed with Franz Philipp. He had been informed by John Altmann that Philipp would be arranging his exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria for the Captain Cook Bi-centenary celebrations. In honour of Cook's first footfall, the Queen would be making a personal appearance. Arthur immediately sprung off the mark, despatching three transparencies to Eric Westbrook for his consideration, before writing to Philipp with some urgency, asking for details and stressing his desire that works of his choosing be included.

When Arthur received Philipp's "first draft list" he wasn't satisfied and wrote immediately to the Australian dealer, Brian Johnstone, expressing concern that his latest work from 'The Potter series' had not been submitted: "It's important to me that an exhibition of this kind (visited by the Queen I believe) ought to represent me by a more comprehensive selection ..." The same day a detailed letter was dispatched to Philipp urging him to contact Johnstone and to include: *Potter Drawing at Yarra Glen, The Beach at Rosebud* (most important), *Figures on the Beach at Arthur's Seat, Bush Landscape with Ram 'Figure Carrying a Ram, Lovers with Blue Bird and Wheatfield, Harkaway*.

The opening of the 'Landfall exhibition' illustrated how time had moved on. Buvelot brushed frames with Boyd, and old communists rubbed shoulders with royals and royalists. Nolan was there on opening night; but Noel Counihan, sipping "free champagne",¹¹⁴⁶ failed to see him or his contribution to the exhibition, a vast wall of 1,320 paintings (two paintings a day for six days a week) named *Paradise Garden*. Instead he spent his time viewing Arthur's retrospective. It gave Counihan "much pleasure" and he wrote to Arthur telling him so, assuring him, "you come out of it well".¹¹⁴⁷

The art critic, Ann Galbally, disagreed. She found "a certain rigidity" in what Hughes had once described as Arthur's "elephantine commitment to his images" and what Philipp referred to as Boyd's "character of persistent recall". She questioned: "How long can the same images – even dissolved in colour and given new titles and associations – continue meaningfully to contain this tension between themselves and their environment? Works like Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel with bound arms make one wonder".¹¹⁴⁸

It is interesting to compare Galbally's criticism with that of *The Times* critic, Michael Billington six months previously.¹¹⁴⁹ His objection to Arthur's obscure personal images seemed slight: Who was the potter? Why was Nebuchadnezzar's military might disregarded? What is the significance of the symbols? But Arthur never forgot the side-

¹¹⁴⁶ "Noel Counihan, sipping 'free champagne' ..." Extract of letter from Noel Counihan to Arthur Boyd. April 29, 1970. Bundanon archives

¹¹⁴⁷ "It gave Counihan 'much pleasure' ..." Ibid

¹¹⁴⁸ Ann Galbally, art critic for the Melbourne Age ... "The Age, 8 April, 1970.

¹¹⁴⁹ "It is interesting to compare Galbally's ..." John Russell, *The Times*, 29 October, 1969. 'Australian myths'

swipes, and later admitted it hurt.¹¹⁵⁰ Given Arthur's response to these slight nudges, it is possible that Galbally's blows bruised; perhaps so deeply they influenced Arthur's next major series that would become known as 'The Caged Artist' series.

Philipp, having worked long and hard as curator on 'Arthur Boyd's Australia' for the 'Landfall' exhibition, left Melbourne just before the opening and headed for Europe on a delayed sabbatical. His wife, recovering from an operation, was to meet up with him in June, 1970. Philipp's letters to the Boyds throughout the sixties had mentioned, in passing, his tiredness, his weak heart, his hospitalisations. On the May 30, Franz Philipp died in London. The news affected Arthur, to such great extent that it showed. John Hull remembers him taking long walks onto the heath, deeply disturbed by the unexpected news.¹¹⁵¹ Arthur may have felt he had pushed Philipp too hard; been too ambitious. About to turn fifty, Arthur may have felt his own mortality. As he travelled out to Australia in 1968 Martin Smith had died, and shortly after he arrived back in England, Arthur had received news from Beth Halpern: "Stasha died on Monday the 27th – Australia Day, quite suddenly and without realisation he was about to die".¹¹⁵²

Arthur had only just recovered from an illness that laid him low in March. Arthur's daily shadow, John Hull, had been kept away; not allowed up the stairs to the bedroom to see him. No one was told what Yvonne later revealed: that Arthur was suffering from a urinary tract infection. When Arthur's superstitious nature was mixed in with the fact that this infection was manifesting itself in swollen testicles, it must have seemed as though the curse of his Nebuchadnezzar were being visited upon him.

The atmosphere in the house was such that John Hull recalled Barry Humphries pacing into the kitchen, retrieving a bottle from his pocket, taking a swig as if to give him strength, before looking at Hull firmly in the eye to ask: "Is Arthur dying?" Despite visitations by worried friends, Arthur remained closeted in his room. Finally, after several weeks, Yvonne came to Hull with a plea: "Can you think of what to do?" Hull sent Yvonne up with the message that he was having problems with the printing process. Eventually Arthur appeared, wrapped in a blanket. After seating himself down and fiddling around with the print and the press, an infusion of interest began to revive him. Then, recognising the ruse, Arthur turned and thanked his shrewd assistant with: "You bastard". It was the only time John Hull ever heard him swear.

Joe Brown had written to Yvonne in July with a warning.

When you get to the age of 50 we are likely to collect things other than paintings, and it is wise to slow down the pace a little, and I hope Arthur will take longer spells between bouts of painting. I noticed when he did my portrait 18 months

¹¹⁵⁰ "But Arthur never forgot the side-swipes ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker interview

¹¹⁵¹ "John Hull remembers him taking long walks ..." Interview John Hull.

¹¹⁵² "Shortly after his visit to Australia ..." Extract of letter from Beth Halpern to Arthur and Yvonne Boyd, 31 January, 1969. Bundanon archives.

ago with what fervour he worked, and a rest is essential after such intense activity.¹¹⁵³

He spoke of Arthur's work as if it were the infection, not the cure: "I hope Arthur will take longer spells between bouts of painting". Brown issued other warnings. He had become concerned about the importing of Boyds in bulk: Arthur's paintings were flooding the Australian market. At a Christie's auction he had noted no fewer than eleven works for sale, double the number of any other artist. It was cause, Brown believed, for "disquiet, concern".¹¹⁵⁴ McCulloch expressed the same sentiments around the same time, reporting that he believed "there is need for great care. Like all your friends I'm proud of your success and I'd hate to see any kind of glut spoil any part of it".¹¹⁵⁵

Arthur was, by Yvonne's reckoning, "worn out". To recuperate, they took a rare trip away, just the two of them. They journeyed to Ireland, travelling across on a car ferry, staying in Dublin and then driving down the wild west coast to Kerry, where they took donkey rides, and onto Limerick, where they looked for lace but found none. One clear image of that holiday remained in Yvonne's mind: Arthur stripping off and rushing into the icy waters of Dingle Bay. "He loved the open sea, the open river". It was a habit that had begun in Rosebud, continued in Beaumaris and on into the northern seas. Though Arthur was squeamish about still water and, unlike Yvonne, avoided the bathing pond on the Heath, wherever he saw ocean or a flowing river he found it difficult to walk past without throwing himself in. Recalling Arthur's mood on that trip, Yvonne believed "he enjoyed it", adding: "he seemed to relax". But what, by 1970, had wound him up so tight?

There was the obvious pressure of work. John Hull had been driving the Highgate-to-Heathrow express for years. When Australian dealers wrote or called, anxiously investigating the whereabouts of promised long-overdue works, white lies would be told about white canvases. The assurance that the shipment was "on its way" would then be followed by a furious activity and the paintings being driven to the airport so post-haste they were still wet.

There was also pressure from unexpected sources. In the Spring of 1969, John Hull, at the wheel of a huge hired truck crammed with Arthur's works, headed up the motorway to Scotland for the Edinburgh retrospective. Sitting beside him was Jean Langley, who had travelled over to England hot on the heels of the Boyds. In 1965, after John Perceval had returned to Melbourne, news of Arthur travelled with him. John Yule wrote to Jean expressing his concern over her "sadness ... the pain John Perceval's return re-

¹¹⁵³ "When you get to the age of 50 ..." 10 July, 1970. Extract of letter from Joe Brown to Yvonne and Arthur Boyd, Bundanon archives.

¹¹⁵⁴ "At a Christie's auction ..." Extract of letter from Joe Brown to Boyds, 6 March, 1970. Bundanon archives.

¹¹⁵⁵ "McCulloch expressed the same sentiments ..." McCulloch to Boyds June 6, 1970. Bundanon archives

awoke".¹¹⁵⁶ Three years on and the merry-go-round still continued to turn. In the early days of Jean's arrival, John Hull was Jean's direct link to Arthur and through Hull she would try to arrange meetings. Hull recalled that Arthur "never wanted to know ... he was cool ... he was so good at sidestepping." They would meet in family situations, and the Boyds were welcoming and kind. Yvonne was particularly caring towards Jane (Jean and John Sinclair's eldest girl) arranging birthday parties, gifts, outings for her. However, from the moment John Hull set eyes again on Jean and Kate, the daughter he had never seen, his marriage to Margaret was in trouble again. Once Jean realised that Arthur and Yvonne were a rock-hard unit, seemingly happier and more stable than they had ever been, she went with "an easy answer" and allowed herself to be swept off her feet again by John Hull and his "declarations of love everlasting" and promise of "wonderful parenting".¹¹⁵⁷

Once again it was short lived. This time it was Hull who, after six months, walked out leaving behind a short note: 'John belongs to God'. In October that year - depressed, alone again, and emotional after viewing Arthur's show at Tooth's - Jean broke down weeping in the arms of Mary Perceval in the middle of Berkeley Square. Seven years appeared to dissolve in a letter written to Jean by John Yule that December. Addressing Jean's turbulent emotions, Yule's sentiments echoed those he expressed in 1962: "Jean it's such a mixed feeling. I'd love to see you again, be able to visit you and talk with you and paint with you - but I so wish for your own heart's sake you could find a way of being where your greatest love is".¹¹⁵⁸

Financially Arthur was secure. The markets had been steadily growing in Australia and England, but now they were seriously opening up. In May 1968 dealers in London had clients willing to spend up to two thousand on a second 'Bride' series.¹¹⁵⁹ In March 1969, the first telephone link was established between Christie's auction house in London and bidders in Sydney and Melbourne. The results were stunning, with Australian lots realising half of the total sale. The greatest interest was directed towards William Dobell and Arthur Boyd, with Arthur's *Landscape with Figures and Ram* going under the hammer for two thousand guineas.¹¹⁶⁰ At the end of the sixties, an early unidentified 1940s landscape fetched one thousand eight hundred dollars in auction, and a 1944 South Melbourne work, five thousand dollars.¹¹⁶¹

The monetary bar was being reset, higher and higher. In February 1970, *Nebuchadnezzar Hatching Gold* was on sale at the Brian Johnstone Gallery in

¹¹⁵⁶ "John Yule wrote to Jean ..." Extract of letter from John Yule to Jean Langley, 6 April, 1965. Langley papers, SLV.

¹¹⁵⁷ "Once Jean realised that Arthur and Yvonne were a rock-hard unit ..." Extract from Jean Langley's memoirs, from Jean Langley to author, September 2005.

¹¹⁵⁸ "Addressing Jean's turbulent emotions ..." Extract of letter from John Yule to Jean Langley, 6 December, 1969, Langley papers, SLV.

¹¹⁵⁹ "May of 1968 ..." Extract of letter from Clytie Jessop to Boyds, 4 May, 1968.

¹¹⁶⁰ "The greatest interest was directed towards William Dobell ..." *The Times*, 19 March, 1969. 'Sydney bids by telephone.'

¹¹⁶¹ "At the end of the sixties ..." *Sunday Telegraph*, 28 September, 1969. 'Art Prices and Art Values, Daniel Thomas.

Queensland for six thousand five hundred dollars. Supply and demand was now extremely complicated. In January 1970, on a visit to London, Anne Purves was introduced to a Mr Cochrane at Tooth's Gallery. The plan was to simplify both shipping and taxes. Tooth's would be sent paintings; Anne would be sent slides of those paintings. Anne would make a selection, and payment and shipping would proceed through Tooth's. By November 1971 Arthur's coffers would be boosted by a ten thousand dollar, no strings attached, Britannica Australia Award. As Yvonne recalled: "He could afford to do things and buy things for the kids and go places, where we would have thought what it would cost before, but then it seemed to be the price of an etching, so it made life freer to do things".

In times past Brian O'Shaughnessy had lent a financial hand to the Boyds. In the late forties he had consciously employed Yvonne to type his thesis as a way of helping out. Later, when Tim Burstall informed Brian that the Boyds were "hard up", he gave them half of his exhibition award. Although O'Shaughnessy believed he had "given wings" to the money, Arthur paid it back. In 1970 the Boyds returned that favour one hundred times over by lending the O'Shaughnessys money for a house. It was Yvonne's idea. She dismissed this by explaining: "We had money all of a sudden ... and I didn't know what you could do with money in the bank".

When Tim Burstall visited in the 1960s, he still felt "the warmest, almost gooey affection" for the Boyds, and the thirteen years absence from Brian O'Shaughnessy, great friends since their teens, had done nothing to dissolve their closeness either. The beginning of the 1970s would break these old connecting links between friends, and the Boyds and the O'Shaughnessys, despite ongoing efforts by Tom Sanders and Tim Burstall to stage reunions, would forever sever ties. The contradictory and seemingly trivial reasons that were floated to explain this rift confounded family and friends. Tim heard it began with an argument over Brian driving too fast and Arthur too slow; but, while Yvonne admitted that Brian objected to Arthur "getting at Red in his paintings", she offered that the split could have been contributed to by a myriad of possible causes. Although refuted by Yvonne, by far the most persistent belief among the old gang was that there had been an argument over money.¹¹⁶² However, it would not be until the end of the seventies that the mention of the loan, and a request for a return, would be broached by Yvonne: "My cynical thought was 'we've lost the friendship; we might as well have the money'". As for the real reason for the loss of that friendship, within the group of four, no one was prepared to say.

In response to Yvonne's silence-breaking letter asking for a return of the loan, Brian O'Shaughnessy declared that the facts of the breakdown in communications were "known by Arthur as clearly as that blue sky that he paints." While loquacious O'Shaughnessy placed his faith in "the shining light of the word", he viewed Arthur as "a living conspiracy in silence". He objected to Arthur's "unhappy intrusiveness", which he believed had been taken to "excessive proportions and without invitation or even

¹¹⁶² "Although refuted by Yvonne ..." This incorrect assumption was held by Tim & Betty Burstall, Tom Sanders, Maria Clarke, Helena Boyd, Jamie Boyd and Matchem Skipper.

awareness on Red's part to a sexual-phantastic degree".¹¹⁶³ Whatever intimate problems he wanted Arthur to discuss were never addressed. Some twenty years later, all Brian O'Shaughnessy offered was a sad shake of his head and a regretful admission, "We were all a bit too close ... over dependent on each other ...".¹¹⁶⁴

Arthur once confirmed that his choice and use of images were like "saying a constructive thing that has meaning for you and that will somehow go on record."¹¹⁶⁵ Between 1962 and the beginning of 1970 Arthur produced a great number of etchings, dry points and aquatints. The critic, James Gleeson, would describe these drawings as "the scoria of [Boyd's] subconscious", maintaining that by their immediacy the viewer was dragged "willy-nilly into the artist's private world".¹¹⁶⁶ These works, which begin in 1962, constituted records Arthur was so keen to lodge he helped produce a book to contain them.¹¹⁶⁷ As one critic observed, the dense zig-zagging lines produced not so much an outline of form but rather "a closing net of darkness".¹¹⁶⁸

It is an emotional record, laid down in black and white, like the frantic scoring of a needle on a lie-detector. The early drawings relate to 'Diana and Actaeon,' 'Electra', and the nudes. Many are fierce renderings, others lush and voluptuous. The woman from the early 1960s *Woman in Cornfield* is as ripe as the corn stalks that curl and sprout from her naked body. However, fecundity is nowhere to be found in the works from the latter half of the sixties. Although these drawings are flooded with blood, tears and semen, the watered and fertilised seed falls on barren ground. Within these works Arthur's 'connections' revolve.

In the summers of 1967 and 1969 the Boyds resided in Terracina, on the coast of Lazio. Northwards, and butting up against Terracina, was Parco Nazionale del Circeo, named after one of Ulysses' stopovers and sited on a promontory believed to have been once the island of Aeaea, an important site in the mythological world and the home of Circe, the sorceress. From here, towards the Adriatic, an Australian legend, Bert Hinkler, wrote the final chapter to a newer heroic myth when he fatally crashed into the mountains on the last of his epic journeys. He lay buried nearby in Florence.

¹¹⁶³ "O'Shaughnessy objected to Arthur's 'unhappy intrusiveness' ..." This letter from Brian O'Shaughnessy, dated Monday 23, omits the year. It appears in a series of letters initiated by Yvonne 15 October, 1979, and most probably falls in the first quarter of 1980. The loan is eventually repaid via Tom Sanders holding power of attorney for O'Shaughnessy in September 1981. Bundanon archives

¹¹⁶⁴ "Some twenty years later ..." Interview Brian O'Shaughnessy.

¹¹⁶⁵ "Arthur once confirmed that his choice and use of images" Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹¹⁶⁶ "The critic, James Gleeson ..." James Gleeson, the *Sun*, 12 July, 1967.

¹¹⁶⁷ "These works, which begin in 1962 ..." *Arthur Boyd, Etchings and Lithographs*, Lund Humphries, in association with Maltzahn Gallery, London, 1971. This publication presents a comprehensive catalogue *raisonné* of all prints up to the end of 1969 with the exception of the series of lithographs illustrating *St Francis of Assisi*. The book is divided into etchings drypoints and aquatints 1962-3 and etchings drypoints aquatints 1968-9. It must be noted, in the main, drawings came before etchings. Well before Arthur writes to Frank McDonald in May of 1967, he had completed drawings relating to Nebucadnezzar, the Ancient Mariner, and Merric as potter.

¹¹⁶⁸ "As one critic observed ..." Introduction to Maltzahn Gallery catalogue, 21 October – 10 November, 1969 exhibition.

In 1967 and 1969 the Boyds and O'Shaughnessys address was Viale Circe. Many of these 1960s drawings depicted Hinkler, Italy, and the gods from the *Odyssey*: Polyphemus, Danae and Circe. Circe was a central player in the legend of Odysseus (Ulysses in Latin) and his epic journey in the Trojan War. During this war, Ulysses' lieutenant, Eurylochus, while on a reconnaissance mission, discovers the palace of Circe and observes, from a hiding place, how Circe, with the touch of her wand, changes his fellow Greeks into beasts; to a pig, a lion, a dog – according to the animal type she considers best fits the fundamental character and disposition of the man. This is the magic inhabiting many of Arthur's symbols that originated in the forties: in Arthur's words, his "animals and people ...half-man, half-dog, butterfly or cat". To find the story, Arthur instructed, the viewer should look for the "true-to life quality" that they possess.¹¹⁶⁹

Arthur was well aware of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which the legend is mirrored, like images in broken glass, in the life of Leopold Bloom, an Irish Jew from Dublin. While parallels appear in their journeys, the protagonists arrive at different destinations. Ulysses returns to his chaste wife, Penelope, who has steadfastly refused persistent suitors over the twenty years he has been away. Bloom, on the other hand, can't leave his sexually promiscuous wife, Molly, alone for a day.

Like Joyce, Arthur weaves a deliberate pattern of recurrent themes and characters. And, just as Circe stands as the climactic episode in the legend of Ulysses, which abounds in ghostly confrontations between the living and the dead, these violent drawings of Arthur's stand as the climax of his tortured lovers. In these works perpetrators and victims are interchangeable but almost all, at some point, fall under an arsenal of phallic weapons: shafts, sticks, rods, needles.

In *The Ancient Mariner with a Spear*, a branch pierces the heart of a weeping bird. The caption, written in Arthur's hand, reads: 'She shot the albatross' as opposed to a work from the first half of the sixties, on which he had written "I shot the alber tros (sic)." In *Beast, Bird and Wooded Island*, the talons of a bird plunge into the body of a prone figure. In *Dog with Crutches and Falling Figure*, a crutch pokes the eye of a creature wearing a jester's crown. The copulating woman in *Nude with Rabbit and Syringe* pricks a rabbit with a needle. In *Potter with Reclining Nude Inset*, the potter's wheel-cum-gramophone needle nails his feet; in *Ram and Potter's Wheel with Pot of Flowers*, the needle drives itself, like a stake, through the heart of a confined figure. In *Danae on a Couch with Open Window*, a woman is involved, like the goddess of Greek myth, in a dubious sexual liaison. In this ménage à trois, the foot of the sofa stabs the genitalia of a floored figure. The cow, portrayed in one of Arthur's earliest sketches stabbing the stomach of a prone man (sent to Yvonne from Bendigo) reappears in *Reclining Figure with White Haired Potter and Cow*. Now the creature's hoof sexually penetrates a

¹¹⁶⁹ "To find the story, Arthur instructed ..." Arthur Boyd interview, *Pamphlet & Catalogue Contemporary Art Society*: Sixth Annual Exhibition, 1944.

woman as she lies crumpled, not unlike Arthur's broken Icarus, at the feet of the potter. Throughout these battlefields obsessed eyes drill and bore into the object of their focus.

The loving *Lovers in a Boat* from 1961 journey into Circe's sea where, in *Figure and Floating Figures with Beasts (Circe)*, the craft once again becomes the corpse-carrying coffin of the 1940s. The waters of the 1940s South Melbourne paintings converge in *Figure with Beast and Moth over Water* where, in front of the sea and a bandstand an ejaculating, rampaging beast sticks his finger in the eye of a weeping dog thrown prone across a moth.

In this world, where time conflates and balance is lost, toes become talons become scuttling claws become flippers become the feet of a bath become the props of a sofa. The child's feet in *Potter with Child and Gramophone* resemble one part man, one part beast. The child kneels, much like the supplicant prodigal son in the 1940s drawing, *Gerontion*, at the feet of the potter's chair. A pair of lovers lie across the wheel, a vision of desire that prompts release at a remove. The child becomes father to the man. His penis is now chained to the potter's wheel.

While Joyce draws the reader's attention to time throughout *Ulysses*, using it as an obsessive symbol of betrayal, Arthur entwines time with sex, to the extent that he straps a wristwatch to a penis. The time for the masturbating potter reads five past seven, but reversed (as it is in the mirror image of the etching plate) it is set on 1940s time and John Perceval's cuckolding cock's crow, at five-to-five, in *Setting Moon Surprised by the Dawn*.

The fictional and the living, the living and the dead, are at once seen as varied and the same. Time moves forward. Rewinds. We hear Icarus's cry as his wings dissolve and flail; Hinkler's yelp as his single-prop engine flutters and falls over the Italian Alps; and the supersonic scream of a jet thrusting itself across the sky. Ulysses' sails billow, the Ancient Mariner is becalmed, the lovers' boat drifts on. From Homer to home and the 'Homing bird of Bundaberg,'¹¹⁷⁰ to the Concorde.¹¹⁷¹ The kite man becomes Hinkler, Hinkler becomes Icarus, the levitating man is now earthbound, and the potter crashes, like his pot, to the floor. In time present and time past the potter's wheel turns, the gramophone record spins, and nature sings its oldest of tunes based on the high and the low notes of Molly Bloom's 'yes' and Penelope's 'no'.

Around the time of Arthur's illness, in March 1970, he was working on a series of etchings on Lysistrata.¹¹⁷² As in the old days in Melbourne, Arthur still met fascinating people in pubs. Bernhard Baer, a well known and respected printer and publisher, had

¹¹⁷⁰ "'Homing bird of Bundaberg' ..." The title of Evelyn Gough's ode to Hinkler (see chapter 7)

¹¹⁷¹ "...to the Concorde ..." See *Reclining Nude with Aeroplane*, plate 109, op cit

¹¹⁷² "Around the time of Arthur's illness ..." John Hull interview

been one of them.. In Baer, Arthur recognised a fellow traveller: "He had that sticking power of the true craftsman, he knew what his business was ... he could make colour prints of a painting."¹¹⁷³ Ganymed's clients were Henry Moore and Oscar Kokoschka. Baer had previously commissioned Brett Whiteley and Sid Nolan; now when he offered Arthur a commission for a suite of etchings, based on Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata*, Arthur jumped at it. Perhaps his competitiveness was spurred by Baer's previous commissions, but the subject matter would have appealed to Arthur.

It was a Greek political play that addressed the power of sex and the evil of war, named after the woman who led the coup against the warring men of Athens and Sparta. It told the story of sex being used as a bargaining tool for peace. Each woman who wanted to join Lysistrata's cloistered band had to take a pledge to "withhold all rights of access or entrance, from every husband, lover, or casual acquaintance". If forced "to share the connubial couch," they must not "return his stroke" and must refuse to submit to "sloping prone in a hangdog crouch."¹¹⁷⁴

When Jack Lindsay, a writer Arthur admired, was employed to translate the Greek text, he completed a happy triumvirate. Arthur worked at his usual manic pace, developing forty proofs within two months. When Baer saw them hanging on the walls of Arthur's studio he found them "staggering." These works, Baer believed, were so dramatic in invention and so brilliant in technique, that here was an antipodean Beardsley, an Aussie Picasso.¹¹⁷⁵ Robert Melville, writing for the *New Statesman*, reviewed the set of etchings at the Ganymed Gallery in May of 1971. In his opinion there was no competition with Beardsley's "under-the-counter interpretation." He found Arthur's "handwriting" far more lively: "more spontaneous ... vividly in action."

Who would have expected to find Lysistrata's female companions sneaking around and crouching in the lecture room of St Helier Hospital in Carshalton, Surrey?¹¹⁷⁶ Arthur was, once again, making every story fit within his frame. With this mural, first mooted in 1968, now long overdue, Arthur, freshly inspired by his Ganymed commission, transferred the subject matter to the mural.¹¹⁷⁷ When a head-scratching recipient at the hospital asked just how the knee bone was connected to the thigh bone, Arthur's response described a wide arc: "It is a story of mind and body being used to a compassionate purpose and that seems to me to be a medical theme."

¹¹⁷³ "In Baer, Arthur recognised a fellow traveller ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker interview

¹¹⁷⁴ "If forced 'to share the connubial couch' ..." Excerpt from *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes, 'Taking the Pledge' translated by Douglass Parker, 1964.

¹¹⁷⁵ "These works Baer believed ..." Introduction by Bernard Baer in catalogue of a Ganymed exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. *Ganymed: Printing Publishing, Design*.

¹¹⁷⁶ "Who would have expected to find ..." This commission was instigated by an enthusiast friend of a Hampstead acquaintance of the Boyds, a Dr Cedric Hirson. At a later date, when the hospital was sold, the AGNSW purchased the mural.

¹¹⁷⁷ "With this mural – first mooted in 1968 ..." E.A. Abbey, R.A. 1852-1911 had left a bequest for the commissioning of "highly gifted, trained Artists to execute Mural Paintings in public buildings or buildings belonging to Charitable Institutions." 'The Edwin Austin Abbey Memorial Trust Fund for Mural Painting in Great Britain' was administered through the Royal Academy of Arts.

While Arthur painted the mural early in 1971, Mahler, Beethoven and Wagner urged him on. With dusty polythene sheets shading the windows of his studio, amid walls and floor splattered with oil, drums of turpentine, scores of paint tins, heaps of old rags and hundreds of brushes packed tight in soup tins and jam jars, Arthur stood on a contraption of his own making, a platform on wheels, and impressed his version of *Lysistrata* on two canvases that would form a diptych around the speaker's platform in the St. Helier library.

From all the situations within the Greek story Arthur could have chosen, he selected the moment *Lysistrata*'s plan comes unstuck, when nature's demands become inescapable and libido conquers all. He depicts a brief episode, before the resolution of peace, when the women experience a moment of weakness; "One of them was sneaking out the back door over there by Pan's cave; another was sliding down the wall with rope and tackle." Arthur depicted this situation in a *Lysistrata* etching titled *They are all deserting*. He shows a naked woman, on all fours, shadowed by a larger bulkier form (an embodiment of the Cave of Pan) about to grasp the woman from behind. A phallic snake, unravelling aggressively towards her naked body, leaves no doubt as to its desired destination. Above, on high ground, is the ubiquitous figure from the 1940s and the 1950s, arms thrown up in desperate warning.

The *Lysistrata* mural continues the theme of both wildness and watchfulness, stillness and action.¹¹⁷⁸ Nothing is fixed or straightforward: it is a place, as the viewer can see, where, in the top right hand corner of the painting, the blue bird of happiness flies upside down. As one critic noted: "the sense of haunted humanity and the dream-like quality are all there, typical of Boyd's work".¹¹⁷⁹

With the Boyd show having been on the road for so many years, the PR and marketing acumen of Arthur and Yvonne had reached professional level. The unveiling of the mural (delayed in favour of the Ganymed commission) on 24 March coincided nicely with the release of a limited edition of sixty-five sets of Arthur's thirty etchings of *Lysistrata* in April, and with the exhibition that followed at the Ganymed Gallery in May. Timed with the same precision came an exhibition in St. Helier's hospital chapel, titled 'Art and Genetics'. It was a gathering of the clan: oil paintings, drawings, watercolours and sculpture of four generations of the family - from Arthur Merric Boyd and Emma Minnie a'Beckett and their children, Merric, Penleigh, Martin and Helen; from Penleigh and Edith's son, Robin; from Merric and Doris's children, Arthur, Guy, David, Lucy and Mary; from Lucy and Hatton's son, Robert; from Arthur and Yvonne's children, Polly, Jamie and Lucy; from Mary and John Perceval's children, Matthew, Tessa, Celia and Alice; and from Guy and Phyllis's daughter, Lenore.

¹¹⁷⁸ "The mural *Lysistrata* ..." When reconstruction took place in the library and the mural was threatened, both panels were purchased by the AGNSW.

¹¹⁷⁹ "As one critic noted, 'the sense of haunted humanity ...' Peter Smark, *Sunday Australian*, 14 March, 1971.

If ghosts hover about old haunts, Sir William a'Beckett, Arthur's great-great-grandfather, may well have joined the family gathering that night. After leaving Melbourne in the late eighteen fifties, he had retired to the very same suburb that housed St Helier Hospital. Without the marriage of his son to Emma Minnie's mother, Emma, the daughter of the convict, whose heritage, some say, had driven Sir William all the way from Melbourne to the quiet backwater of Carshalton -- there would have been no show. Arthur would have liked that spin-off.

In 1967, at the age of eighteen, Jamie had become a handsome young man, with a crop of Beatles mop-top hair, wearing a sharp three-piece tweed bespoke suit bought with the proceeds of his first one-man show. On the eve of his second one-man show, a second suit seemed inevitable, but his future plans weren't so definite. Jamie, despite this initial success, was "uncertain about the future." After studying piano for five years his aspirations were divided: his week split in two: half music, half painting. Back in Australia, he had only drawn aeroplanes and boats, but in London he had begun to draw the English countryside and Hampstead Heath. He had started messing around with oils, "because it was easy, being surrounded by the materials". His father stood at a distance and observed, offering encouragement when Jamie, around the age of thirteen, asked if he could go knocking door-to-door in the hope of selling some of his tiny paintings. After that early success, while Arthur painted on the ground floor, Jamie painted in his attic bedroom; father and son vied for the title of having the untidiest room in the house.

Like his grandfather before him, Arthur never criticised Jamie's work. He simply repeated the invaluable history of Rosebud. He lent Jamie his station wagon so he could get out into the country to work; and he urged his son to paint in his own style, to do what he wanted, not what other people wanted. He convinced Jamie that there was more "than knocking up canvases", simply to "sell". Criticism was left to Yvonne, and Jamie found his mother's advice "very constructive."

In the Boyd household Jamie's unusual eagerness to collect his little sister Lucy from the O'Shaughnessy household went unnoticed by all except the beautiful young Portuguese girl, named Helena Lopes, who worked for Red and Brian O'Shaughnessy as their au pair, who had travelled to London to perfect her English; but the sweet, silly excuses that followed Jamie's unexpected arrivals at the O'Shaughnessys' door needed no translation. Jamie met Helena during her first week in London and in just over a year, in April 1970, they were married in Oporto, Portugal, in a traditional ceremony, surrounded by family from both sides, as Yvonne reported to a friend in Australia, with "quite a party of Boyds and Lennies".

In May 1970 Arthur had received an invitation from the registrar of the Australian National University (ANU) asking whether he would be prepared to put his name

forward for a Fellowship in the Creative Arts for a term of two to six months the following year. The Fellowship came with a grant of five thousand dollars. Alan McCulloch and Peter Herbst had been manoeuvring to get Arthur a spell in Canberra for many years. As early as 1962 Herbst invited Arthur to put himself forward but due to pressure of work Arthur declined, suggesting he submit John Perceval instead. But now, with Polly independent and Jamie married, Arthur was free to accept.

When Arthur and Yvonne arrived in Canberra October 1971 for a three month fellowship there followed a small flurry of recognition. A journalist from the *Canberra Times* painted a "puckish ... slightly stooped" eccentric character, a vague dodderer, who was easily distracted by "the wind at a patio door, his daughter Lucy 13, clomping around upstairs after school". Arthur's polite shy charm and his subtle diffidence; the qualities that had stood him in good stead in England, were perceived as quaint and bumbling:

Boyd finds himself with a vaguely formed sense of mission, something in his mind about helping Australian art and arts ... he says he hasn't been told exactly what is expected of him during his stay, but feels the university is hopeful that he will come up with a constructive idea or two before he returns to England ... it is difficult for a person like Arthur Boyd to relate himself to the rest of the world in positive terms after such a long absence from it...¹¹⁸⁰

Success in Australia was tricky; whereas local fame had once relied heavily on pre-existing 'overseas experience' now a resistance towards returning heroes was beginning, particularly directed towards those who where just dropping in. In the 1950s and 1960s, if you stayed at home you weren't good enough for the international stage. Now, if you stayed away, you were perceived as believing yourself too good for those at home. Arthur had felt the resentment on his first journey back: "There was a definite ... you went over to London and you cashed in".¹¹⁸¹

The *Canberra Times* journalist caught Arthur at a particularly distracted time. There were family concerns. In a shaky hand, proud Martin, in extremis, had written 16 September to Yvonne:

"I am ashamed to send you this S.O.S when you must be extremely busy and I don't even know your whereabouts but my situation is precarious ... it is awful to worry you but my situation has seldom been so desperate, if ever."¹¹⁸²

Royalties from his publisher Lansdowne, were in dispute and at the end of August, ill health necessitating a sudden operation had cost one thousand pounds and emptied his bank account. Now, desperate for funds, he suggests Yvonne buy his furniture, which they were housing in Highgate: "an antique chair, and table, and the Regency mahogany chairs and the Empire ones".

¹¹⁸⁰ "A journalist from the *Canberra Times* ..." *The Canberra Times*, 30 October, 1971.

¹¹⁸¹ "Arthur had felt the resentment on his first journey back ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes

¹¹⁸² "In a shaky hand, on September 16 ..." Letter from Martin Boyd to Yvonne Boyd, 16 September, 1971, Bundanon archives.

News of Martin's predicament had reached home and notable forces had begun garnering support. Patrick White wrote to Lady Maie Casey:

Martin Boyd ...having difficulties making ends meet, particularly since a major operation in Rome carried off a large sum and left him with only partial use of his legs ... I have taken this up with the CLF [Commonwealth Literary Fund]. You know the Boyd family, I seem to remember. Could you perhaps stir them into doing something if the money is there which I'm sure it is. (Arthur Boyd alone.)¹¹⁸³

Lady Casey then contacted Sir Daryl Lindsay. Lindsay, like most, not knowing where Arthur was residing, addressed his letter care of Joseph Brown. Either Lindsay was not an avid reader himself, or he believed this to be true of Arthur, for his letter, dated just one year before White received the Nobel Prize for Literature, mentions: "one Patrick White – a writer, is applying to the Commonwealth Government through the Library Board for a pension (for Martin)".¹¹⁸⁴

This flurry of activity, outside a family who had always managed to support each other without help from outsiders, must have distressed Arthur. Long before the arrival of Lindsay's letter, he had arranged the transfer of money to Martin's British bank. Guy had alerted Mary in London and she had rushed to her uncle's aid, staying by his side until he could walk unaided. When sufficiently recovered to give thanks, Martin wrote to Yvonne, proclaiming he had "the best group of nephews and nieces of any uncle in the English speaking world".¹¹⁸⁵

The early months in Canberra were not a time of contemplative repose, as one might imagine a fellowship to be. In the midst of Martin's illness, Arthur's childhood companion and cousin, Robin Boyd, died suddenly, on 15 October, at the age of fifty two. Robin Boyd had become a household name in Australia. An author of four books on architecture, President of the Victorian Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, he was both one of the country's leading architects and the champion of the abolition of "the Australian ugliness (the title of his best-known work, published in 1960). He was described as "Australia's most insistent architectural conscience" and his early death was a great loss to family and community alike.

Upheaval, both emotional and physical, shadowed the residency. The Boyds were left to choose a place to live and, at the university's suggestion, to stage an exhibition. Arthur had gone to the great expense of shipping a vast number of works from England and was left to unpack the crates in an improvised studio in Childers Street. During Perceval's tenure the university had knocked down several walls and put in a huge glass sliding door to give him enough space and light, but in Arthur's case he was given a pre-fab

¹¹⁸³ "Patrick White wrote ...: Extract of letter from Patrick White to Maie Casey, 7 November, 1971. *Patrick White Letters*, edited David Marr, Random House, Australia, 1994.

¹¹⁸⁴ "Either Lindsay was not an avid reader himself ..." Extract of letter from Daryl Lindsay to Arthur Boyd, 15 November, 1971. Bundanon archives

¹¹⁸⁵ "When sufficiently recovered to give thanks ..." Extract of letter from Martin Boyd to Yvonne dated 5 October, 1971. Bundanon archives

studio, so inappropriate he never bothered to go near it and instead worked from his rented home. A venue for the exhibition was eventually found: Melville Hall, a newly-built examination space.

About four thousand students trooped through the six-day exhibition. However, the five tapestries, thirty-five ceramics, fourteen drypoints and etchings of Lysistrata, and one hundred and five paintings were dismantled after just five days of hanging. The shortness of the show was due to the failure of the organisers to consider the need of the hall for imminent end-of-year exams. To make matters worse, the university had failed to generate any publicity: no one outside Canberra, or apart from dealers, knew the show was on. As the *Australian* reported "there could be no less fanfare than if [Arthur Boyd] were an unknown".¹¹⁸⁶

The scale and impact of the exhibition was not lost on Jack Golson, Professor of Pre-history at the ANU. He never forgot his first sighting of Arthur's works crowding out Melville Hall that October of 1971. "I found it overwhelming. The vast array of work ... the colour, the variety ... the scope of this joker ... the range was fantastic ... it was amazing". When Arthur stepped out from behind these magical works, like the Wizard of Oz, Golson was surprised all over again: the 'joker' he discovered was "a modest man" with "absolutely no pretensions".¹¹⁸⁷ These characteristics appeared ill suited to Canberra.

At the height of his fame in England, Arthur was left to languish in the deathly quiet suburb of Garran ('Barren Garran' the Boyds called it due to the lack of trees) in a small brick house with cell-like rooms (made smaller still by the necessity of claiming a room for a studio), on which he had the honour of paying rent. Six miles from the university campus, Arthur must have felt he was in the Murrumbidgee schoolyard once again, relegated to the sidelines. The evening the police pulled up in their patrol car beside Lucy and Yvonne, to ask if the suspicious-looking character meandering some fifty paces behind them was "bothering" them, would have totally convinced him he'd been transported back in time – all the way from the capital city to Bacchus Marsh.

In a city where politics and intrigue were not only the bread but the butter, Arthur was on a starvation diet. As usual, never complaining, never explaining, in later years he would admit to none of it. Instead, like putting his finger in a handful of muddy colour, from among the murky circumstances of time, he pulled out one gleaming thread of fact that perfectly illuminated his neglect during the Canberra tenure. "Professor Huxley ... came around one day ... and he said, 'Is there anything I can do for you?' I said, 'I'd love to look through a real telescope.' Every time I saw him and mentioned it he said, 'Oh, yes, I must fix that up'". Arthur told that story in 1996, describing the telescope with the excitement of a child: "a proper one, a wind up job, where you go up in the air

¹¹⁸⁶ "As *The Australian* reported ..." *The Australian* 'It's the Arthur Boyd Show, quietly' 21 October, 1971.

¹¹⁸⁷ "The scale and impact of the exhibition was not lost on Jack Golson ..." Interview Jack Golson, Canberra, September, 2003. All quotes derived from this source.

and come down.” His story ended, “I never got to look through a telescope, and I still haven’t”.¹¹⁸⁸

Old friends jollied up the proceedings and got the Boyds out of town. Apart from many journeys into the outlying countryside with Valerie and Peter Herbst, the Boyds spent time with Dymphna and Manning Clark, a Professor of Australian History at the ANU, and one of the pioneering figures of Australian history. The ties between the two men stretched back to Arthur’s days spent with Denison Deasey and Max Nicholson when Nicholson, alongside Clark, taught at Geelong Grammar.

The Boyds were invited to stay at the Clarks’ holiday cottage at the coastal town of Wapengo, where Arthur painted his friend’s portrait. He painted it twice: later with academic regalia but on this occasion in casual clothes and an Aussie felt hat. Clark would modestly name the painting (done at Arthur’s usual pace, in an afternoon) after his dog, ‘Tuppence’s portrait.’ Clark personifies the bush. He is earthy and tanned, his blue shirt and eyes reflecting a blue sky that is, at once, both soft and penetrating. Clark stands balanced, straightforward, hands in pocket, casually ready. Like Piero di Cosimo’s dog, Tuppence’s black back is bent in a half arc of patient, faithful watchfulness – concern, in this instance, not directed inwards towards the master, but outwards towards the bush. The painting is so still, so expectant, we can almost hear through the stillness a faint scuttling, a crackling – a lizard through the dried grasses perhaps? Or is that shadowy trunk the shape of a semi-hidden figure, and that scrappy strewn bark, a pair of talons emerging from the undergrowth? Dymphna Clark, after a spell in hospital and nightmarish dreams fuelled by morphine, found she could not look into Arthur’s painting any longer without seeing, to her horror, “a demon” hiding in the undergrowth.¹¹⁸⁹

Arthur and Manning Clark were drawn to each other. Clark’s son, Andrew, recalled the two men talking at great length about Australia, about art. He believed their bond grew from a sense of separateness: Manning had been kept away from school and university for long periods because of his epilepsy. Dymphna saw the friendship based on “an instinctive, intuitive bond... a current that said human life is a very strange thing and it has its heights and it has its depths”.¹¹⁹⁰ Arthur thought Manning Clark “a beautiful person ...very delicate ...” with a “very gentle Christ-like approach to life ...”¹¹⁹¹ While Arthur admired Clark’s republican view of Australia, Clark admired Arthur’s take on the world. In his attic study, where Clark laboured away at what would finally become his six volumes of Australian history, he tethered inspirational images with drawing pins. Among his treasures hung a reproduction of *The Mourners*.

¹¹⁸⁸ “Instead, like putting his finger in a handful of muddy colour ...” Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

¹¹⁸⁹ “Dymphna Clark, after a spell in hospital ...” Interview Dymphna Clark, Canberra, 13 November, 1999. All quotes originate from this interview.

¹¹⁹⁰ “Dymphna saw the friendship based on ...” Interview Andrew Clark, Melbourne, 12 December, 1999.

¹¹⁹¹ “Arthur thought Manning Clark “a beautiful person ...” Arthur Boyd, NLA Oral History ‘Manning Clark’s world’.

About an hour's drive from Canberra, the Sydney art dealer Frank McDonald, jointly owned a property with Sandra and Tony McGrath, called 'Bundanon.' In December of 1971, the Boyds were invited down. Arthur and McDonald had been doing business, not only in paintings and drawings and pastels since the early sixties, but in the entirely new form of tapestry. In 1966 Arthur had journeyed to Portugal, to the province of Alentejo near the Spanish border, to view Manufactura de Tapeçarias de Portalegre, the tapestry workshop of Guy Fino. Within the walls of the former Jesuit monastery, Fino employed half a dozen women with a talent for weaving and an eye for tone and colour.

John Olsen, on a retainer with the Clune Gallery, had already begun the process of turning wool into images and Arthur liked the result. Olsen, McDonald and Arthur stayed a couple of nights together in a pousada and left satisfied that the Portuguese workshop produced far more sensitive results than its would-be rivals in France. By November 1966, Arthur had submitted cartoons, imaging Nebuchadnezzar and the Ancient Mariner. In 1967, McDonald's enthusiasm for merging craft and art was undiminished, but realistically he was forced to admit that the market for tapestry in Australia was not as big as he had supposed.¹¹⁹² The critics were underwhelmed by Arthur's tapestries. One commented that, although the tapestries were beautiful in themselves, the calculated discipline they demanded was "foreign to the restlessness and spontaneity" of Arthur's style.¹¹⁹³

However, in 1970 after a showing of tapestries at the Hamet the year previously, Arthur and McDonald optimistically waded in once more, and five sumptuously executed tapestries were exhibited at Clune Gallery. They were applauded as tapestries, but in chorus the critics viewed the works with warmth rather than heat, seeing them as faithful to Arthur's painted images, but not exciting; they didn't quite translate; they had lost Arthur's fierce and subtle grip on the paint. The overwhelming consensus seemed to be - why bother? Arthur disregarded the lack of sales and reviews and continued, over the years, to commission tapestries. Just like the process of etching, or ceramic tiles or sculpture, he delighted in the 'accident,' the Chinese whisper that occurred between the transition from one medium to another.

There was much about Frank McDonald that prompted Arthur to suggest he would get on well with Uncle Martin. At Arthur's request, McDonald, while journeying through Europe, met Martin Boyd near the Spanish Steps in Rome, where they took tea and discussed the sale of a Berwick painting that would buoy up Martin's shaky finances.¹¹⁹⁴

¹¹⁹² "In 1967, McDonald's enthusiasm for merging craft and art ..." Extract of letter from McDonald to Boyds, 3 August, 1967.

¹¹⁹³ "One commented that, although the tapestries were beautiful ..." James Gleeson, *The Sun*, 12 July, 1967.

¹¹⁹⁴ "At Arthur's request ..." McDonald, a considered dresser himself, made a mental note of Martin's wardrobe the first day of meeting in Rome: "he wore a silk jacket, cream grey flannels, a regimental or school tie and a panama hat, a silk shirt, and a little satchel." Arthur, despite his success remained the antithesis of sartorial elegance: he appreciated good clothes but rarely had the occasion to wear them. McDonald and Tom Rosenthal furnished him with attire in which to address the world. McDonald would supply shirts from his West End London shirtmaker and Tom Rosenthal, returning the gift of Arthur's paintings, would order three-piece bespoke suits from his tailor in Savill Row

At the beginning of the 1970s, after a visit to Frank McDonald at Bundanon, Yvonne Boyd wrote: "The house and you all, of course, epitomises what we came for – the essence we've been thinking about all these years. Congratulations on the vision you've made real. I don't mean to be so poetic – just appreciative".¹¹⁹⁵ By the end of the decade, all mail addressed to the owners of Bundanon would bear the name Boyd.

Bundanon was the most historically important house in the Shoalhaven region. From the 1840s on, it had survived flood, fire and, by virtue of its isolation, the suburban sprawl radiating from the large country township of Nowra. The main house, completed in 1866, sat in a fertile, grassy flood plain and was cradled by densely forested bush. Composed of finely jointed Australian cedar bones fleshed out with local sandstone, it was handsome and well-proportioned: a colonial gem. A broad timber balcony spanned the upper storey and on the lower floor a stone-flagged terrace ran from French doors out onto lawn. From these vantage points the housebound could observe the wild rock and tree-strewn cliffs bordering the opposite side of the river and looking right, view a slab of sandstone, known as Pulpit Rock jutting from the top of a high cliff face; a flying buttress supporting the domed sky.

When Arthur completed his three-month tenure, he continued to use Canberra and Bundanon as bases, taking McDonald up on his offer of 'the milkman's cottage', a small wooden house on the old dairy farming estate, sited on the road leading up to the house. At the same time they kept up the rent on the Garran house. Using these residences as halfway houses between Melbourne and Sydney, Arthur began a series of nude studies in the landscape. The area in which Arthur painted was about 15 minutes out of Canberra: a white landscape, not exactly bush in the sense of the bush around Bundanon, but sparse and uninhabited. Arthur loved it.

Over a century had passed since Edouard Manet completed *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. As Yvonne gathered wood to set a fire to boil the billy, as their picnic unfolded, Arthur saw connections with Manet's al fresco lunch. Both artists sought the natural light – Manet, the diffused reflections off the Seine; Arthur, the heat-blazed air bouncing off the Canberra hills. The arc-lamp light of these works would, on Arthur's return to England, give way to the deep, dark greens of the north. The landscape would change, but Yvonne would remain, becoming the focal point. One particular work shows her set against an emerald Suffolk wood. In reality she sat in a bare unfurnished room, her foot perched on an empty packing case, while a team of busy gardeners chattered on the other side of a curtained window, just feet away, hacking down head-high nettles in the neglected garden.

This middle-aged woman with all the imperfections brought on by time and child bearing has the grace and the strength of a goddess, yet she has little to do with Titian's

¹¹⁹⁵ "After their 1971 visit to the property ..." Letter from Yvonne Boyd to Frank McDonald, 14 December, 1971. Bundanon archives.

Venus or Manet's *Olympia*.¹¹⁹⁶ She does not seduce or pose, engage or bargain; there is no role play. Unlike so many of Arthur's nudes she is not insistently, frantically moving: she is strong and still. It is she, not the artist, who treats her flesh as a thing, an abstraction. Her nakedness is unsentimental. She is a woman in a relationship with a man to whom she allows herself to be totally exposed. His gaze, so close and intense, is second nature to her. But here privacy is shared, not violated. In many of the paintings where she marks time by reading, her eyes are cast down. In the paintings where their eyes meet, her look is direct. The intimacy she offers is bound by thought.

In many portraits, from the earliest works, Arthur placed both his mother's and his wife's feet on pedestals. In *Figure by a Creek*, Yvonne's foot rises to the height of a river rock, almost spanning the creek in one stride. In *Seated Figure by Creek*, her foot is so purposely placed it appears to stem the tide, walk on water. She is both grounded and ethereal; the source of light and the dominating feature of the landscape, north and south. In *Figure on a Chair in Suffolk Wood*, the landscape is merely her backdrop. Again, she is raised on a pedestal, her foot placed even higher. In these nudes there is an emulation of the Old Masters, as serious and considered as Arthur's technique has ever been. Arthur presents Yvonne as Rembrandt presented Saskia, both monumental and domestic, a vital ingredient of the day.

Despite a ram that appears in one work and the dog in another, with one or two exceptions, this is the only time that a full-blooded, life-sized naked woman is stripped of myth, allegory, tension, despair, angst, frustration or burden.¹¹⁹⁷ She is out in the open, on her own terms, and free of any man, except the man who paints her. Now, after almost thirty years, the viewer exhales.

Throughout Arthur's childhood his father had always referred to England as "home".¹¹⁹⁸ The majority of Australians of Merric's generation shared that sentiment. By the 1960s however, for a great many that notion had changed. Since World War II there had been a remove. Those in power at the time were aware of it and sought to mend the rifts, despatching such dignitaries as Laurence Olivier (lecturing in a post-war rally cry that loosely recalled his St Crispin's Day speech from *Henry V*) and Queen Elizabeth II

¹¹⁹⁶ "This middle-aged woman ..." Discussing these works Yvonne ventured: "I didn't know that when I was middle aged and bulging I'd be posing for Arthur ... I didn't do it for anyone else ... I remember Barbara Blackman making a bit of money being a model when we got to know the Blackmans and I thought I should do that to make a bit of money too and she said: 'Oh they won't take you if you've had children ...' I wasn't eligible because I'd had children therefore my figure wasn't as good as hers."

¹¹⁹⁷ "Despite a ram..." Arthur also painted Valerie Herbst naked in the Canberra hills. It occurred when the Herbsts and the Boyds were out on a picnic in the Canberra hills. On impulse, Valerie stripped off her clothes and threw herself naked onto the rocks, offering herself as subject. It was an invitation an old friend, and a polite painter, could not refuse.

¹¹⁹⁸ "Throughout Arthur's childhood his father ..." "Arthur Boyd interview with Geraldine O'Brien, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 June, 1965. "When we were children father used to talk about 'going home' and he meant England."

herself, to remind the colonists of their important links. These tours were fiercely promoted by Sir Robert Menzies, a royalist to the extent he had been compared to “a Reverend Mr. Collins to the Queen Mother’s Lady de Burgh”,¹¹⁹⁹ and a traditionalist of such depth he allowed democracy to take a back seat when he promoted an unsuccessful attempt to ban Australia’s Communist Party.¹²⁰⁰ Arthur had scarcely known a government that hadn’t been shadowed by Menzies’ thinking: “Although I never joined the party I had strong leanings towards a socialist system”.¹²⁰¹ When the election campaign began rolling in 1972, it wasn’t merely people like Arthur Boyd or struggling working men and women who looked forward to polling day. It was the baby-boomers, those who could use their voice in the running of the country for the very first time, who had only ever known a Liberal government and some of whose fates were being determined by lottery marbles in the selection of conscripts for a war in which they wanted no part. The now famous electoral slogan for the Labor Party—‘It’s Time’—said little, but meant a lot.

Arthur had not been able to return to Wahroonga Crescent to face the concrete boxes where Open Country once stood, yet he had seen similar destruction in the hills, valleys and shorelines of the city. From the protected hills of Shoreham, Alan McCulloch had written in 1970, that “the old feeling of being so far away from everything doesn’t exist any more, in fact one feels sometimes that everything is coming too close and that the beautiful old, primeval Australia is doomed. Heaven forbid”.¹²⁰²

Arthur didn’t see Australia as the motherland. It wasn’t Doris: small, cosy, gentle and genteel. It was Merric: intense, distanced, punishing and capable of producing unique beauty. When commenting on the Australian bush Arthur once said: “...it is something like your father, your fierce father ... but you love him all the same”.¹²⁰³

Arthur and Yvonne dreamed of coming home, but their dream varied from a “a sparkling new house and a studio somewhere, anywhere as long as it’s surrounded by gum trees;”¹²⁰⁴ to a house on Sydney Harbour,¹²⁰⁵ to a shack in a Queensland rainforest, or a beach hut on Mornington Peninsula. But the photographs Frank McDonald sent to England in September 1973 clarified their intentions. They showed a wooden house on

¹¹⁹⁹ “These tours were fiercely promoted by Sir Robert Menzies, a royalist ...” *Manning Clark: Occasional Writings and Speeches ‘The Years of Unleavened Bread’*, Fontana Books, Melbourne, 1980.

¹²⁰⁰ “These tours were fiercely promoted...a traditionalist” Sir Robert Gordon Menzies was Prime Minister (1939-41), founder of The Liberal Party, and leader of the Opposition 1943-49 or Prime Minister 1949-66

¹²⁰¹ “Arthur had scarcely known a government ...” Peter Otto, *Arts & Entertainment*, 6 April, 1994.

Arthur added the caveat: “which I still have, so long as it’s one without crooks in charge.”

¹²⁰² “From the protected hills of Shoreham ...” Extract of letter from Alan McCulloch to Arthur Boyd, 1 May, 1970

¹²⁰³ “When commenting on the Australian bush ...” Joanna Mendelssohn, *The Bulletin*, December 21, 1993.

¹²⁰⁴ “Arthur and Yvonne dreamed of coming home ...” Extract of a letter from Yvonne Boyd to Betty Burstall, August, 1966. Bundanon archives.

¹²⁰⁵ “to a house on Sydney harbour ...” Extract of a letter from Yvonne Boyd to Peter O’Shaughnessy, 6 February, 1967. Bundanon archives

the brow of a hill that faced a wide bend of the Shoalhaven River. The cottage, twelve miles by river from Nowra, on a steep bank falling down to the water, was the other side of sparkling new. Long used as a store for wheat, cows meandered through its decrepit windows and doors and birds nested in the rotting rafters. But gum trees crowded the high surrounding hills, and the river and the vast sky floating above it, flooded the eyes with beauty. Arthur dashed off a telegram to McDonald: ¹²⁰⁶ "Thank you for the wonderful photographs. Do not let it go. We love it. Please try and secure it". ¹²⁰⁷ Later Arthur would admit to McDonald, it had been his second choice: "I only bought Riversdale because I couldn't have Bundanon." ¹²⁰⁸

Gough Whitlam, the Leader of the Opposition, promised the end of war. Riversdale promised peace. It would be an escape, a stronghold, a 'call-before-you-come' distance from anywhere. It was a long way from the pressures of London and a long way from Melbourne and old friends, with old memories. It was a fresh start. It was a run for home. It was time.

¹²⁰⁶ "Arthur dashed off a telegram ..." Telegram dated 22 September, 1973. The Boyds subsequently gave Frank McDonald power of attorney. His initial news re the land was in a letter to Arthur 9 July, 1973: "Apropos your remark "Do you know any other like" the farm: There is 140 acres with a derelict wooden cottage on the bend of the river a couple of miles down stream from us."

¹²⁰⁷ "...please try and secure it ..." Arthur and Yvonne purchased Riversdale for \$100,000 on 13 February, 1974, later adding a right of way and two further parcels of land bringing the total acreage to 144 (58.28 ha).

¹²⁰⁸ "I only bought 'Riversdale' because ..." Interview Frank McDonald.

CHAPTER 18

“This reservoir of blue”
...Arthur Boyd.

“For if the entire history of landscape in the West is indeed just a mindless race towards a machine-driven universe, uncomplicated by myth, metaphor, and allegory, where measurement, not memory, is the absolute arbiter of value, where our ingenuity is our tragedy, then we are indeed trapped in the engine of our self-destruction.”
Simon Shama, *Landscape & Memory*, Fontana Press, London, 1996.

"Prithee where are thoust sweet prince? Turnest thou thy face away from those that succoured thee in the days of thy discontent?" So began a letter of gentle complaint to 'Cher Arturo' from Alan McCulloch.¹²⁰⁹ It was waiting at 13 Hampstead Lane to greet Arthur after the S.S. Iberia had delivered him back from Australia in May 1972. While Arthur had been in Canberra, and later travelling through Melbourne, McCulloch waited in vain to receive a 'coo-ee' and this despite Arthur being in shouting distance of his door when visiting the Cairns. McCulloch had received a "nice letter from Yvonne" in reply to his 'welcome home' note when the Boyds first arrived. But from his old companion at Cape Schanck, from the artist he constantly championed, McCulloch received not one word: "I would have liked to have heard whether or not the Canberra Fellowship is an honour worth getting, and whether the Britannica (for which you were my recommended nominee for three consecutive years as indeed you were also for the Fellowship) has any real significance apart from the money?"

Sufficiently chastened, Arthur attempted a paragraph or two:

I can not tell you how sad we were not seeing you at Shoram it was one of the few things we had planned to do when in Melbourne we really only saw our intimate family for the very breife time we were there ... we spent nealy every bit of the time in Canberra ... we had only 2 visitors from other stats the whole time we were there...¹²¹⁰

But then Yvonne took over, tidying up, typing up and enlarging upon his lame excuses.

McCulloch was not alone in his disappointment. Most friends at some point would feel neglected. Neil Douglas wrote asking "wotswot" after attempting to see Arthur on his 1968 visit home and being told by Guy that Arthur "wanted to hide out". Chas Adams, Arthur's neighbour and school friend from Murrumbena, had also tried to make contact.. Chas had written through the years, always hoping to arrange a get-together but the closest he got was an accidental meeting when he bumped into Arthur on the street. Max Nicholson, a continuous correspondent, after hearing nothing of the return to Australia, wrote that November: "It's not possible to conceal my considerable disappointment in not hearing anything at all from you on that immense journey – I had (foolishly it seems) looked forward to the occasional letter ..." ¹²¹¹ In September 1977, Tom Sanders penned a rant to Yvonne: "neither Arthur or you seem to realize just how much you have jacked-off your old-mates with your casualness and to mention Bert Tucker, Tim, Brian, and myself are just a few – believe me!"¹²¹²

Not only did Arthur appear unsentimental about old ties but it would seem that there were very few people he needed. There had been times when his own children had felt,

¹²⁰⁹"Prithee where are thoust sweet prince?..." Extract of letter from McCulloch to Boyd, Bundanon archives

¹²¹⁰"Sufficiently chastened, Arthur attempted a paragraph or two ..." Bundanon archives

¹²¹¹ "Max Nicholson, a faithful correspondent ..." Extrat of letter from Nicholson to Arthur and Yvonne, November 1, 1968. Bundanon archives.

¹²¹² "Some years later, in September 1977..." Extract of letter from Tom Sanders to Yvonne Boyd, 7 September, 1977, Bundanon archives

if not deserted, certainly aware that their mother and father survived perfectly well as a separate unit, content with Arthur's work for company. Certainly if Arthur's friends analysed the past, all the way back to Open Country, they would have realised that, whether from the other side of the fence or from the other side of town, they came to Arthur, rarely did he go spontaneously to them.

Members of the family swelled the numbers of the disenchanted. By 1980 Guy, writing from Toronto, bemoaned he been trying to contact his brother for the past three weeks, adding: "it would be nice to have your number to ring to talk to you a couple of times a year".¹²¹³ Martin Boyd, a decade earlier, had written from Italy.¹²¹⁴

I know you must be awfully busy, but I would be very grateful if you would put on a postcard:

1. How Arthur is (2 words)
2. Whom Jamie married (3 words)
3. If you got the booklets (1 word)
4. If you are coming this way in the summer. (1 word)

Within two years of receiving this plea, Arthur and Yvonne would be travelling to Rome for Uncle Martin's funeral. After his illness Martin did not rally with the warmth of the spring as he had predicted at the beginning of 1972.¹²¹⁵ That summer on 3 June, at the age of seventy eight, he died - alone in Rome.¹²¹⁶ Martin's romantic vision of a large home, and the gathering of generations about him, had come to nothing. He had died close to where Keats; another sickly, lonely, self-exiled writer ended his days and was buried in the same graveyard that contains Shelley's memorial.

However, in the last months of his life, Martin had been given succour by the country he had left behind. In January of 1972 he had energetically assured Yvonne that there was now no need for concern "for an antique Uncle ... holding out his cap ... on the Spanish Steps", for "the Australian Government has come to your aid".¹²¹⁷ After his long siege at the hands of "incredibly avaricious nuns"¹²¹⁸ and "morally despicable" publishers, he

¹²¹³ "Family swelled the numbers of the disenchanted". Extract of letter from Guy Boyd to Arthur Boyd, Toronto 4 March, 1980. Bundanon archives.

¹²¹⁴ "Martin Boyd, a decade earlier had written from Italy ..." Letter from Martin Boyd to Yvonne Boyd, 3 June, 1970. Bundanon archives.

¹²¹⁵ "After his illness ..." *Patrick White Letters* Op cit. Just two days before Martin's death, 1 June, 1972, Patrick White wrote to Elizabeth Harrower "Geoffrey Dutton says that Boyd is dying... Geoffrey doesn't think he will last long. A niece, Mary (I think Perceval) has flown out from London to be with him. Apparently at the last CLF meeting they had been discussing an increase in the money they send him; he will certainly need it if he lingers on in a Roman hospital".

¹²¹⁶ "That summer on June 3 ..." Geoffrey Dutton wrote to Arthur and Yvonne 15 June, 1972, expressing his sadness over Martin's death and explaining he had "had such good talks with him in that last week or so, & even though he was very weak & wandered a bit from time to time he was still full of spark in between". Bundanon archives.

¹²¹⁷ "In January of 1972..." Extract of letter from Martin Boyd to Yvonne Boyd, 4 January, 1972, 'Bundanon' archives.

¹²¹⁸ "After his long siege at the hands ..." Extract of letter from Martin Boyd to Yvonne Boyd, 5 October, 1971. Bundanon archives

reported "the department of Conservation ... has decided to conserve me".¹²¹⁹ Patrick White's lobbying had borne fruit and Martin had received news of a one thousand dollar award and an annual pension of a \$1,560. The money brought relief and also a long-awaited recognition - an accolade that Martin, in his debilitated state, could not pass off with his usual insouciance. He wrote to Arthur that the award was "owing to the part I have played in the development of writing in Australia".

Yet it seems that ultimately Martin's spirit was crushed. His broken body would be discovered in the Blue Nuns' gardens, lying where it had fallen, below his hospital window.¹²²⁰ In the weeks preceding his death, in his debilitated state he had written of his "hope to die soon ... I get weaker & weaker ... I cannot see what will become of me".¹²²¹

The Times obituary would begin by introducing Mr Martin Boyd, as "a perceptive novelist", and conclude by confirming that this man of "eloquent expression and unflagging wit" had been "much consoled" that the Australian Government had recognised his contribution to the literature of his country.¹²²²

Shortly after experiencing the shock of outliving Robin, the son of his beloved brother, Martin had completed his last will and testament and signed it on the 25 October, 1971 in the presence of consuls from the British Embassy in Rome. His two eldest nephews, Pat and Arthur, were written out. Copyright in all of Martin's published work was bequeathed to Guy. Despite not being invited to Jamie's wedding he left a small collection of silver to his nephew's son. In itemising these few mismatched pieces, Martin's diluted dream of duplicating all things British was poignantly revealed in his listing of "one silver coffee pot (reproduction Georgian circa 1880) with Boyd coat-of arms".

Back in the days of the Grange, Arthur could never have conceived the dreadfully reduced circumstances in which Martin found himself at his death. Arthur had been a landowner since he invested his army pay in Hastings; he had been a builder since the day he built his pottery shed; he had been a conservator since the time he secured his toys in the safety of his father's bureau drawer. Now these character traits would find their fullest expression.

¹²¹⁹ "... and morally despicable publishers ..." Extract of letter from Martin Boyd to Arthur Boyd, 5 January, 1972, Bundanon archives.

¹²²⁰ "Yet, it would appear that ultimately ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd. According to Yvonne, on the plane journey to Rome to claim Martin's body and arrange the funeral (Arthur travelled separately by train) Mary Perceval revealed that the belief was that Martin had committed suicide by throwing himself from his hospital window. This provides another argument as to why Martin Boyd was buried in the English Protestant Cemetery despite his very recent conversion to Catholicism.

¹²²¹ "In the weeks preceding his death ..." Diary extract from Martin Boyd Diaries, 21-23 May, 1972.

Brenda Niall, *Martin Boyd: A Life*.

¹²²² "The Times obituary began" *The Times*, 10 June, 1972.

Since the late 1960s Yvonne had been soliciting world-wide, asking friends from Perth to Dorset, to make inquiries about rural land and city houses. From 1969 to 1979 the shopping trolley overflowed, to such an extent that Yvonne, writing to solicitor George Legge, reported "we have some other land in Australia but I cannot find the papers with all the details." However, there were papers for thirteen acres in Springbrook, Queensland; a Georgian terrace house for Jamie in Hampstead; a Queen Anne terrace house in Highgate for Polly; a villa in Tuscany; the purchase of Riversdale; the redeemed mortgage on Hampstead Lane Highgate, then later the exchange of that property with Jamie for Flask Walk, and the transfer of the Beaumaris cottage into Lucy's name. Yvonne would later comment: "What do you do if you have money ... give it to your children and spoil them, of course". But the Boyds had more to give away. The next purchase would be given to those outside of the family. To cap the ten-year shopping spree, in 1979 there was the purchase of Bundanon.

One other property was laid on the monopoly board, but one without a freehold. The owner of the Hamet Gallery, Mary Rose 'Dobbie' Adeane, had presented them with a perfect retreat from London. It was a ramshackle cottage in the hamlet of Ramsholt, near the town of Woodbridge, part of the Adeane estate in the county of Suffolk. More importantly, it was entirely in the vicinity of Arthur's heart – just a few miles from Flatford Mill, scene of Constable's *The Haywain* painted in 1841. Until Arthur put his hand up, willing to spend many thousands of pounds to connect water, light, plumbing, re-thatch the roof and do all necessary to save the badly neglected cottage, the future of Keeper's Cottage was threatened. The landlord, Dobbie's father, Sir Robert Adeane, was so concerned that itinerants might take shelter there, he was considering calling in the bulldozer to knock the building down. This fate had already befallen a small self-sufficient village belonging to the estate that had once stood on the rise of the hill close to the cottage. It had been complete with a school..

Dobbie found Arthur a "shy, gentle, funny man ... very appealing, full of charm ... he would tie himself up in knots, and tie *you* up in knots, tripping over his words ... he could be quite hard to understand ... quite self-conscious, probably defensive ..." Then, with the shrewd eye of a West End dealer, she bored through to the core: "he was quite a determined chap".¹²²³ When Arthur first stood on the hillside looking down over the thatched roof of the cottage and saw the scene before him, the green land flattening out from the Saxon church with its Norman tower on the high ground, then rolling towards the wide blue grey estuary, he was perfectly determined. A solicitor was engaged and an agreement made on 6 January, 1971. In exchange for restoring the cottage, the Boyds would lease it for a peppercorn rent (one hundred pounds per annum) for the next twenty years.

Constable hadn't set up his easel in Ramsholt. It wasn't, to Arthur's eyes "picture-book English countryside" but it was a landscape that "moved him"; a "lonely" place with "a

¹²²³ "Then with the shrewd eye ..." Interview Dobbie Adeane.

kind of virginity".¹²²⁴ The isolation and the fog and the wind could combine to create a forlorn atmosphere without the sun. But the river's tidal pulse delivered wide mud flats and seabirds, and perhaps also the dream of Hastings and the vision Arthur had nurtured at the age of twenty-one; to be at a remove, in his studio, alone with his girl. Arthur's favoured position for the telephone in Highgate had been inside the refrigerator and for many years the Boyds avoided having the telephone connected in Suffolk, preferring a long trudge across the marsh for half a mile to the nearest pub to make calls. The rounded flint and brick watchtower, to which the medieval church had become an appendage, may once have warned Saxons against Viking invaders. Now it could be seen to rise in defence of the Boyds' quiet sanctuary.

Paretaio became another hopeful place of peace and escape and satisfied years of searching for a summer retreat in Italy. By the end of 1972, negotiations had been concluded for this old Tuscan farmhouse. With the exception of one neighbour, it stood alone and protected by 20 acres, in the Commune di Colleoli, equidistant to Lucca and Florence, in the department of Pisa. Immediately the Boyds sprinkled the environs with 'No Hunting' signs. In the interests of preserving the status quo and on the condition that not one olive tree be cut down, Arthur agreed to lease out the surrounding land to be farmed, "in the same manner it is presently farmed". In response, the 'Tuscan Development Company' inserted a clause in the agreement: "an area immediately round the house will be garden, and maintained by the owner." Arthur's wiry take on all things mercantile is seen in his scribbles on the copy of the agreement, "how far is immediately?" As for the harvest from the olive trees, he pondered, "perhaps enough olive oil for a salad?"¹²²⁵

By 1973 builders were employed in three countries on four restoration projects. Lucy and Hatton had moved back to Melbourne from London, and were established at Surf Avenue. The kitchen had been improved and painters sent in. Frank McDonald had organised drawings for the rebuilding of Riversdale. Arthur's blanket instructions were that "the indigenous architecture of the early period" govern the design. In Paretaio he separated rooms with arches, restored tiles, added bathrooms and paced out the dimensions of a Tuscan summer essential, a swimming pool. He designed a simple rectangle and, ever vigilant, placed the grandchildren's end nearest to the house. On the flat-fronted façade Arthur created what some visitors might have found symbolic, an ambivalent entrance: a front door to the right of the house and a front door to the left. Or perhaps it was simply a link back to home and the two wooden doors that had marked the simple façade of Open Country.

During their first summer of occupancy, Arthur, tanned and fit and bare to the waist, pulled all the straw out of the barn to judge whether he preferred to keep the building, or retrieve the vista that was barred by its position. Once the straw freed the views through

¹²²⁴ "It wasn't to Arthur's eyes ..." 'The Grand Old Man of art' Linda Van Nunen, *The Australian Magazine*, August 24-25, 1991.

¹²²⁵ "Arthur's wiry take ..." As it turned out as many as eight or nine-litre bottles were delivered by the locals who were in charge of harvesting. Interview Yvonne Boyd.

the small windows of the barn Arthur could see the sun-bleached fields and the twisted and gnarled trunks of the centuries old olive trees. The landscape won. The barn came down.

Arthur paid attention to all kinds of detailing. The colour of the doors in Suffolk, the length and width of bathtubs, the height of benches and skirting boards at Riversdale, down to the instruction, "all cisterns to be of the most silent possible type." By March 1974, work had not even begun on the Tuscan pool. While floods delayed work on Riversdale, third parties and language problems caused misunderstandings at Paretaio, and bad management created confusion in Suffolk. Distance frustrated communications. Budgets hit the roof and schedules went out the windows. As urgent requests for building costs mounted in sterling, lire and dollars, and mortgage payments needed to be met, monies poured into Bill Lasica's office from various bank accounts and Arthur's main galleries. On the back of a bill received at the end of 1974 outlining costs not initially anticipated at Riversdale, including the building of a new road, pumps and water systems and engineer's fees, Arthur's doodles reveal how he planned to cope: "to sell in one year 4 pictures (major) at \$10,500 each ..." However many paintings it took, within fifteen months mortgages totalling eighty thousand dollars on Beaumaris and Riversdale were free and clear.

While Arthur had many profitable gallery connections within Australia, a letter arrived in November of 1971, during his fellowship in Canberra, from an art dealer of such reputation that to be courted by him was an accolade. Harry Fischer had grown up in imperial Vienna within a well-connected Jewish family that had enjoyed the environment of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy before its downfall. In the mid-1950s Fischer was the first to champion the German expressionists. By the sixties he was exhibiting Francis Bacon, Graham Sutherland, Barbara Hepworth, Sidney Nolan, and his two favourite artists and good friends, Kokoschka and Henry Moore.

Fischer had been attracted to Arthur in the early 1960s but had been hampered from acting on this interest by Cynthia Nolan, who had no wish for Sidney to share the same platform as Arthur. In the early 1970s the dubious business practices of Fischer's partner at Marlborough led to his breaking away and the opening of Fischer Fine Art, in London's St James. Walter Neurath before his death had long sung Arthur's praises to Fischer. More recently Arthur's great admirer, Bernhard Baer, a mutual friend of both men, had been the catalyst for Fischer's letter, in which Fischer proposed an "Arthur Boyd Exhibition in about fourteen months".

In preparation for Fischer's visit, the shag pile was meticulously brushed back: John Hull described the scene as "tickety-boo". As usual the double doors were opened between the studio and the front room. There were two chairs placed between the small drinks table, one for Fischer and one for his wife. All the paintings (mainly from the Nebuchadnezzar series) were stacked dramatically, their faces to the wall. It was John Hull's job to pick up each painting, twirl it around, and place it directly in front of Fischer. If Fischer held up his hand, the painting stayed. If not, the moment it touched the ground Hull would snatch it back up and race onto the next canvas. Up, down, away;

it was Arthur's choreography. "Boom, boom, boom - it was as fast as that", recalled Hull. "Arthur reckoned Harry had been looking at pictures all his life, he didn't need to dwell on them... that he didn't need more than four seconds." Arthur was right, Fischer took him on.

Fischer was an enthusiast.. He had written to Arthur well before his visit, stressing his plan of commitment:

Dr. Baer might have explained to you that if I really feel intellectually and visually drawn to a painter like you I go all out for it. This only happened once before to me in England to a similar extent, when I first saw a small Francis Bacon exhibition ...¹²²⁶

He proposed a five-year contract, offering two London exhibitions, one in Paris, a travelling exhibition through art institutions and museums in Germany and Holland, and shows in New York, the West Coast, Japan and Australia. Warm and straightforward, Fischer was a hands-on art dealer - literally, for Harry Fischer was slightly deaf. Holding Arthur's shoulders fast, he would stare through his thick black pebble glasses, focusing sharply, not on Arthur's eyes but his mouth. As it turned out, this dealer with a hearing problem and the artist who seldom finished a sentence were destined to understand each other perfectly.

Arthur was back in the hub of things, a long way from 'barren Garran'. After Fischer signed him on it was reported that "doyens of the art world were saying Boyd was on the threshold of true international fame".¹²²⁷ In England there were his children and first grandchild Alexander; his home in the city, his retreat in Suffolk and the lure of Italy and Fischer at his doorstep. Yet he longed for Australia. It wasn't that he didn't embrace England. He relished the accessibility of theatre and music and the great paintings of the past and present. He once said that returning to England was "like coming back to a nursery where the seeds of thoughts and ideas lie all around".¹²²⁸ And Arthur "loved" the English landscape; it relaxed him: it was settled, domesticated and imbued with stability. Australia, in comparison, produced a foreboding for it was "new ... untouched ... ready to be spoilt." In England, he believed, "all the damage had been done." What was left, was left: attended and protected. He felt "the fight was over" and it gave him a feeling of "great peace". That quality eluded him in his homeland and perhaps that was the sand in the oyster shell that kept pulling his brush back to the wild, pristine landscape on the New South Wales south coast.

Arthur didn't know New South Wales and "wanted some experience of a tough landscape". He described it as "challenging ... fierce country ... bigger ... rugged ...

¹²²⁶ "This only happened once before to me ..." Extract of letter from Harry Fischer to Arthur Boyd, 14 July, 1972. 'Bundanon' archives.

¹²²⁷ "After Fischer signed him ..." Rosemary Munday, *The National Times*, October 1972.

¹²²⁸ "He once said that returning to England ..." *Now!*, 'Recapturing the Outback in the Heart of Suffolk', 28 November, 1980.

grander" than the countryside in which he had grown up.¹²²⁹ In fact, he felt it was completely disconnected from Melbourne: Victoria he saw as "cloistered," a "smaller state" where everything was on a "smaller scale". The Shoalhaven was a vast rousing symphony of a landscape. Arthur believed Wagner could have composed there "easily" but never composed at Port Phillip". Those bay beaches where Arthur painted as a boy he now likened to the beaches he had seen in Southern France and Northern Italy: places where the light was muted, fuzzy, the mist permeating the landscape. On the Shoalhaven the mist rose in a single body, straight up like a curtain, and revealed to Arthur's endless fascination a landscape for which he could find no comparison.

The beautiful Shoalhaven, on a clear day, underlined the possibility of darkness. The sharp outlines the sun produced were to Arthur's eyes "so hard, so hard" creating "deep great black cavities of shadows". He would paint these black shadows, figures falling into the shadows, and caves: dark and mysterious images; Freudian wombs and tombs. Perhaps these nebulous shapes excited his sense of fear and recalled the tunnels he had dug under the orchard in Open Country and under his grandparents' house in Sandringham; and that long cave he had run towards, hollering at the darkness as he ran, down into the dangerous, drowning tunnels known to every Murrumbidgee child as 'the darkies'.

Sixty-eight oils on canvas were exhibited at the 1973 Fischer exhibition titled 'Arthur Boyd Recent Paintings', exactly one year after Arthur returned to London from his Canberra fellowship. The sequence of the collection as set out in the catalogue could be seen to form a body of work divided into two shadowy parts: Part 1, Dreams (1-33); Part 11, Nightmares (34-68).

Dreams take place in the countryside of Suffolk and the hills of home. Australian landscapes, although hot and melting, are dominated by tracts of redemptive waters: creeks, rivers, ponds, dams, the sea. The landscape of Suffolk drips volumes of green. Misted woods accommodate lovers, an ethereal artist at his easel, a patient seated dog. Peaceful though the landscapes are, at times fitful memory threatens to disturb the quiet: a voyeur, and a crouched and prone artist figure, rustle through the gentle grasses and pines. Against both northern and southern landscapes come the nudes of Yvonne, either seated in the Australian hills and valleys, or against the backdrop of Suffolk woods.

As the dream edges towards nightmare it is heralded by regret. In rain and tears the artist in *Figure with rainbow and rain* is foiled in an attempt to capture his muse by a black dog that clings to his back, weighing him down. Hope withers. The landscape becomes dry, barren, treacherous. The once weightless artist who floated through dreamscapes now falls to earth in *Hill landscape, aeroplane and book*; Icarus and Hinkler and Uncle Martin, bent and twisted upon rocky ground. Darkness descends.

¹²²⁹ "Arthur didn't know New South Wales" Arthur Boyd to Sandra McGrath, *The Artist & the River*, op cit.

In *Crescent moon and muzzled figure*, the title reveals that the warty muzzled toad-like creature is a personage. Indeed, it is an artist, clutching a trio of brushes. Past figures of rejection converge in this creature huddled under a sky studded by the Seven Sisters and hung with a crescent moon: Nebuchadnezzar covered in boils, the dog in the forties roundelay, balancing the moon above his head, the frog observing the lovers in the hammock, and the watching dog. A shroud of dark thoughts, like the smoke that spewed from the South Melbourne chimney stacks, rises from the head of the muzzled figure.

In *Levitating figure on fire, money, nude* the action moves into the realm of the truly terrifying. The figure rises above ground, its progress controlled by a fearsome nude, similar in stature and posture to the siren that appears to play host to the artist's fear of flying and lures Hinkler's bi-plane to its earthy grave. She is a magician in the act of performing a levitating trick on the hapless figure and, under her powerful hypnotising influence smouldering thoughts now combust. The figure's gut bursts open, bubbling in fire, scattering in flames. Piles of gleaming golden excreta, in triangular forms, are common to both these works.

In ancient times the rising of the Dog-star heralded unwholesome and pernicious heat. It was considered an evil time, a period in which malignant influences prevailed - dog-days. In the ancient setting of the Shoalhaven, under a blistering sun, the muzzled dog will not get off the artist's back: they are fused into a desperate oneness. Black dogs had populated Arthur's life: from his earliest memories when Granny Gough's black dog loomed large and bigger than himself; to the gentle black roly-poly spaniel, Peter, inhabiting the Brown Room days; to the guard dog of the vegetable patch in the Bendigo army barracks. In a letter home Arthur had likened his father to a dog: patiently and faithfully waiting for his wife by Murrumbidgee railway station. He had also described himself as a dog let off the chain, free; and a dog fastened on a chain, trapped. And when, at the age of nineteen, his painting were lambasted by Yosl Berger, he offered the simile for himself as a dog thriving on abuse who, when kicked, loved his tormentor even more. Yvonne considered the symbol of the dog a "lovely cipherable image" and read it both as Arthur, and as "a watcher, a weakness".¹²³⁰

Through the ages the dog has been a symbol. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare uses animal eroticism throughout the play. Helena begs Demetrius: "I am your spaniel ... the more you beat me, I will fawn on you... use me but as your spaniel; spurn me, strike me ... what worser place can I beg in your love ... than to be used as you use your dog?" In Francois Boucher's *Madame de Pompadour*, the dog was a symbol of Pompadour's fidelity: as the dog is faithful to the mistress, so the mistress is faithful to the king. In Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *The Broken Mirror*, executed before 1763, the yapping dog is used as a familiar symbol of carnal desire. Arthur admitted "the dog" was "a favourite image".¹²³¹

¹²³⁰ "Yvonne considered the symbol of the dog ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd. "I think it is a real black dog, probably in childhood. Interviewer: ... a sign of guilt, or something like that? YB Or a watcher, a weakness. Interviewer: "You don't think he could have been the black dog sometimes? YB Yes.

¹²³¹ "Arthur admitted 'the dog' was 'a favourite image'. Sandra McGrath, *The Artist & the River*, op cit..

Arthur's black dog of the 1970s is not the monstrous guard dog in South Melbourne works. It is not the fawning, faithful at the feet 'let sleeping dogs lie' creature seen in the biblical works of the forties; nor is it the leaping companion dog in the landscape of the fifties; or the patient, waiting, watching sentinel of the sixties. The dog is a doppelganger perhaps, given the descriptive of 'dog' so often attached to Arthur by his friends ("dressed like a dog,"¹²³² "shook his head like a dog"¹²³³), an epithet perhaps nudged into being by Dylan Thomas's poem, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*. Perhaps this 1970s dog is a creature closer to James Joyce's "poor dogsbody", the forlorn title attached to Stephen throughout *Ulysses*; the hang-dog, a black symbol of depression, the artist dogged by his own dark thoughts. Arthur would describe the dog as a bestial or sexual element¹²³⁴ but in so many paintings from this period, to become known as the 'Caged Artist' series the dog whispers in the artist's ear of images past, visions he must doggedly continue to un-see. Arthur described this seventies dog as "a howling behind", and the muzzle attached as a means of "shutting out ... to shut him up ... shut out the last squawk".¹²³⁵

This series was, Arthur said, about shadows. Shadows that weave a tangled, entrapping web: "the shadows of wire".¹²³⁶ Aborigines penned like cattle in the carriages on The Ghan, the barbed wire spiralling around the shanty town in the Simpson Desert, Yosl Bergner's painting of aborigines in chains¹²³⁷, the infamous incident of an aborigine in the heat of the desert chained to a tree; the newspaper photograph of aborigines bound by bands of steel about their necks and linked together by chains; Noel Counihan self-caged in a protest designed to expose settlers' shame. The bars on the windows of Heildeburg hospital. The wire-mesh caging in laboratory animals. Memories of life denied and defiled come together as crimes against the natural order and are exposed under interrogating light.

In *Chained figure and bent tree* Arthur admitted, "I put myself in a cage like Noel Counihan".¹²³⁸ In this painting Arthur reveals himself to be the blue man, placed in the position of the black man. Up to this point Arthur admitted that in many of his expressionistic works he had been present but disguised.¹²³⁹ Now he steps out from

¹²³² "...dressed like a dog ..." Robert Langley interview, Sandringham, November 2000. "Arthur would dress like a dog ... come to the Beaumarius pub in long-johns, bottom hanging out of his woking man's trousers".

¹²³³ "...shook his head like a dog ..." Neil Douglas interview.

¹²³⁴ "Arthur would describe the dog as a bestial or sexual element ..." When discussing *Artist in Boat Painting Nude with Dog*, 1975, painted after 'The Caged Artist' series, Arthur said: "I think the dog in some way represents in my pictures the bestial or sexual element in humans."

¹²³⁵ "Arthur described this seventies dog as 'a howling behind' ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹²³⁶ "Shadows that weave ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹²³⁷ "Yosl Bergner's painting of aborigines in chains ..." ABC archives, Sydney. "Yosl Bergner ... he painted the first really social realist pictures of aborigines being chained to trees ... very strong pictures indeed."

¹²³⁸ "In *Chained figure and bent tree* ..." McKenzie, Fisher interview

¹²³⁹ "Up to this point Arthur admitted ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes. While discussing paintings done when Arthur was in Canberra when he had "came back [to Australia] and going outside again ... in the

behind the screen of his canvas. It had begun in the hills of Canberra when he put his undisguised self in the picture.

The protagonist in the 'Caged Artist' series was, Arthur admitted, "the painter, the artist" who has "gone full circle," who can no longer "do it any more". Arthur connects this crouching artist back to "the aboriginal in the cave" and reveals that the muzzled dog's head "takes the place of the bride's head".¹²⁴⁰ In *Figure in a cave with a smoking book*, the artist turns his knowledge destructively upon himself. As Arthur explained, the book tells the artist how to make bombs and he drops the bombs on himself.

When Arthur was questioned on his visual language, his deep and dark reservoir of blue, he offered: "It's hard to take occasionally, especially for me, and it could be for quite a lot of other people ..."¹²⁴¹ He described the artist in the 'Caged Artist' series as a conjurer who was "becoming a bit of a devil ...he is probably evil ..."¹²⁴² He spoke of the dog riding on the artist's back, as carrying "a sin ... pride ...things coming home to roost". Then he floated an unfinished sentence "...rather than being something that is supposed to release you..."¹²⁴³

In *Figure and Laughing Head*, a pitiful figure clutches empty garments to her naked body, while Arthur, contorted and ugly, laughs hideously at their mirror images. *Painter, dog and model – mirrored* depicts father and son, and once again Arthur describes his belief in the power of paint: "This one with the paint rag was looking in a mirror ... at myself ... with my father behind me ... in a way trying to push him out of the way ..."¹²⁴⁴ Once again, the gentle pacifist becomes physically aggressive in his painting, following the pattern that began in the 1940s when he admitted to "punching" a figure out of the image, to the 1960s when he "cut off" arms as "punishment" and on into the 1970s when a "push" provides a solution.

The cast from South Melbourne, Murrumbidgee, Beaumaris and European mythology have departed, with one exception. As the artist strains forward towards his canvas, the vision of the rutting ram, once juxtaposed with copulating lovers, haunts the landscape. Is his brush (one of a trio of brushes) scrabbling to un-see it?

Woman injecting a rabbit may have been prompted by the unshakable sight of the injection of a bullet into a rabbit's head, but the agony Arthur admitted to moving him was the slower bullet of myxomatosis on the rabbits in the fields of Ramsholt; "I did this when I didn't like the look of the rabbits ..." As Yvonne recalled, in Suffolk in the early 1970s "we saw a lot of poor, half blind, half dead rabbits everywhere".

bush and then to put myself in it as well." GG: "Although you identify with some of the subjects in other pictures ... even cripple pictures ... here is the first time you appear as the artist." AB: "Mmmm ... well, it's very obvious ... yeah."

¹²⁴⁰ "Arthur connects this crouching artist back ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹²⁴¹ "When Arthur was questioned on his visual language ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC archives, Sydney.

¹²⁴³ "He spoke of the dog riding on the artist's back ..." *ibid*

¹²⁴⁴ "Painter, dog and model – mirrored ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

In the high white light of Maudsley Hospital laboratories Arthur saw scientific minds cast shadows. Cats lay, splayed open, attached to electrodes with their hearts still beating, while researchers pursued a theory they called 'the Pleasure Principle.'¹²⁴⁵ In *Woman injecting a rabbit* and *Interior with black rabbit* there is a nude, a shadowing artist, a crucified artist, piles of gold, piles of excreta -- and no pleasure. Like the two-legged dog on Brighton beach, like a laboratory animal the crippled, tormented artist is pushed and pulled: he has no autonomy.

A connection to the forties and 'Heide' and other manipulated beings can be made here. Sidney Nolan's *Constable Fitzpatrick and Kate Kelly*, was painted in 1946, while he, like Kelly, was an outlaw on the run, a deserter from the army, and living under the controlling influence of the Reeds.¹²⁴⁶ Arthur's works *Woman injecting a rabbit*, *Interior with black rabbit* and *Paintings in the studio: Figure supporting back legs* all depict the same compositional device as Nolan's *Constable Fitzpatrick and Kate Kelly*, that of a window shutting out the natural world, the blue sky as caged as Kelly's eyes.

By 1973 perhaps Arthur felt he was painting his expressionistic works in retrospect rather than in the moment. Perhaps now, instead of approaching the canvas in a needy heat he felt the painter had become self-conscious, employing his symbols like an experienced magician, performing at the behest of an audience with a cold expertise, passionlessly pulling the rabbit out of the hat.

Some Suffolk landscapes were *en plein air* but for the most part, during the long grey sunless days of the British winter, while preparing for the first Fischer exhibition, Arthur was caged within his studio in Hampstead Lane. Working indoors on landscapes was never his first choice. The formulaic was on his mind:

I'd much prefer to have that canvas stuck up outside and done the whole thing from there it would have been a lot harder because I would have been working fresh and not with a formula ... being inside you have to a certain extent work to a formula ... outside you don't necessarily work to a formula if you're trying to get the landscape right.¹²⁴⁷

Arthur had always felt the need to establish financial security for his family, but during this time, with the walls of his many houses rising up around him, the pressure was intense. After the show, Harry Fischer wrote thanking Arthur for "the opportunity of

¹²⁴⁵ "He had seen shadows cast ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes "A chap, a research scientist took me to a laboratory in London ... fixed electrodes into a rabbits brain ... zones of the brain he calls them ... every time the rabbit was stimulated on these electrodes it pushes it's foot against the box ... as it gets more and more shocks ... (thumps) and he wrote it down ...".

Yvonne Boyd interview "I ignorantly enquired: "when you sew it up again will it recover?" The answer, immediate, was firm: "Oh it won't recover.""

¹²⁴⁶ "Sidney Nolan's *Constable Fitzpatrick and Kate Kelly* ... "Sid Nolan said in 1986: "The Kelly paintings are secretly about myself. From 1945 to 1947 there were emotional and complicated events in my life. It's an inner history of my own emotions." Reported *Good Weekend*, 1 March, 1997.

¹²⁴⁷ The formulaic was on his mind ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC archives, Sydney.

showing your marvellous paintings". Arthur had taken the same risk as he had in 1960 at Zwemmer and placed exceptionally high prices on his works. In 1973, this didn't prove to be quite so successful: the exhibition was not a sell-out, but forty thousand pounds had been made on seventeen sales. During the 1977 Fischer exhibition, Michael Chase, the man behind Arthur's first London exhibition, wrote in shocked surprise at the prices, saying he would "have to sell most of his orchard" to acquire even a small painting. He reported sighting only one star, but surmised that the one sale alone would produce a "Little Haddon Hall or equivalent for the Boyds!" He left Arthur with "jibes apart you've taken a slight rise in price since Zwemmer days ... Does the whole economics of art worry you sick?"¹²⁴⁸

As had happened in the past, the unsold paintings were shipped to various Australian galleries, and in most instances find a buyer. As money poured into the Boyd coffers, excreta, in the shape of gold coins, poured onto the canvases.¹²⁴⁹ Arthur offered an insight into the symbolism of tainted money: "if you're not about expunging, if you are painting it for money ... you are in exactly the same position more or less as the woman injecting the rabbit ..."¹²⁵⁰ He saw the manipulated artist creating bloodless work: "his shadow is shining onto the canvas...it's meant to be a painting ... but you want a bit more substance than just a shadow".¹²⁵¹ A drawing by Kokoschka, in a book given to Arthur in 1962, may have prompted associations.¹²⁵²

When Arthur arrived in Australia in the last months of 1974 he stayed at Sandra McGrath's neighbouring property Earie Park while work was completed on Riversdale. He had returned to Australia feeling it worthwhile stepping back into the ring. Fourteen years earlier, he had left admitting he was tired of the tired arguments, fed up fighting the losing fight. He would, he had promised Alan McCulloch after the Antipodean Manifesto fracas, stay out of the political arena.¹²⁵³ Now he was returning because he wanted to "see how ... things had changed", how they were, "shaping up". Gough Whitlam, Arthur believed, had given Australia a "change of heart": the country had become "more compassionate and humane."¹²⁵⁴ Gough Whitlam spoke not to big business but to the majority of the voters, from left-wing intellectuals to the working

¹²⁴⁸ "During the 1977 Fischer exhibition, Michael Chase ..." Letter Michael Chase to Arthur Boyd, 22 March, 1977.

¹²⁴⁹ "As money poured into the Boyd coffers ..." The symbol of money as excreta was also employed by St. Francis.

¹²⁵⁰ "Arthur offered an insight into the symbolism of tainted money ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

¹²⁵¹ "He saw the manipulated artist creating bloodless work ..." McKenzie/Fisher interview, 6 July, 1993.

¹²⁵² "A drawing by Kokoschka ..." The book was a gift from Tom Rosenthal, inscribed "To Arthur & Yvonne with warm regards Tom" Thames & Hudson, 1962, Limited edition no. 400 'Kokoschka Drawings' edited by Ernest Rathenau. Study for Karl Kraus, 'The Chinese Wall', Lithograph Charcoal, 38.7x 31.4 cm, Hamburger, Kunsthalle, Hamburg, 1913. This work shows a decomposing figure straining across a gravestone; it depicts the same forward thrust as the caged artist. Here, however, the idea of substance verses non-substance is reversed: within the shadow of the stretching form, in the shade of his skull, a fully-formed face appears.

¹²⁵³ "He would, he had promised Alan McCulloch ..." Extract of letter from Arthur Boyd to Alan McCulloch November 1959. 'Bundanon' archive

¹²⁵⁴ "Gough Whitlam, Arthur believed, had given Australia a change of heart". Amanda Meade, *The Australian*, 'Gough a light in dark years: Boyd'. 23-24, September, 1995.

class 'Aussie battler.' When he took office in 1972 he immediately kept his promise and withdrew all remaining troops from Vietnam. He then pursued radical reforms such as a universal health care scheme, recognition of Aboriginal land rights, policies to improve the social and economic status of women, and he abolished tertiary education fees.

While British journalists explored why Arthur would want to leave mother country for mother earth, Arthur told them that the reports of his selling up in London were an "exaggeration". He was hedging his bets. Work and family would always be the influence on where Arthur lived. When he talked about rediscovering "the smell of gum leaves and of the sea" that was nostalgia. When he got down to the Australian light and the sharpness and intensity of the shadows, he was getting down to bedrock: work. "I sometimes see the pictures I did before and they have a sharpness which I would rather like to see again". He then described Australia as his life's blood: "Over here I have been doing mainly studio pictures and I think it is probably time that I had a transfusion of the real thing".¹²⁵⁵

The waters mingling in Arthur's memory – the rainstorm canal running under the outer circle railway at the bottom of Wahroonga Crescent, the estuaries of Rosebud, the bay beaches of the Mornington Peninsula, the swamp at Hastings, the pond at Berwick, the sea at Cape Schanck, the dam at the Cairns' apple orchard, and the harbour at Port Phillip that had pushed him away now all delivered him home to the long and winding, salt and fresh water of the Shoalhaven River.

He had felt the push and pull of the river on his first visit in 1971, while still resident in Canberra. It was a day of record heat, registering 110 degrees. Yet, under the boiling blue sky, while every sensible lizard and crab lay still and sheltered and not a fish jumped, Arthur toiled on the banks of the river, hatless, without the shade of an umbrella, totally exposed as he had to be so as not to "distort the light".¹²⁵⁶ He felt like Jonah being punished by God in the hot wind.¹²⁵⁷ As the earth blistered and cracked, sweat dripped into Arthur's eyes and paint oozed off the palette and ran in rainbow rivulets into the burning sand. That scorching day Arthur and the Shoalhaven shouldered each other and neither found the other wanting. He pressed hard for that first image, titled *Riverbank*, racing to capture it while he still had paint and a mind capable of directing its course. He described the heat as "terrifying".

He had no idea that this first searing encounter would lead to almost a quarter of a century of further labour when, under every angle of the sun's span, he would continue the struggle to "get it down, to get it right".¹²⁵⁸ For the continuum of his life the Shoalhaven would be an on-again, off-again affair with Arthur continuously circling between London, Suffolk and Italy, and then back to Australia. Distance served to

¹²⁵⁵ "He then described Australia as his life's blood ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC archives, Sydney

¹²⁵⁶ "Yet, under the boiling blue sky ..." Arthur Boyd to Sandra McGrath, *The Artist and the River*.

¹²⁵⁷ "He felt like Jonah ..." *ibid*

¹²⁵⁸ "...to get it down, to get it right". John Read, while describing Arthur Boyd in the documentary *A Man of Two Worlds*. In one interview (ABC archives, Sydney) Arthur would admit: "I like the business of painting ... and I like the problem of getting it right ...you never get it right, of course".

frustrate and fascinate. He looked at oak, spruce and birch growing by his cottage on the Deben Estuary and painted the rocks and river of Bundanon. He looked at the olive orchards of Paretai and painted the gums trees surrounding Riversdale.

He had been seduced.. He found the “moods” of the Shoalhaven “very rich”. The “upright stuff” appealed, the “extraordinary business of the trees growing so straight” and “the curves” and “the marvellous colour” and “the terrific quality of light”.¹²⁵⁹ He wanted to “know it”. On his return, after a time, he would suffer from a surfeit of Shoalhaven. Like a grand passion, it weighed him down, pressed in upon him; “the black shadows” became “claustrophobic after a while”¹²⁶⁰ and he would climb aboard another ship and return to Europe, where he would begin painting the Shoalhaven once again, as if he were sending love letters home.¹²⁶¹ By 1985 the romance still held him. He couldn’t satiate himself; in the mid-1980s he felt he hadn’t “painted it out yet”. The Shoalhaven was always on his mind, he “couldn’t shake off the memory of the place”.¹²⁶²

Two years before his death he would describe the Shoalhaven as having
 a quality...a soul if you like, it was very unusual ... both of us, my wife and I,
 we actually fell in love with it...if you want to keep anything at all in your
 spiritual glove box, or whatever it is where you keep your memory and thoughts
 ... I think this is probably a pretty good spot.¹²⁶³

Here was nature’s shining city. Rocky escarpments and towering eucalyptus scraping a glassy sky and where a freeway might slice through valleys, the river. Above the shoreline, on land once covered by ocean, an aeons-old giant curved rock created an amphitheatre that held as much beauty and history imbedded in its fern and wild orchid strewn face as any art or natural history museum could wish for. Arthur cherished it all, even the aspects of the landscape that frightened him.

He had found the terrain treacherous as he negotiated pathways through it, “skidding ...sliding ... bumping over rocks”. The river held him in thrall. There were days when the only movement on its still surface came from rocketing trout re-entering the water. But the scattering of dried debris hanging in the topmost branches of the river trees bore evidence of the river’s power. In full flood it swept up victims: on one occasion an entire herd of cattle had been carried in its surging path.¹²⁶⁴ More than once it had pushed as far afield as the stone footings of Bundanon, around 700 metres away from the river bank.

¹²⁵⁹ “The ‘upright stuff’ appealed ...” Arthur Boyd, ABC archives, Sydney.

¹²⁶⁰ “Like a grand passion ...” Arthur Boyd, ABC archives, Sydney.

¹²⁶¹ “...as if he were sending love letters home”. By extricating himself, Arthur could paint “without distraction ... when you are away from a subject your memory is free in a way it cannot be when you are buried in it”. It was “stronger ... bigger thing than anything in Europe you might come across” it was, “a very big story. ABC archives, Sydney.

¹²⁶² “The Shoalhaven was always on his mind ...” Christopher Leonard, *Vogue Living*, August 1985.

¹²⁶³ “Two years before his death ...” Arthur Boyd, ABC radio interview, Marius Benson, 1997.

¹²⁶⁴ “In full flood it swept up the victims ...” Frank McDonald recalled a time when twenty or more cattle from a farm ten miles down river were washed up, alive.

Arthur painted his “scared feelings”, explaining it was a way of “trying to get rid of the bad things ... making use of them”.¹²⁶⁵ He painted the land after a bushfire and in that “emptiness” he found “a sense of peace”.¹²⁶⁶ He painted the river at its highest tide mark when he felt “a great calm rested over the land ...” In *Flood Receding in Winter Evening* he worked to capture “the stillness of the air and the water”.

In March 1977, Brett Whiteley and Arthur Boyd, almost bumped into each other on a busy London street. Whiteley had popped into Fischer Fine Art and caught sight of Arthur’s second exhibition, just before it came down off the walls. Arthur had left only minutes before Whiteley’s arrival. The two artists had kept contact since their early days in London: back in the sixties Whiteley had made a polite bow when, stopping Arthur in his tracks, he bent down to tie the lace of his shoe. When Arthur and Yvonne were staying at Earie Park and later as residents of Riversdale, they had been invited to Sandra McGrath soirées. Among other guests came the regulars, John Olsen and Brett Whiteley.

Peter Porter, having just begun what would be a long series of collaborative works with Arthur, met Whiteley in August 1975, while staying with the Boyds. It was a dark time for Porter, who was trying to reassemble his life after his wife’s suicide. Porter found Whiteley “intolerable” -- the painter had managed to confound the grieving man with the words: “Your wife is dead. Tell me about it. What’s it like to have a dead wife?” Porter described Whiteley, as others had described Perceval: “he was so rude about everything, everyone ...except Arthur”.¹²⁶⁷ Porter watched Arthur and Whiteley draw each other: “two artists, whatever peculiarities they had, immediately drew each others’ likeness, both beautiful freehand drawings ...”. Arthur taught Whiteley techniques involving copperplate and sent him home with a gift of more copper plates than he could comfortably carry.¹²⁶⁸ David Boyd believed that Arthur had always thought “vigour and enthusiasm infectious” and from all reports Arthur enjoyed Whiteley’s bounding exhibitionism, no doubt taking his compliment, “Seeing you makes me not so worried about the age thing”¹²⁶⁹ in the spirit it was intended. Whiteley’s Perceval-like penchant for dominating proceedings may have created a sense of déjà vu for Arthur and perhaps this gifted and competitive younger man may have provided yet another productive grain of sand in Arthur’s oyster shell.

If Arthur in any way sought to attract Whiteley’s approbation, he achieved it. Shortly after viewing Arthur’s show at Fischer in that spring of 1977, Whiteley wrote:

¹²⁶⁵ “More than once it had pushed as far afield as the stone footings ...” Arthur Boyd, ABC sound archives

¹²⁶⁶ “He painted the river at its highest tide mark ...” Arthur Boyd to Sandra McGrath, *The Artist and the River*

¹²⁶⁷ “Porter described Whiteley as others described Perceval ...” Several interviews were conducted with Peter Porter in London: 28 March, 2001, 3 May, 2002, 30 November, 2004, December 2005. Unless otherwise noted all quotes by Porter are sourced from these interviews.

¹²⁶⁸ “Arthur taught Whiteley techniques ...” Quoted in Sandra McGrath, *Brett Whiteley* 1992, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

¹²⁶⁹ “Whiteley’s bounding exhibitionism ...” Extract of letter from Brett Whiteley to Arthur Boyd, dated Easter, 1977, Bundanon archives.

...it really is remarkable and masterly of you to be able to hold that dry white heat of the bush in your head from 12,000 miles ... I have seen a few of the copper jewels in A [Australia] but the big ones (4' x 5') I like more, more freedom and modernness and just like the peeling bush behind the Nowra house. A few things from Freddie [Fred Williams] in Melbourne but these new ones of yours carry the Roberts line right up which someone had to do, and quite a few have tried [sic] and failed. So really congratulations on the feeling of pale intense beauty you have pulled out of the Australian bush, its such a great subject and its going to go on D.H. Lawrencing artists for a long time to come.

Further in the letter, Whitely comments, "I couldn't believe in my twenties that life would thicken in complexity and responsibility as it has, everyone faces it I suppose, your generous example to me is probably that good work, consistent good work is the only meaning ..."¹²⁷⁰

Arthur cared nothing about being seen to be first past any painting post: it was one of the reasons he gave for not dating his work.¹²⁷¹ He had no wish to claim any new concept or technique. His ambition had only ever been to produce a great painting. As Robert Hughes noted of Arthur's lifetime's output: "Nobody could call it avant-gardist, but so what? What counts is its integrity and depth of feeling".¹²⁷² Arthur freely admitted he had "never been regarded as a progressive artist", although, he added with a twinkle, he would like to think he had "progressed".¹²⁷³

When it came to choosing the medium of copper, Arthur was consciously setting himself a difficult task. While the "big picture" allowed him to "let off steam ... hoping it would work", copper demanded that he deliberately "set about to make it work".¹²⁷⁴ It was a time-consuming occupation, detailed and precise. To facilitate the close work Arthur bought an enormous magnifying glass, new spectacles, and used an armrest while painting. It was as if he was choosing to rein himself in, to balance the scales between the wild expressionistic paintings and works which would demand patience and formal technique.

His grandmother, Emma Minnie, whom Arthur considered "a very meticulous painter", was a source of inspiration. At the age of seventeen, when Arthur was throwing himself into 'modern' painting, he had decided his grandmother's style "didn't suit". But now, in his fifties, he laboured to produce work that, like Emma Minnie's, was "finely done". Just one copper painting, measuring under twelve by nine inches, took him over a week to complete. Later he would call these magnificent works "little colour notes ... finely detailed". Like a classical pianist turning to jazz, he would use these copper paintings as reference for the "... broader ... much more immediate ..." larger works. The copper

¹²⁷⁰ "Shortly after viewing Arthur's show at Fischer ..." *ibid*

¹²⁷¹ "Arthur cared nothing about being seen to be first past any painting post ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹²⁷² "As Robert Hughes noted of Arthur's lifetime's output ..." Robert Hughes, *Time*, 'Seeking the Wild' May 2, 1994.

¹²⁷³ "Arthur freely admitted he had "never been regarded as a progressive artist" ... Arthur Boyd, *ibid*

¹²⁷⁴ "While the 'big picture' allowed him to 'let off steam ..." ABC archives, Sydney.

paintings were a medium and technique in which he could capture another aspect of the landscape: "they're stiff in a way ... but they're meant to be stiff because this is the way the landscape looked ... the delicacy of the fine ferny stuff and the very precise tree trunks". He felt this technique had "a sort of tapestry effect, getting each section to look like the quarter of a square inch previously done".¹²⁷⁵

Each day, resuming work, in his effort to attain a seamless progress he would often scrape work off or rub it out, sometimes six times or more. Vermeer was another source of inspiration. Arthur admired his "brilliance" and "technique" and sought to emulate it: "When he painted a red sleeve, a necklace, it was so beautifully and simply done, so precisely done ... in a way I'm trying to do these rocks and upright trees ... in such a way ..."¹²⁷⁶ Arthur was engaged in portraiture of a powerful and singular beauty. He had, and would, depict the Shoalhaven in broad strokes, on canvases so vast they dominated the dimensions of a regular sized room. But his careful copper studies revealed another face of the Shoalhaven, one as intricate and intimate as a portrait in a locket.

Arthur bloomed in the wilderness. For all of his open-armed charm, John Hull reckoned him to be "a lonely man ... by choice." In circumstances where people upset him he would remove himself. Polly would see how her father reacted: "He didn't pick over the bones. He never criticised anyone".¹²⁷⁷ Sid Nolan was one of the rare members of the old guard that Arthur welcomed into his new found sanctuary. They had gradually grown close during the sixties. As early as the forties Nolan had admired Arthur's ability, declaring in a letter: "I give painters away lock stock & barrel. All except Arthur Boyd". Nolan was drawn to the mystery of both Arthur and his art: "Arthur is probably the biggest enigma in the community, in fact he & his art are an almost indivisible entity".¹²⁷⁸

Around two decades later, in August of 1962, the two men visited the Wedgwood factory at Stoke-on-Trent. Arthur wished to see the place where his father had honed his potting skills and to his delight found an elderly gentleman who remembered Merric's sojourn. The trip, and a luncheon to follow with Sir John Wedgwood, had been arranged by the well-connected Bryan Robertson.¹²⁷⁹ Most in Sidney Nolan's circle would have anticipated his delight at this luncheon appointment. Nolan relished the cocktail party circuit, while Arthur shunned such affairs. A mutual friend believed Arthur was "in awe

¹²⁷⁵ "Later he would call these magnificent works ... he felt the technique. ABC archives, Sydney.

¹²⁷⁶ Each day ... in a way I'm trying to do these rocks and upright trees ... in such a way" .Ibid

¹²⁷⁷ "Polly recalled the same thing ..." Interview Polly Boyd. That Arthur's was disinclined to make contact with Perceval was substantiated by David Chalker who had been the go-between for Perceval when he had petitioned to visit Arthur at Bundanon. David Chalker interview, Canberra, September 23, 2003.

¹²⁷⁸ "Nolan was drawn to the mystery of both Arthur and his art ..." *Sidney Nolan: Landscapes and Legends Catalogue: a retrospective exhibition: 1937-1987*. International Cultural Corporation of Australia Limited, Sydney, 1987. pg 66.

¹²⁷⁹ "In August of 1962 ..." Whitechapel archives. Letter dated August 8, from Whitechapel in 1962, suggesting Nolan and Boyd visit 23 August..

of Sid's ability to sell himself".¹²⁸⁰ On the other hand, perhaps Nolan was in awe of Arthur's lack of interest in the salon way of life. According to Yvonne, one reason Arthur began his friendship with Nolan was Sid's relative sobriety. Nolan was one of the few painters in the group in the sixties who didn't drink excessively.

Arthur never talked up or down but Nolan's verbal skills could be dressed to accommodate any occasion: he was a sophisticate who, when it suited, played the naughty-boy larrikin. He was, according to Tim Burstall, "a risk taker". Once, when they had been swimming at Heide, Burstall had tried to ape Nolan's dive from the willows into the river and only just escaped breaking his back. Arthur was so infected by Nolan's adventurous spirit that he even allowed himself, in the mid-1960s, to be talked into flying to Paris with Nolan to see an exhibition, *Hommage a Pablo Picasso*, at the Grand Palais. It would be the first and the last time Arthur would take to the skies. He was "so petrified" getting there, when he finally saw Picasso the show was lost on him: all he could think about was the dreaded moment he would need to fly back in the French Caravelle that "shot up straight from the ground". Later, he would memorably say that he felt safe because God would never dare kill Sid.

In the kitchen at Bundanon in the 1980s, attempting to interview the family for her forthcoming biography on Martin Boyd, writer Brenda Niall found herself seated between these two distinctive personalities. There was Arthur: "interested in what I was doing, displaying a lack of self importance, a willingness to help, and no fuss about projecting himself". And there was Nolan: "who wanted to talk, about what he was doing, what he was reading ... the conversation focused completely around him, until he let Mary eventually talk".¹²⁸¹ Like Tim Burstall, like Brian O'Shaughnessy, Arthur was always drawn to engaging extroverts with a powerful grasp of language and a storehouse of ideas. Arthur admitted he found Nolan "a stimulation, because he was so enthusiastic ..."¹²⁸² He described him as "an international, intellectual man ... we talked a lot".¹²⁸³ The consensus of those who observed the dynamics of the pair was that the relationship was based on humour and an enormous fondness.

In the 1960s they would meet every Thursday at the National Gallery to look at old masters or any interesting exhibitions being staged, and then lunch at the Café Royal. Arthur never wanted to know Nolan's telephone number. Instead, he waited for his phone to ring. On Wednesday or Thursday morning, a modulated voice would announce to John Hull "Sidney Nolan here ..." and then Arthur would wash his hands free of paint and hop on the Tube to meet his mate.

In 1976 a tragedy drew them closer still. On 22 November, Cynthia Nolan failed to keep her appointed time for tea with her husband in Piccadilly at Fortnum & Mason's, their

¹²⁸⁰ "A mutual friend believed Arthur was 'in awe of Sid's ability to sell himself'..." Interview David Chalker.

¹²⁸¹ "And there was Nolan ..." Interview Brenda Niall.

¹²⁸² "Arthur admitted he found Nolan 'a stimulation' ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC radio interview, AGNSW archives.

¹²⁸³ "He described him as ...". Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes.

favoured place of rendezvous. Unbeknown to Nolan, Cynthia had checked into the Regent Palace Hotel, a few minutes walk away from the tea room. The following morning a chamber maid found her dead from an overdose of sleeping pills. Nolan was distraught, maintaining he had no idea of the depths of his wife's despair. Neither could he find any explanation in Cynthia's cryptic farewell telegram, sent to the Nolans' Putney address shortly before she registered at the hotel: "Off to the Orkneys in small stages".

Within a matter of months after Cynthia's death, Nolan was in Mary's care,¹²⁸⁴ staying with her in her remote house in Herefordshire. After a little over a year, Sidney Nolan fixed his friendship with Arthur Boyd in stone by becoming his brother-in-law and marrying Mary at the Euston Road Registry Office in London.

In the last years of the 1970s and all through the 1980s the two couples travelled through Europe together. Nolan, like Brian O'Shaughnessy before him, would do the organising - planning the details for fascinating tours while remaining always considerate of Arthur who, like the figures in his paintings with legs twined like ivy to tree trunks, had a desperate need to stay tied to the earth. They had, Yvonne confirmed, "great times". They went to Madrid to the Prado to see Velazquez, and to Amsterdam to see van Gogh. Sid, according to Yvonne, was "a fixer". He could always find the hottest tickets in town for theatre and opera, and charm taxi drivers into hanging around. Arthur was grateful for Nolan's organisational skills; Arthur found himself doing things that, left to his own devices, he would "never would have done". Rather than a "fixer", Arthur called Sid his "mentor".¹²⁸⁵

Mary's reaction to these holidays could be read as a barometer to her earlier years of pain: "We drifted, there was no urgency, no anxiety. I had the nicest time of my adult life on those journeys". Arthur, ever attentive of his sister, would have revelled in that knowledge. It was Yvonne's belief that Arthur's close connection to Nolan was pivotal to protecting his sister: "He wanted her to be happy". The fatherly role Arthur had assumed since Mary was a toddler continued and, on a visit to Paris, parent and brother merged. "When Arthur took me to the Louvre he behaved just like my father did when I was twelve and he took me to the Herald Art Exhibition." On that occasion Mary saw a glimpse of the man her mother had married. "My father was telling me about things ... I was thrilled with his enthusiasm"; just as she was when, so many years later, Arthur dragged her, from painting to another. The family had become so familiar with this habit they had come to call it Arthur's "race around the Louvre". Hunting down his favourite works, impatient and excited, he would exclaim: "Don't wait for *that* ... come ... come and see *this!*"

¹²⁸⁴ "Within a matter of months after Cynthia's death ..." An extract of a letter from Jinx Nolan, Cynthia's only child, written to Yvonne Boyd and dated 24 February, 1977. In it Jinx expresses concern over Nolan's inability to cope with practical issues, and the hope that Mary will encourage Nolan into "doing stuff for himself".

¹²⁸⁵ "...Arthur called Sid his 'mentor' ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

In the winter of 1977 the Nolans and Boyds travelled to Moscow, the train slicing a black line through snow-covered Europe. There were many checkpoints. In Poland Arthur was given a rude display of communism at work, to which he responded in kind. A heavily armed guard, bursting in on Arthur's cabin, demanded to see Arthur's passport. Receiving nothing but groans from the direction of the bunk bed, the guard became demanding, ordering the malingerer to his feet. Stumbling upright, covered in nothing but his usual night attire, a long woollen singlet, Arthur blearily faced the firing squad. Finally, in answer to the guard's insistent question, "Have you anything to declare?" Arthur remonstrated by lifting his vest high in the air and replying: "Just this". The guard left on the double and Arthur's credentials sped him across the border.

The highlight of that tour was a visit to the Hermitage and the sight of Rembrandt's *The Prodigal Son*. What did the other tourists make of these two pilgrims, kneeling, clowning but deadly serious, almost prostrate on the cold floor before the master's masterpiece? They could not have begun to imagine what was going on - just as the two friends could not have begun to imagine, as they knelt in the Brown Room back in the early forties at the wedding of Mary and John, that life would bring them back to their knees in such circumstances, in such a place.

The Nolans stayed at Paretaio on many occasions. By the 1980s Nolan was drinking heavily and had developed a heart problem. Nolan's sway over Arthur irritated Yvonne:

Arthur looked after Sid like a baby. We had a table in Tuscany that Arthur and Lucy had made and Sid would sit there and Arthur would run out to the fig tree and pick him figs and put them on a little plate and go around the side door so the draught would not get on Sid ... and then he'd peel them for him.

At this point Nolan didn't have his licence and every morning Arthur would drive to the village and buy the paper for Sid. Eventually Yvonne asked Nolan: "Do you have to have the paper every day?" His reply earned no laurels from Yvonne: "Oh, I'm just used to it". Her summation of the friendship was: "He was fond of Arthur, loyal to him up to a point. He saw himself as number one. First fiddle. He took advantage of Arthur, and Arthur allowed himself to be used".

Yet both men were masters of the art of gentle manipulation. On the last holiday the two painters spent together in Italy, Arthur's persuasiveness ensured they came face to face with Piero della Francesca. They had journeyed to Arezzo to view Piero's fresco *The Legend of the True Cross* in the church of San Francesco, only to discover it shut for restorations. Arthur searched out the priest, explained the situation, and then pressed a great deal of money into his hand. The lock generously greased, the gates to Heaven swung open. Soon both Nolan and Arthur were up on the scaffolds, behind the drop cloths, pressed close to Piero's fifteenth-century brush strokes.¹²⁸⁶

John Hull was a man who worked as an assistant to Nolan and Arthur and knew both men well. Different though Nolan and Boyd appeared, whenever John Hull described

¹²⁸⁶ "Arthur searched out the priest..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

them he saw them as joined at the hip: "Tweedledum and Tweedledee ... a pair of devious old boys ... both pirates ... two young prep school boys". In whatever pairing Hull pictured, he recalled them revelling in each others company: "giggling together ... bouncing jokes around and falling over and laughing".

The turning point in the Boyds' relatively removed existence had been a telephone call Arthur had been waiting on for years.¹²⁸⁷ Frank McDonald had finally put a figure on Bundanon, the property Arthur had hankered after since 1971, when he had first set eyes on it. Eight years later it was for sale and as Arthur described it, McDonald was asking for "quite a respectable amount of money." The sale had been precipitated by Tony McGrath's dire financial situation and ill health. Frank McDonald, financially squeezed at the time, was stranded, unable to carry the mortgage. After helping to create a wonderful garden and gracious house, and loving the area, he desperately wanted to stay. Some years before McDonald had approached the State Government and met with Neville Wran, mooted the idea of 'Bundanon' being owned by the State, of it becoming a regional museum, of preserving the house as an historic residence but the project did not get off the ground. Over the course of many months, in an effort on McDonald's part to preserve some sort of tenure, the sale became protracted: he floated variations on part-ownership, part-share, but Arthur wasn't interested. Both parties fell silent. Behind the scenes the Boyds dispatched letters to mutual friends and colleagues, urging them to forward any information they might hear of plans for the sale.

Finally, with the bailiffs at the door, McGrath and McDonald were forced to return to Plan A: McDonald's initial response had been, "There's always Arthur." When McDonald eventually called with a figure, Arthur, rather than negotiate directly, handed it over to his solicitor, Bill Lasica. Lasica was, Arthur later attested, his "special friend." While McDonald and McGrath were less than appreciative of Lasica's involvement, Arthur was very aware of the strength he gained by placing him on his side of the negotiating table: "He was very astute, and was able to seize the opportunity of getting the house ... getting Bundanon ... for as little as possible."¹²⁸⁸ It wasn't exactly a killing. In 1968 the McGraths had bought the property for \$56,000 and eleven years later they sold it for over \$800,000.¹²⁸⁹ Perhaps the experienced dealers had thought to find Arthur a gentle, bumbling negotiator. However, when it came to the final cut and thrust he had conducted a sale that was reasonable, clean, and total.

Since the destruction of the Grange mural and the bulldozing of Open Country the need for preservation had long been on Arthur's mind. By 1976 the fate of Arthur's mural in the church at Yallourn was under discussion.¹²⁹⁰ The church was sitting on a rich coal seam and it was soon, like the entire town itself, to be sacrificed to the mining industry

¹²⁸⁷ "...a telephone call Arthur had been waiting on for years..." In a letter to the Boyds in 1976 Anne Purves discusses the Boyd's hope of swapping Riversdale for Bundanon.

¹²⁸⁸ "Arthur was very aware of the strength he gained by placing him on his side ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

¹²⁸⁹ "In 1968 the McGraths had bought the property ..." The details of the Bundanon sale were supplied by David Chalker.

¹²⁹⁰ "By 1976, the fate of Arthur's mural ..." *Age*, 27 February, 1976.

and levelled to the ground. The minister, attempting to sell the mural, discovered its size was a deterrent. However, an art dealer had proposed the church could make a handsome profit if they cut the work up and sold it piece by piece. The mural would eventually be safely preserved but for Arthur chain saws and jack hammers defacing the mural at the Grange would have sounded loudly in his memory..

With the purchase of Bundanon Arthur could pursue his wish to save the land and his family history: his mother's paintings, his father's drawings, his grandparents' drawings and paintings, Guy's sculptures, Lenore's sculptures; the pottery of Perceval, Douglas and Boyd from the AMB pottery; paintings by Brack, Perceval, Blackman, French and Nolan; Arthur's tiles and sculpture, and the paintings of Arthur's lifetime, going back as far as 1932; "quite a swag of booty" as Arthur described it. Nature's 'booty' consisted of high country and low country with a biodiversity of flora and fauna: a habitat and landscape that was remarkable. Bird life was rich and among an abundance of species that included lyre birds, bower birds, king parrots, whip-birds, wrens and finches could be found the rare and endangered Glossy Black Cockatoo and the Powerful Owl. There was even evidence of the Tiger Quoll (the NSW equivalent of the Tasmanian Tiger).

Arthur had walked through the bush a "hard six kilometres" from Riversdale to Bundanon and had been stopped in his tracks on a high ridge where the view offered the river running from left to right and a sense of space "so vast". In 1979 all that vastness was lodged under the name of Boyd and within three years the area would be declared a wildlife refuge.¹²⁹¹ Arthur's beloved bush - the bush he had spent much of his life tracking down; cycling to, driving to, building caravans and catching trains and trams to reach - was here now, and his. However, adhering to the belief that the only thing to hang onto were concepts not possessions,¹²⁹² before the ink on the title deeds was dry Yvonne and Arthur were planning how they could give Bundanon away.

By the time the Boyds took possession of Bundanon it was work and not picnics that overflowed onto the riverbanks. When Whiteley became the guest of the Boyds at 'Bundanon', he would answer Frank McDonald's query, "What's it like now?" with "I can tell you there's no fucking Pears soap and white towels anymore".¹²⁹³ Sandra McGrath had been a stylish chatelaine. She had perfumed the air with apples thrown into fires lit on the white river sand. Guests had lolled on Persian rugs while champagne chilled in the river. And talk had ebbed on into nights so studded with stars that the glow

¹²⁹¹ "In 1979 all that vastness was lodged under the name of Boyd ..." The Bundanon Wildlife Refuge was declared by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in September 1982 at the Bundanon Family Day, the first time that Bundanon was open to the public. More than 2000 people attended. Reference Bundanon Trust: the early years, David Chalker, 2005.

¹²⁹² "But, in keeping with his belief ..." Arthur Boyd, in *Testament of a Painter*. "You really don't want to hang onto possessions, you want to hang onto concepts".

¹²⁹³ "When Whiteley became the guest of the Boyds ..." Interview Frank McDonald

from the Chinese paper lanterns, hanging decoratively from the branches of the she-oaks, couldn't hold a candle to them.

The Shoalhaven sky held Arthur's eye at all hours of the day or night. "There is blue in the whole thing ... the blue is taken out of the sky and is reflected on the trunks ... the light is coming from the sky ... by doing the sky first you have this reservoir of blue".¹²⁹⁴ The adolescent boy who had fallen hard for van Gogh now boasted of a colour he had made his own: "...van Gogh never had a bluer sky than the Australian sky at night. There's nothing bluer. It's absolutely brilliant ... you get a marvellous feeling looking up on a clear night at 'Bundanon'. It is incredible, it's really beautiful, wonderful ... the stars are throwing the light on the land". When the summer sun rose high and the sky turned "blackly blue", Arthur could almost imagine he saw "stars in it." He marvelled at that "deep, deep, deep ... blinding ... blue" and its effect on the landscape, how it made the trees appear "much whiter, much lighter ..."

Arthur Boyd and the bower bird were both builders and both attracted to blue. Arthur would hunt for blue pegs, blue plastic tops, buttons, blue anything, and leave his finds outside his studio door for 'Bundanon's resident bower bird to collect and scatter outside the entrance to his nest, as bait to lure the female into his beautifully constructed chamber. Outside Arthur's Suffolk kitchen he had clumped masses of his favourite flower, the blue delphinium. His kitchen plates were blue and over the kitchen chair hung his blue jacket. On his back, on most days, he sported a blue shirt. Finally, his paint suppliers named his particular and most requested recipe for blue, 'Boyd Blue'.

James McGrath (Sandra and Tony's son) was eighteen in 1988, when he worked as Arthur's studio assistant. He had just returned from Paris, where he had been apprenticed to a neo-renaissance painter who produced around two paintings a year. McGrath found it "an irony" that he learnt more about "technique and experiment and the idea of paint" in a wooden hut in the middle of the bush than he had in Paris. His mother, Sandra, an art writer who had recently completed a book on Arthur titled *The Artist and the River*, had called to ask if James could work at Bundanon. "Yeah, sure", said Arthur. When the teenager arrived to find his job description "ambiguous", he straight away set about making himself "indispensable". A routine was soon established. By ten o'clock he would be ready for Arthur's imminent arrival: the studio prepared, the palette cleaned off.

When Arthur entered paint would be mixed, brushes sorted, and there the teenager with the ponytail and earrings and his silver-haired teacher would stay, working until the end of the day. "Arthur taught me about the informality of art...the environment in the studio was never pressured or precious." McGrath would go on to become an established artist, living and working in New York. For McGrath there would not be another painter like Arthur, who was "so involved" in the paint: "He was a master of layering: he worked

¹²⁹⁴ "There is blue in the whole thing ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC archives, Sydney.

wet into wet: he could work back into it".¹²⁹⁵ He credits Arthur with not only teaching him how to use tempera but how to drive a car. James McGrath had grown up at Bundanon. To be taken under Arthur's wing, encouraged to truly enjoy the process of painting, he must have felt he'd come home in more ways than one.

While Arthur was living at Riversdale, a horse named Flame, belonging to one of James's sisters, had been trapped by barbed wire from a fence, torn up by a flooding river. By the time it was found and freed, it collapsed and died. In flood, a bull had perished in the flooded river while trying to lead its herd to safety. Arthur took these "heartbreaking" stories that "moved him" and told them again. He dug up the skeleton of Flame and carried its bones back to the studio; on the canvas he re-bound the horse, twining barbed wire once again about its legs, and around memories of other victims - the legs of the drowned bull, thrusting skywards and set in a permanent gesture of surrender by rigor mortis, and Merric's legs, out-thrust and bracing against the moment that heralded loss of self.

In *Flame Trees*, *Horse's Skull*, *Black River*, while nature (personified in this version by the inclusion of a mother and child) stands beautiful and distant, torture and death sit like an offering at the heart of the image, nourishing the roots of the blazing red flame tree. In *Horse Skull under a Blanket and a Starry Sky* the steaming vaporisation of flesh is coolly witnessed by a misted river and sky. Moths and flies circle the decaying carcass and beyond the predatory flapping and buzzing there are other sounds: the cries of recognition at oncoming darkness: the neighing, the roaring, and Merric's words, "I am held".

When Arthur addressed the subject of death on his canvas perhaps, like St. Francis and the leper, he was steeling himself to touch it. He couldn't speak of it. Jamie had watched his father unable to handle the death of his young cousin (Phyllis and Guy's grandson) in a car accident. "Dad couldn't confront it, he couldn't make a gesture. I remember Mum saying he should say something... He couldn't find the language". As an adolescent, Jamie had seen the very different way Brian O'Shaughnessy had handled the death of his mother: "I remember his calmness, his marvellous philosophical attitude a week after her death. He was so matter of fact and positive the way he talked of her, describing mundane events." Jamie came to realise: "My father could not have brought it to his mind. He would need to assimilate it, over a period of time, before he could bring it to his consciousness."¹²⁹⁶ In Arthur's seventy-seventh year a journalist queried: "Do you mind dying?" Arthur, making light of the ridiculous question, replied, "I don't like it at all - can't you stop it?" Then he revealed life was a ride from which he had no immediate plans of disembarking: "The nice thing is that dying is only kind of one stop ...so don't get off".¹²⁹⁷

¹²⁹⁵ "For McGrath there would not be another painter like Arthur ..." Interview James McGrath, NYC, September, 2001.

¹²⁹⁶ "He would need to assimilate it, over a period of time ..." Interview Jamie Boyd.

¹²⁹⁷ "In Arthur's seventy-seventh year ..." ABC interview Marius Benson, 1997.

The eroticism of the ram, the allegory of the dog, and the symbolism of the victim in the seventies and eighties is extended to stoats, roosters, hares, deer, rabbits, pigeons, mackerel and skate. In every sense the creatures Arthur depicts are 'still life'— either gutted, shot, poisoned, hooked, trapped, strangled. Sir Robert Adeane's gamekeeper, on occasion, brought dead offerings to Arthur's door; others Arthur ordered from the Ramsholt butcher and fishmonger. At times he would come across a pitiful creature speared on a fence post in Suffolk. Other corpses were found in the bush or washed up on shores of the Shoalhaven. Arthur saw the artist as "voyeur and creator": God in the garden, observing "activities of extreme intimacy".¹²⁹⁸ Now the artist appears to extend a god-like quality to the creatures of the fields, sea and sky: un-seeing their death, plucking them from decay and raising them back to the life of the canvas.¹²⁹⁹

Shoalhaven Rabbit, its fur glistening, still seemingly lissom, is in fact already in the process of decomposing, like the background it hangs against, already on its journey into a black void. Arthur had found the rabbit lying freshly shot. Rushing back to his studio he painted the subject rapidly, while the body was still warm. Delicate shading captures the tender interior of the rabbit's sensitive ears. Its soft fur ruffles like a jester's collar about its face. The body dangles on a chain held by a brace slung around the torso. The contraption forces the stiffening legs into a begging position. With the exception of the whiskers, the entire work was achieved by the smoothing and stroking of Arthur's hand and the patting of his fingers, as if he were, if not comforting the rabbit in the hour of its death, reviving it.

A Suffolk poulterer presented Arthur with the body of a hen that had once been a champion producer of eggs. Ignoring the vision of its ignoble end, Arthur produced *The Champion* a vast work that alters the pecking order. By completely reversing the scale he forces the viewer to see the world from the bird's perspective. The hen, emboldened by size and now in a position to look down on its captors, thrusts its swelled chest across a dazzling background of gold-leaf, its every puffed and preened feather declaring glory.¹³⁰⁰ In other, more subdued works, even when the body of birds are shown as if hanging (as Arthur often observed them in the local butcher shop window) their feathers float on the threshold of rising, a split-second away from a wide-winged lift off.

A ravishing memento mori in ice-cold blues was borne from the white hot blue of funereal flames. While Arthur was living at 'Riversdale', one of three cows on agistment died. The owner was asked to collect the animal, but he didn't come. Three weeks later, the stench was so bad Arthur was forced to incinerate the carcass. As petrol was poured over the disintegrating cow, it literally exploded in the flames. At that horrifying moment Arthur's memories of human bodies doused with petrol must have re-ignited.

¹²⁹⁸ Other corpses were found in the bush ...” Arthur Boyd to Sandra McGrath, *The Artist and the River*: “The artist, imagining he is a creator, he can observe and watch activities of extreme intimacy. The artist can be a voyeur or creator.”

¹²⁹⁹ “Now the artist appears to extend a god-like quality ...” Some later studies picture death with no hope of resurrection. Blood drips from a slain rabbit into a red congealing pool, and in *The Queen's Deer* from the Magic Flute Series, 1990, the animal hangs completely lifeless: gutted.

¹³⁰⁰ “Ignoring the vision of its ignoble end ...” Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes. “I made it look alive ...”

From the ashes Arthur's plucked the skull, giving the creature a glorious resurrection in *Cow's Skull*. He would use the skull again, with horns, in other paintings.

Arthur's selection of the mackerel and the skate illustrate two distinctive views of the same life form. He painted a mackerel lying spare and flat across the width of the canvas; a formal beauty, with skin and scales as shimmering as Velazquez's silks, and fin and tail as sheer as Rembrandt's lace. And he painted the skate. Chardin had beaten him to the image in *The Ray*, but Arthur discarded the polite accessories - the jug, the civilising white cloth - and hung the gutted fish, with its seemingly direct look, its smiling (Arthur described it as "voracious") mouth, and its pink and shining labia-like entrails directly in the viewer's face. It is an image that is both innocent and explicit, violent and vulnerable; a collision of death and sex, an ending and a beginning. The critic Elwyn Lynn, saw the skate as a "revivification" and believed the entire series of skates to be all "alive with the sense of renewal".¹³⁰¹ Perhaps Arthur was also, once again, presenting a subject from which the eye instinctively turns. But the viewer, drawn back, returns to discover that, what at first sight had appeared strange, was familiar; what had seemed confrontational, was connecting. Proust applauded Chardin for his talent of turning the skate from a 'strange monster' into 'the nave of a polychrome cathedral'. But Arthur's skate, although we may have to steel the eye to visually touch it, is presented as nature's architecture and ultimately not foreign because of that.

Arthur described these still-life paintings as he would his landscapes: "It was like a holiday in a way because you weren't dragging something out of yourself" ... it was "objective". His drawings were the opposite: for the most part, bleeding raw emotions served up on a white platter of paper. "I need to make a lot of sketches. The sketches are never what you paint, of course, but are part of the process of finding it. It comes through my boots to my head".¹³⁰²

The Australian-born poet, Peter Porter, had arrived in England in 1951 at the age of 22, and never wanted to leave. By the time he found himself seated next to Arthur at a London luncheon, he was thoroughly transplanted.¹³⁰³ Porter had been among the first of the post-war imports, arriving a whole decade ahead of Germaine Greer and Clive James. James recalled his delight on discovering Porter in Britain in his early struggling years: "I dug my foxhole below the dunes it took me some time to realize that Porter had already gone in miles ahead by parachute". James hailed Porter as "a big part of [the] Australian expatriate story" that offered England "a productive demonstration that the

¹³⁰¹ "The critic ... saw the skate as a 'revivification' ..." Elwyn Lynn, *Weekend Australian*, 28 November, 1981.

¹³⁰² "The sketches are never what you paint ..." Janet Hawley 'The Great Art Rush', *The Age Saturday Extra Arts Centre Special*, Part 2, 27 October 1984

¹³⁰³ "By the time he found himself ..." Arthur and Porter first met in 1965 at the Royal Court Theatre when Arthur was working on a stage design for festival of poetry.

colonial investment didn't end up in the debit column".¹³⁰⁴ By the mid-1960s as Porter made inroads as arts critic and poet his job as advertising copywriter balanced the budget. Porter believed Arthur "quite plainly thought I was a stupid literary loudmouth. I remember going on, showing off probably, about what a bad artist Michelangelo was". Although Arthur illustrated other works of authors and poets,¹³⁰⁵ he produced the greatest number of collaborations with Porter, four in total: *Jonah* (1973), *The Lady and the Unicorn* (1975), *Narcissus* (1984), and *Mars* (1988).

Porter light-heartedly admitted to suffering from "uncertainty" because he found his name "so silly – who would imagine a tragic poet called Peter Porter?"¹³⁰⁶ Uncertainty hampered his relationship with Arthur, too. It would be a distanced union. Although Porter spent concentrated time with Arthur; many weeks during the 1970s and 1980s in Suffolk, Paratoio and the Shoalhave, he recalled:

...it was difficult to feel an endorsement ... to know what Arthur thought of you. There was something disturbing about his presence ... maybe my sense of uncertainty was a projection back on myself. You couldn't really get close to Arthur. It was difficult to feel at ease, particularly when Yvonne was present; she was like a guard dog.

Brenda Niall, also felt the beam of Yvonne's surveillancing eye. Guy Boyd had warned Niall: "You won't get through on the phone, and if you write to Arthur he won't reply". On first meeting, Niall found Yvonne "quiet" and possessing of "stillness ... a stillness that holds the possibility of power. I felt she was assessing me, looking to see if I would be a time waster".¹³⁰⁷ Porter, sensitive about his financial position, believed "Yvonne felt it was her duty to keep parasites away from Arthur. I think she sniffed me out as a prospective parasite".

Expectedly, descriptives of Arthur come fast to Porter's tongue. "He was a nocturnal marsupial, blinking into the light". He was "like Lawrence of Arabia who appeared to be retreating but always advancing ... always backing into the limelight". Less expectedly, Porter proposed: "On a raft with Arthur, after a time, I suppose you'd slowly find yourself slipping into the water". Porter saw what others did not: "There was a strange ruthlessness in Arthur. He would always give precedence to his own intentions".

¹³⁰⁴ "James hailed Porter ..." Clive James. *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 February, 2004.

¹³⁰⁵ "Although Arthur illustrated other works ..." Other collaborations Arthur undertook were: 'The circus and other poems', Max Harris in *Australian Letters*, vol. 4, no 1. October 1961. *Tomorrow's Ghosts*, Circle Publications, Guildford, England, 1971. *Pushkin's Fairy Tales*, introduction John Bayley, translated by Janet Dalley, Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., London, 1978. *The Drifting Continent and Other Poems*, A.D. Hope, Brindabella Press, Canberra, 1979. *Spare the Face Gentlemen, Please*, autobiography Tom Sanders, Phoebe Publishing, Mt. Evelyn, Victoria, 1993. *Sangkuriang (A Legend from West Java)*, a myth related by printmaker Indra Deigan and expressed in collagraphs by Boyd and woodblock prints by Deigan: limited edition of ten books, 1993. *The writer and his muse*, a suite of 23 etched prints, inspired by poems of Christopher Brennan, 1993.

¹³⁰⁶ "Despite spending concentrated time with Arthur ..." Interview Peter Porter.

¹³⁰⁷ "On the first meeting Niall found Yvonne ..." Interview Brenda Niall, Sydney, September, 2002.

Porter would sometimes stand for hours and watch Arthur draw and paint: "His brain was led by his hand ... he had the *glückliche* hand, the lucky hand: he had the knack". Porter discerned another quality: "You could feel when you were with Arthur that he had an instinctive understanding of something you had to be explicit about". One witty observer noted that when this extraordinary ability permeated Arthur's work, it was as if he had a direct line on the 'Jungian telegraph'.¹³⁰⁸ Perhaps it was Arthur's elemental understanding of the earth and its creatures; his extraordinary depth of empathy for his fellow man; a kind of emotional osmosis, from his 'boots up' that, combined with his 'lucky hand' raised him from the category of the gifted into another realm.

Porter's previous collaborations with fellow poets and music composers had been unsuccessful. But imagining how to "satisfy" Arthur with his poetry "liberated" Porter. He saw it as a chance to address subjects he wouldn't have approached if left to his own devices. While the end results for each project differed, the practice of working in their separate vacuums, often on different sides of the world, never changed. Porter submitted that Arthur's constant preoccupation was "the celebration of both the fertile and terrifying aspects of sexuality".¹³⁰⁹ Finally Porter came to believe that despite the terrific range of subjects all their collaborative works would be dominated by one theme: "The four books we did together, it seemed to me, were an attempt to reconcile the masculine and feminine."

In the instance of *The Lady & the Unicorn*, the work Porter found "most decoratively beautiful", there had been a restraint on Arthur's part; one drawing for each poem. Their later collaborations would produce a plethora of work. As Porter saw it, the difference with *The Lady & the Unicorn* was that Arthur had a consciously restrictive narrative: "He concentrated on the central main plates ... the result is the complexity of each piece is remarkable". The *Guardian* pronounced *The Lady and the Unicorn* a success. Porter was "as clear and intelligent as ever" and Arthur Boyd "erotic, violent and innocent at the same time".¹³¹⁰ The *Sunday Times* thought the evocation of the 'lovely lady' was a "dual aesthetic pleasure". The drawings were seen to complement the poetry perfectly. "Echoes of childhood fantasies mingle with phallic suggestions. Mr. Boyd's fine drawings punctuate the humour... neither poems nor drawings would be complete without the other".¹³¹¹

Fittingly, *Jonah* was executed on the high seas while Arthur sailed out to Australia from England. Porter and Rosenthal were engulfed by a delta of images, as Porter described it, "springing out everywhere. We had to align images that didn't relate to the poem. We bundled them in like a Spanish omelette". When the dish was set before the critics it

¹³⁰⁸ "One witty observer ..." Interview Stuart Purves.

¹³⁰⁹ "Porter submitted that Arthur's constant preoccupation was ..." Extract from draft copy of Porter essay titled 'Working with Arthur Boyd' which he intended submitting to the publication *Westerly*: sent with covering letter to Arthur Boyd, 19 September, 1986.

¹³¹⁰ "Porter was 'as clear and intelligent as ever'..." P.J. Kavanagh, 'April showers', *Guardian*. 15 May, 1975.

¹³¹¹ "The *Sunday Times* thought the evocation of the 'lovely lady' ..." Lyman Andrews, 'Lovely Lady', *The Sunday Times*, 3 August, 1975.

proved impossible to please every palate. The avant-garde poet Robert Adamson writing for *The Australian* spat it out, calling the work "iconoclasm at its most wasteful and tragic ... this book probably surpasses, by sheer eagle-screaming, the artistic puffery of Blackman and Alvarez's *Apparitions*".¹³¹² He found Arthur Boyd's "scribbles" like "some adolescent art student, describing his frustration on public walls..." The text abounded with "terrible puns and word-playing ... embarrassing hyperboles ... allusions" and "pseudo-profundities". Cyril Connolly of *The Sunday Times* declared Porter's "poetry and ... mannered prose ... spoiled by Arthur Boyd's ... mildly scatological ..." drawings.¹³¹³ He felt the poems could read well enough without them. However, *The Times Literary Supplement* gushed: "This is visually the most memorable and successful book of poems and drawings to have appeared in England for a very long time".¹³¹⁴ As a satirist, Porter, in this critic's eyes, was

...almost too brilliant for his own good ... the intensity is almost too great ... calling for a close reading that loses speed. Anyway, Mr Boyd would stop any speedy reader in his tracks ... At a time when so much art is called disturbing and fails to disturb, here is something that really does disturb, by the immediacy of its impact and by the variable depth of what is said. Everything gets abolished except God and the singing bone of raw nature, to which God listens.

Narcissus was ten years in the making. "It was Arthur's idea", Porter recalled. In 1975 by the glassy waters of the Shoalhaven river, the two artists began exploring "the Freudian idea of pictures of self, how self sees itself".¹³¹⁵ By 1977 Arthur was exhibiting a series of oils at Fischer Fine Art in London with *Narcissus* as the main theme. The poem was incomplete, only two stanzas from *Narcissus at Nowra – for Arthur Boyd* had been written.¹³¹⁶ By now Porter had discovered that it was "the *idea* of the poem that attracted Arthur. He would never talk about what he felt about the poems, never comment, never ask questions". Porter felt "Arthur just took the odd word or sentence

¹³¹² "The avant-garde poet Robert Adamson ..." Robert Adamson, 'Extravagant gestures but without any passion.' *The Australian*, 5 January, 1974.

¹³¹³ Cyril Connolly of the *Sunday Times* declared ..." Cyril Connolly, *The Sunday Times*, 9 December, 1973.

¹³¹⁴ "However, *The Times Literary Supplement* gushed ..." "De profundis, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 November, 1973.

¹³¹⁵ "There, by the glassy waters of the Shoalhaven river ..." Peter Porter interview.

¹³¹⁶ Peter Porter's, *Narcissus loses his love*: Stanza one: "What happened to you, my skin?/You were famished in the rose/And went where that colour is. What green garlanded my eyes?/The depth of a standing pool,/The discolouration of lasting. What breath misted the lonely glass?/Garlic, where form was eaten,/A repast for frightened gazers. What catechism, what pattern left?/Hell, hanging-on, her face gone,/Only her lying words, my eyes. What catechism, what pattern left?/ Hell, hanging-on, her face gone,/ Only her lying words, my eyes./Welcome, then, to the self's eternity!" Stanza two: *The Making of a Monster* To wake out of oneself,/the same sun shining,/verbless, sleepless and/afraid to dream – the self-/absorption of a hare/on tapestry, caught in/an Eden-wide catastrophe,/ murder seen down every/leafy avenue but no/deceit of songsters, pure/rhyme's word, immense/injustice for a syllable -/nobody can bank his/loving fire so high:/the definition of happiness/begins – another person/growing out of my looking/a fern springing where/some noble tragedy/still lives in rock./I waited and I followed/my shadow in the bush/until I found this pool./The water is a cylinder/leading down to death/and I am tired of faces hiding in myself./Dear Surface, I open/my eyes above you/and let a carnage/loose upon the earth -/Dear Sir Face, you/are tomorrow's monster,/our looks are a walking-/away from blood, and/your name is Nothing.

for the drawings". The two-stanza offering, used as the catalogue introduction, was described by Porter as "a work in progress". Nevertheless, the images in this unfinished poem, like light bouncing off water, appear to spark and glimmer throughout Arthur's works.

Several of the paintings continue the theme of the manipulated man, the artist forced to look into the mirror of memory. But for the most part Arthur paints Narcissus in the throes of self-courtship and the canvases form a posy, blooming with the romance of spring colours; soft blues, whites, pale golds, pinks and greens. Narcissus, Porter's "Dear Sir Face ..." ¹³¹⁷ has travelled from ancient Greece, to touch down one hundred and fifty kilometres south of Sydney by the banks of the Shoalhaven River, where he is "caught in an Eden-wide catastrophe ..." Bending low over a glassy billabong, or crawling from womb-like tents and caves towards the water, Narcissus reaches out to caress the hypnotising sight of self (the "dear surface") with "the self absorption of a hare on tapestry ..." ¹³¹⁸ Ignoring the triangular caves or, in reverse, the sexual feminine 'V', he flies towards the river, arrow-like, drawn down into the bullseye of his image: "the water is a cylinder leading down to death ..." ¹³¹⁹ On a tip-toe of ecstasy he cranes towards his reflection, spilling semen, literally falling for himself: "Your looks are a walking-away from blood, and your name is Nothing."

The *Narcissus* series appears to be one of the rare instances where the paintings came before the drawings. It would not be until September 1983 that Porter and Rosenthal were "overwhelmed" by Arthur's etchings and "the sheer bloody genius of them". ¹³²⁰ These drawings, in the sharpness of black and white are, unlike the oils, rarely rosy. In general they depict a theme of waste, suffering, torture and death. These images prompt parallels: self-absorbed water-skiers, self-centred entrepreneurs and profiteers, those disregarding of the river, of the water that is both nurturing and necessary to life itself. Self-love results in self-destruction.

The river on a still day was a mirror. On those days Arthur imagined the banks of the Shoalhaven were "the ideal place for Narcissus to be". ¹³²¹ Throughout the works, in a reversal of the shallow gaze of Narcissus, the viewer is encouraged to look past the "shining surface picture", through the flatness (paper for poet, canvas for painter) hoping for that rare gift of a moment when there is a glimpse of something "beyond the picture..." something past the recognisable, "something more of the depths". ¹³²²

¹³¹⁷ "'Dear Sir Face' ..." Extract from Peter Porter's *Narcissus at Nowra*

¹³¹⁸ "... 'the self absorption of a hare on tapestry'..." Ibid

¹³¹⁹ "... 'the water is a cylinder leading down to death' ..." Ibid

¹³²⁰ "It would not be until September 1983 ..." Extract of letter from Tom Rosenthal, 23 September, 1983. Bundanon archives.

¹³²¹ "...Arthur imagined the banks of the Shoalhaven ..." Broadcast on Radio National, *Arthur Boyd: Rainbow Maker* 1 February 13, 1994. ABC archives, Sydney.

¹³²² "Throughout the works ..." Robert Frost, *For once, then, something*

Whether it was Tom Rosenthal bringing Porter and Boyd together for *Jonah* in their first collaboration,¹³²³ or Georges Mora commissioning the second book, *The Lady and the Unicorn*, or Arthur initiating *Narcissus*, each time Porter was left in the dark about who was running the show. On one occasion they met at the Ritz and Arthur pressed a brown envelope of money into Porter's hand. "Arthur always claimed these projects were being financed by people, but I was never sure". Porter had no way of knowing that *Nebuchadnezzar*, *Arthur Boyd Drawings*, *Merric Boyd Drawings* and the majority of the Porter/Boyd collaborations supervised by Tom Rosenthal¹³²⁴ were either fully, or in part, financed by Arthur.¹³²⁵ Porter never lost the feeling of a sense of injustice when it came to the distribution of wealth in Arthur's dealings. For Arthur these publications were good for business: not only an elegant way of hanging an artistic hat but they also promoted the highly lucrative sales of drawings and folio-ed etchings.¹³²⁶ In 1988, finances for poet and painter were so diametrically opposed that for Porter to launch the last of their collaborative works *Mars* in Australia only Arthur had the funds to secure his ticket.

When *Mars* exploded from Arthur's pen, once again the publisher and poet had "poems with no drawings and drawings with no poems". Porter recalls: "We made snapshot judgement. It was never quite accurate. Arthur threw everything in ... I think he thought iconography infinitely graftable". Porter's poetry, trying to "rationalise the irrational", sought parallels between myth and modern examples of war: from the fall of Troy, to the *Book of Job*, to World War I and Simpson and his donkey, to Mars, the Roman god of war, personified as a top brass from the Pentagon.

Mars, among all of Arthur's work, was Yvonne's favourite. In this series Arthur makes much of what Barry Pearce described as "Boyd's magnificent pessimism" and Peter Porter described as "his morbid obsessional view of the world". Porter believed: "There was in Arthur a very strong vein of violence, always hidden below the surface...he had a profound seriousness about the basic human condition". The collection of horrific images could be seen collectively as a 'consumer warning' to the human race, as a lurid skull-and-crossbones symbol stamped across the package of the globe. Arthur believed the drawings were, "fairly savage, but not savage enough: "he's not a good God to serve, Mars".¹³²⁷

While Arthur was working on these images, James McGrath was staying at Bundanon. "It was quite lonely, just the three of us. At night Yvonne didn't sit with us, she'd go into the library ... there was no television. Arthur and I would sit opposite each other at

¹³²³ "Whether it was Tom Rosenthal ..." "Arthur wanted to do a biblical subject and Tom said it had to be Jewish" – Interview Peter Porter.

¹³²⁴ "Porter had no way of knowing" These works were published by Thames and Hudson, or later, when Rosenthal moved houses, by Martin Secker & Warburg, then Andre Deutch.

¹³²⁵ "...were either fully, or in part, financed by Arthur". In the instance of Merric Boyd Drawings both Guy and David, together with Arthur, equally met the final costs.

¹³²⁶ "Porter always felt a sense of injustice ..." "[Arthur] saw no clear need to compensate his collaborator (me) for the gross disparity between what his art could earn and what mine was paid."

Extract of letter from Peter Porter to author, 19 March, 2007.

¹³²⁷ "He's not a good God to serve, Mars". ABC archives, 'Rainbow Maker' op cit

the table and he would draw men shitting skulls, raping women ... during the day he would be painting ridiculously romantic things ... sunsets".¹³²⁸

But the 'romance' could turn into terrifying beauty and the lonely, echoing space of Australia becomes the setting for "end of the world" pictures. The menacing aspects of the river didn't truly frighten Arthur. He knew that "the wonderful, sweeping river" would "quieten down". Its destructive force he saw as a natural phenomenon: "After a flood and a carcass lying on a sandbank... the river will rejuvenate, the sun will come out, and then it will happen all over again". What frightened him was "the human brain". Arthur didn't think "anyone evil" although "starving children, slaughter in wars, droughts, floods, natural disasters" were "pretty hard to shove off". It was a "wanton lack of imagination" he found impossible to understand. "It's almost like people in power want to shut out the nasty bits ... they don't see it's a dilemma".¹³²⁹

While back in England, where the Thatcher Government was pushing Britain towards adopting the neutron bomb, Arthur felt the evil to be very close. Even in peaceful Ramsholt, jet fighter planes from a nearby airbase flew regularly over 'Keeper's Cottage' and on over the wider estate that provided killing fields for shooting parties. In *Picture on the Wall, Shoalhaven*, Arthur suggests the older perspective of the Renaissance, with a long-lens view of the landscape through the frame of a window. Arthur had noticed how the river and its banks around Bundanon and Riversdale looked like representations of the Arno in the work of Piero de Cosimo.¹³³⁰ By mimicking Piero's view and punctuating the long line of the river with the exclamation mark of an atomic bomb, north and south and time and distance, fuse.¹³³¹ Once again, the viewer is reminded that Australia is not so removed and that war will reach the most secluded door.

At the same time, on the Shoalhaven, slow destruction lay down-river and at a neighbourly stretch. By the turn of the twentieth century catchphrases such as "substantial human impact" and "industrial revolution of the coastal zone" had found their way into environmental reports and council studies in the Nowra region. In the early 1970s, just as Arthur set eyes on the Shoalhaven, development was beginning. By the mid-1970s Arthur's *Pink Sky, Bank and Brown River* showed the aftermath of deforestation and re-routing of the river. As he explained: "They've cut a big gorge near Kangaroo Valley to divert the river. It's desolate because man has chopped down the trees and blown up the soil".¹³³²

¹³²⁸ "It was quite lonely, just the three of us..." Interview James McGrath.

¹³²⁹ "It's almost like people in power ..." Arthur Boyd, ABC archives, Sydney

¹³³⁰ Arthur had noticed how the river and its banks ... Interview Peter Porter.

¹³³¹ By mimicking Piero's view ... On a loose piece of paper in the Bundanon archives, a curved line reflects the curving river of the Shoalhaven. Against this image, in Arthur's hand, is written 'Call me Brett'. Just as Whiteley had reflected Rees' *Road to Berry* Arthur finds similarities in both Piero de Cosimo and Brett Whiteley. Like Narcissus reflected in the river, artists reflecting images of those who come before and after.

¹³³² "As he explained: 'They've cut a big gorge ...' Sandra McGrath, *The Artist & the River*, op cit

To push projects of expansion to completion, sand was needed to make concrete. New and efficient pump dredges had recently been invented and suddenly the riverbed was ripe for harvest. The Emerys, a fifth generation farming family from the Shoalhaven area, were positioned just across the river from the Boyds. One day, without warning, they announced they intended to dredge the river for sand. Arthur responded by saying he had seen rivers that had been dredged for gold and sand, and not only were the rivers absolutely wrecked, but so was the landscape.¹³³³ In turn, the Emerys claimed the sandbar needed to be dredged because it was choking river flow, causing flooding.¹³³⁴ Arthur argued the sandbar was part of a natural process and if there was concern about flooding, trees should be planted along the bank. The noise and pollution from trucks and dredges were all secondary considerations. Arthur's greatest concern was that the Emerys' proposal set a precedent.

Arthur, who had never thought it worth fighting for himself in court, now fought for the river. The man who believed that "if you can't eat it, you don't own it"¹³³⁵ won his case, but Arthur did not celebrate. When asked why, he responded, "We've only won for the time being".¹³³⁶ He was right. Tony Emery lodged an environmental impact study. Arthur countered by commissioning a hydrologist and an environmental expert to argue Emery's report. He then took his case to the newspapers and made a public plea: "It would be a tragedy if, in order to make a few hundred thousand dollars a year in sand mining for private individuals, something as valuable as a total environment is lost to the people of the South Coast and indeed, Australia".¹³³⁷ Emery's response was Arthur was "too emotional" about the issue and had "not done enough research."¹³³⁸ Emery assured a reporter that if he got the go-ahead "it will not set a precedent because only about 800m of river has the sandbar and the Government has tough environmental limits."¹³³⁹ Four months later, December 1981, the Shoalhaven Council voted overwhelmingly in favour of the project. In 2007, the Emerys still mine the river, joined now by other companies along the rivers length, extracting not only sand but minerals.

Other threats encumbered the river. Increasingly it was becoming a freeway for water-skiers, churning the riverbed, eroding the riverbank. The irritant of noise and disturbance to the quiet pursuits of fishermen, campers and canoeists was nothing compared to the danger to swimmers and to the upheaval of the wildlife such as platypus, echidna and giant goannas. Arthur was appalled by the lack of awareness of the water-skiers: "The hedonists think they're fulfilling themselves - living for the moment, but they're not fulfilling themselves, it's a dying business, an ending."¹³⁴⁰ Use it, but don't use it up,

¹³³³ "Arthur responded by saying ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker tapes.

¹³³⁴ "In turn, the Emerys claimed ..." Keith Finlay, *The Australian Women's Weekly*. 'Artists fight to stop the river sand dredgers'. 12 August, 1981.

¹³³⁵ "Arthur, who had never thought it worth fighting ..." (without newspaper reference) Arts section 'Boyd by return to Bundanon', Elizabeth Fortescue. 30 June, 1995.

¹³³⁶ "Arthur did not celebrate ..." Interview Polly Boyd

¹³³⁷ "He then took his case to the newspapers ..." Peter Ward, 6 July, 1981.

¹³³⁸ "Emery's response was" Interview Keith Finlay, op cit

¹³³⁹ Ibid

¹³⁴⁰ "Arthur was appalled by the lack of awareness of the water-skiers ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce interview

was Arthur's dictum. He wanted the most sympathetic use of the land; to keep it intact and maintain its fertility.¹³⁴¹ Arthur believed Australians had to learn to give back to their country at least the equivalent of what they had taken from it.¹³⁴²

Almost from the beginning the Nolans had been regular visitors to Riversdale. In 1981 a section of Eearie Park, a property adjacent to Riversdale and Bundanon was purchased by Sidney Nolan from Sandra McGrath. Nolan spoke of plans of building a house, studio and library; of retaining visiting rights but giving the lot to Bundanon.¹³⁴³ Some little time after McGrath began making overtures for the sale of the remaining section of land, saying if she couldn't sell it in one lot she would break it up. This of course was a prospect that horrified Arthur. The land rose to around 235m above sea level on the Shoalhaven escarpment. The price was high and negotiations stalemated. Finally the purchase was triggered by John Hull. While touring Australia and staying at Riversdale he heard the land was on the market and about to be sold to a man who intended to turn it into a caravan site. When Hull called England to alert Arthur, his response was simply: "Put the phone down". Twenty minutes later Arthur's solicitor was on the phone to Hull and Nolan and Boyd jointly paid the asking price.

On a personal level John Hull understood Arthur's curt reaction. Not many of Arthur's friends or acquaintances noticed, or rated, John Hull. They saw him as a shadowy presence, someone even less verbal than Arthur. However, Hull's silence, and his ability to read Arthur's, may have been the underlying strength of their relationship. On the occasions John Hull felt there was information to impart, he would watch Arthur take it onboard, not say a word, and go on working. After some time Arthur would mutter something like, 'a nice day outside, John,' which he took to mean 'leave now'. Nothing more would be said. John Hull would leave, and Arthur, in his own time would address the problem. In the 1950s Len French, while holding forth at the Swanston Family had mused that despite appearances, Arthur may have been "the greatest operator of all".¹³⁴⁴ By the end of the seventies many heads had begun nodding in agreement. The Sydney painter, Robert Dickerson, after meeting Arthur initially in the mid-1950s at Beaumaris

¹³⁴¹ "He wanted the most sympathetic use of the land ..." A quote taken from notes for a speech made by Yvonne Boyd to the Bundanon Trust in which she reiterated some points from the original 'Deed of Wishes': that pleasure boats on the Shoalhaven be limited to canoes or other small craft; that access to the river for local campers be maintained; that Bundanon produce crops rather than raise cattle; that science be encouraged and a gift of an electron microscope from CSIRO be accepted; that the interest of musicians willing to give master classes and performances be encouraged; and that contemporary work include all the arts: drama, dance, sculpture and music, both jazz and classical.

¹³⁴² "Arthur believed Australians had to learn to give back ..." Barry Pearce, Introduction. AGNSW catalogue Arthur Boyd retrospective

¹³⁴³ "Nolan spoke of plans ..." Interview David Chalker, Canberra, September, 2003. David Chalker first met Nolan in 1980. His contact with Nolan was as the first Director of the Nolan Gallery at Lanyon. According to David Chalker the gifting of this parcel of land was Sidney Nolan's wish: "We walked over the site in 1982 and [Nolan] described the project and his wish to contribute to Arthur's plans for Bundanon. He wanted to build a house, studio and library and retain visiting rights, but give the lot to Bundanon". However, title passed to the Nolan Estate on Nolan's death and this gift (known as Eearie Park 1) has yet to be realized.

¹³⁴⁴ "In the 1950s Len French ..." extract from Tim Burstall's diary.

believed Arthur could “see through people: he was “a very clever man, a highly intelligent man”, a man who “made things work for him”.¹³⁴⁵

“Arthur Boyd is sometimes prepared to reveal a naked pessimism”. This is the assessment of the controversial and highly respected British art critic and theorist, Peter Fuller, as he waded into a discussion on the ‘Bathers’ series. Executed in 1985 these works formed part of the exhibit for the 43rd Venice Biennale in 1988.¹³⁴⁶ Fuller found them “neither easy to look at nor to like” and considered them “difficult and intractable works”. He also rated them “among the most ‘important’ new pictures to have been seen in London for a long time”.¹³⁴⁷ If the Shoalhaven Council and Arthur’s neighbours hadn’t got the point, there were people on the other side of the world who did. They could see an invasion of a river. Arthur presented hedonistic, senseless low life; flipped and membranous pink, oozing with a slither and slide up over the sandbanks to take the river; like marauders of ages past, scaling the battlements of the river bank, up and over its protective walls, mindlessly intent on pillage, rape, and destruction.

While chainsaws, dredges, bulldozers and water-skiers had begun to change the Shoalhaven, Arthur Boyd’s record of its beauty was becoming more and more valuable. By 1985 the price of his works had trebled, if not quadrupled. That was the estimation of James Mollison who, as director of the National Gallery of Australia, had accepted a donation of 3,634 works by Arthur Boyd a decade previously.¹³⁴⁸

The gift, so large it took several years to catalogue, was unprecedented. It had been the result of a blunder by Georges Mora. Mora had supposedly arranged a major retrospective of Arthur’s works with the National Gallery of Victoria. Arthur had duly packed a vast shipping container in London of his works. In 1975, after Arthur landed in Perth, he called Mora to ask details of delivery. The reply came, “Oh, I couldn’t get in touch with you on the water but they’re not going to have it now, they won’t have the exhibition.” Arthur was bewildered: “We were on the way across the Nullabor with a container on a ship with nowhere to go, so I had to think of something pretty quick”. He rang his old friend and art dealer, Joe Brown, who suggested the idea of offering the works to the NGA.¹³⁴⁹ Arthur agreed, with the suggestion the gallery purchase twenty tapestries at \$5,000 each (a sum that would cover weaving costs). Mollison accepted.

¹³⁴⁵ “The painter, Bob Dickerson ...” Interview Bob Dickerson, 13 December, Sydney, 2001.

¹³⁴⁶ “These works, executed in 1985 ...” In November 1988, these images appeared in a commission painted for *Time* magazine for a Special Issue dealing with environmental conservation in Australia.

¹³⁴⁷ “He also rated them ‘among the most important new pictures’ ...” These quotes are extracts from an essay by Peter Fuller titled ‘Arthur Boyd’s Suffolk Outback’: Bundanon archives

¹³⁴⁸ “That was the estimation of James Mollison ...” The deed of gift was signed by Arthur, 23 April, 1975. It broke down into 195 paintings, 2362 drawings, 885 prints and 149 matrices for prints, 2 tapestries, 4 bronze sculptures and 37 ceramic tile paintings.

¹³⁴⁹ “He rang his old friend ...” Upon opening in October 1982 the museum was named the Australian National Gallery, a decade later it was changed to the National Gallery of Australia.

Given the timing, perhaps Mollison could do little else. The NGA, well before even opening its brand-new doors, had purchased Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles* for \$1.34 million in 1973. In the mid-1970s that sort of expenditure had caused a furore. Mollison ventured that at that time Australians couldn't believe it possible to spend a vast amount of money on anything other than a racehorse".¹³⁵⁰ Mollison could have clearly imagined the headlines if the gift from an Australian artist of paintings, drawings, prints, ceramics sculpture and tapestries had been turned down after such riches had been lavished on a contemporary American. Shortly after the gift was accepted, Arthur painted a Shoalhaven landscape using Pollock's drip pattern-making. So as to leave no doubt of his intention, he then titled the work: *River-bush Homage to Pollock, 1976*. It was a once-off dalliance with this technique and, unusually, Arthur referred to the "cerebral quality" of the work.¹³⁵¹ Given his humour, one wonders if, from the distance of England, Arthur occasionally looked up from this canvas and cast an ironic eye towards Canberra.

Heading towards sixty Arthur was fit. He could manoeuvre his rowboat on the river with ease and cut a nimble pathway through dense bush and rainforest, heavy equipment hanging effortlessly off his back. The way Arthur sometimes painted, completing a canvas 14 feet by 11 feet within two days, demanded exceptional stamina. In the late 1970s a film camera caught him in action, painting the view from his studio. Over and over again he crouches, balances and springs forward; his calves strain and his arms stretch, while his eyes with an unequivocal beam scan the lie of the land like a mountaineer assessing strength and weakness, judging what to cling to and what to discard. He surges over the hill, smoothing leaves and branches, scaling trees, grappling with undergrowth, grasping rock. With energy he wields his implements: the edge of his hand, his fingers, a palette knife and brushes of varying widths, from a housepainter's brush to some so fine they are composed of three or four hairs from his daughter's head. Over and over again he makes his mark until the curvaceous mass of earth outside the window is coaxed inside the room. It is only then we see what the green canopy was struggling to cover. It is a cut across and down the breast of the hill; a man-made mark despoiling the beauty; a slashing scar where "they blasted some of the hill to make the road".¹³⁵²

This painting *The Road at 'Riversdale* was by Arthur's admission, "a performance piece", done specifically for the camera. The thirteen-year old would-be actor always lived close beneath the surface of the man. In his seventies Arthur would admit he had

¹³⁵⁰ "Mollison ventured that in the mid-seventies ..." James Mollison, *The Australian*, 4 July, 1985.

¹³⁵¹ "...Arthur referred to the 'cerebral quality' ..." Arthur Boyd to Sandra McGrath, *The Artist & the River*.

¹³⁵² "It is a cut across and down the breast of the hill ..." Arthur Boyd. *ibid*

“never lost the urge” to act.¹³⁵³ Between 1978 and 1995, Arthur became the subject of three, one-hour documentaries. In 1978 *A Man of Two Worlds* produced, written and narrated by John Read, son of the famous art writer, Sir Herbert Read, was released as a joint ABC/BBC production.¹³⁵⁴ It opens with an introductory segment in Suffolk, but the weight of the film is concentrated on the Shoalhaven. It perfectly captures the exuberance of Arthur exploring and painting his new-found home. In great part this is due to Arthur’s innate sense of the camera, his instinct of knowing what the lens needs to see. Like the ‘silent’ movie stars he had admired as a boy before the ‘talkies’ Arthur was at his most brilliantly communicative without sound.

The second film was directed by Don Featherstone in 1985, for London Weekend Television’s ‘South Bank’ arts programme. Called *Arthur Boyd in the Landscape*, it was narrated by British arts aficionado, Melvyn Bragg. Featherstone was surprised to discover Arthur’s flair for the filming process: “He was into it, he was droll, he was energetic”. As Featherstone pointed out, Arthur “understood the camera”, even down to costume.¹³⁵⁵ The morning of the first day of shooting Arthur discarded his usual blue shirt and chose to wear white, a colour that according to Featherstone, “showed his film sense”. John Hull, while watching this film for the first time decades later, observed Arthur painting the river. After several seconds of looking at Arthur’s head constantly swivelling between his subject and his canvas, Hull burst into laughter. His merriment stemmed from the fact he believed Arthur “wouldn’t have been able to see ... he needed his glasses ... was just *doing it* ... he was a great showman”.

Tom Sanders called the quietly mannered Arthur ‘Quicksilver’ and there had been many an occasion when John Hull had seen him earn that name. At the retrospective in 1969, Hull waited outside Richard Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh, to meet up with Arthur who had travelled up by train, sending Hull and paintings on ahead. Standing at the top of the steps was a man who had loaned his painting for display at the exhibition, who was ignorant of the fact that the work had been damaged in the truck on the journey up. Hull mumbled the news as Arthur approached. Without breaking step, without missing a beat, Arthur strode up to the man, looked him directly in the eyes, and said: “I’m sorry we had to leave the picture in London, we didn’t have space on the truck”.¹³⁵⁶

At a late 1970s exhibition at the Fischer Gallery, Hull and Arthur knew they had a potential problem on their hands. Jeffrey Solomons, the director of the gallery, had been known “to do a wobbly if the pictures were too big”, believing them “not saleable”.

¹³⁵³ “The thirteen-year old would-be actor always lived close beneath the surface ...” Arthur Boyd: *Testament of a Painter*. Arthur told his grandsons that he felt that to paint was akin to “putting yourself on the line like an actor”.

¹³⁵⁴ In 1978, *A Man of Two Worlds*, produced, written and narrated by John Read ...” Read’s production was full of insight, sensibility and appreciation of Arthur’s work and psyche. The sons enthusiasm differed considerably from the fathers. On December 5, 1975, Herbert Read wrote to John Rothenstein: ‘I can’t say that Australian Painting is one of my major preoccupations’. Australia, for Herbert Read was, “Very dull ... America with the negroes ...” (See *Letters of John Reed*, op cit)

¹³⁵⁵ “As Featherstone would point out ...” Interview Don Featherstone, Sydney. September, 2003.

¹³⁵⁶ “Without breaking stop ...” Yvonne refuted this story of John Hull’s. Taking the white lie seriously she responded: “I don’t believe Arthur was a liar.”

Solomons had been deliberately kept in the dark about the vastness of Arthur's newest canvases. At the appointed hour of delivery, Hull recalls, Arthur was there, dead on eleven o'clock. Sweeping into the gallery he was all smiles and with a 'Hallo, Jeffrey, nice to see you', he immediately turned to help the shippers unload his paintings off the truck; something he had never done before. Ignoring Solomons, Arthur then proceeded to hang them with a proprietorial air that defied questioning. Hull was in awe of Arthur's ability to control difficult situations: "My God he was an actor ... you couldn't touch him".

A decade passed before Arthur made the last of the documentaries. In 1995 Melbourne-based director, Don Bennetts, completed *Testament of a Painter*. Filming, as usual, was intense. But by this time Yvonne had erected a firewall around her husband. When she felt Bennetts was pushing Arthur too hard, she pushed back, exploding, "He'll be dead and you will have killed him".¹³⁵⁷ Three years earlier Yvonne had seen Arthur throw himself into a major project. In 1993 a retrospective was staged by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Arthur was a master at masking his strain, perhaps even from himself. While working daily with the curators, Barry Pearce and Hendrik Kolenberg, he appeared interested and buoyant as they reviewed hundreds of works. It was Arthur who controlled the pace, fussing over details, pressing Pearce to search for further works.

Both Pearce and Kolenberg, while staying at Bundanon, learnt to tread warily around Yvonne's landmines. She would bring tea and cakes out into the garden but as soon as Arthur disappeared she would question their schedules and plans: "What is all this for? ... This will put Arthur through the wringer!"¹³⁵⁸ When Yvonne's concerns were replayed back to Arthur he would brush them off, usually muttering one of his favoured phrases: "Ignore the domestics".¹³⁵⁹ Yet, by being prepared to be the buffer, to bear the brunt, Yvonne not only conserved Arthur but his creative fuel. She believed he "didn't know how to protect himself". Kolenberg became convinced that "Arthur's emotion was just under the skin" and that it was transferred "straight into painting". Yvonne was Arthur's ferryman, the person who steered the passage of his emotional energy from hand to canvas. When Kolenberg looked at an early line drawing of Yvonne, with her head wrapped in a towel, which had been executed by Arthur in the early years at Open Country, his response had been: "there's a serious, straightforward, honest woman".¹³⁶⁰ After making her acquaintance, he felt the same.

¹³⁵⁷ "Three years earlier Yvonne had seen Arthur throw himself into a major project.: Interview Don Bennetts, Melbourne, 22 November, 1999, 8 December, 1999. Melbourne. Interview Dr. Leslie Jones, Melbourne, 1 October, 2002. . Jones, father of Polly's son, Adam, spent many years with the family, staying at Riversdale, Suffolk and Gisborne. Arthur enjoyed a friendship from the late seventies onwards – Jones's occupation as a CSIRO scientist greatly appealed to Arthur.

¹³⁵⁸ "Both Pearce and Kolenberg ..." Interview Barry Pearce, Sydney, 12 December, 2000. Interview Hendrik Kolenberg, Sydney, 2006.

¹³⁵⁹ "Ignore the domestics ..." Leslie Jones interview. Jones recalled Arthur using this expression on several occasions.

¹³⁶⁰ "When Kolenberg looked at an early line drawing of Yvonne ..." Interview Hendrik Kolenberg.

Throughout Arthur's oeuvre the themes of sex and death continue but as Arthur settled into the Shoalhaven, his symbolism shifted, became less personal, easier to read. The symbol of the triangle, the trinity, continues to play both a major and minor role: the most ongoing and obvious is its embodiment in the characteristic Shoalhaven landscape, the division into thirds: sky, earth, water. It can be seen more subtly in the form of the triangular-shaped cave¹³⁶¹ (doubling in the reflection of the river into the kite shape) and in the repetition of the three rocks (where four actually exist). Entering his sixth decade, sensuality is found by the painter, in most part, in the landscape itself. Arthur painted his landscapes not simply for their "grandeur" but because he saw them as "erotic and explicitly anatomically sexual".¹³⁶² He particularly found a sexual connection in waterfalls and rock clefts, as can be seen in earlier works from the 'Hunter' and 'Nebuchadnezzar' series.

Over the years Yvonne grew tired of hearing her husband described as an innocent. *Arthur Boyd, His Art and Life* was written by Janet McKenzie and published in 2000. Yvonne complained to the publishers, Thames and Hudson, about the text being "repetitive in this over the top business about his innocence. Look at some of his paintings and drawings for goodness sake, they couldn't be more erotic". Despite Arthur losing his virginity to Yvonne she maintains, "he taught me about sex. There was nothing in the way. No inhibitions. He was uncorrupted, honest, straightforward. He wasn't a selfish lover by any means". In the 1990s when asked if Yvonne had been a model for one of Arthur's paintings, he replied: "whether she is or not she was always my model".¹³⁶³ Perhaps in *Waterfall and Rockface at Shoalhaven Valley, 1975*, inscribed on the painting "Dear Yvonne – with love, Arthur", we can glean something of Arthur's ongoing desire.

Over and over again Yvonne Boyd would be described as Arthur described the river in his paintings: still, calm, powerful, strong. That sense can be felt in the nude studies Arthur painted of his wife. Whenever he was being interviewed Yvonne would be by his side, ready to supply a name, a date, the spelling of a gallery name. If she strayed, he would call her back, on one occasion bewailing, "where's she gone because she's got to put me right". All his life, whenever a painting was finished, the habit of turning to find Yvonne to ask "Well, what do you think?" never abated. And neither did she ever lean comfortably into that request. She would approach it always with nervousness and trepidation, knowing that when he told her "I need your praise", he meant it. Yet, across the decades, family and friends would watch as she steeled herself to give her opinion and never let him down with an easy answer.¹³⁶⁴

¹³⁶¹ "...the triangular-shaped cave ..." Here is an example of Arthur's love of connection. Tom Roberts, one of Arthur's touchstones had, in 1895, painted a similar triangular rock formation *In a corner on the Macintyre*.

¹³⁶² "Arthur painted his landscapes ..." Arthur Boyd to Sandra McGrath, *The Artist and the River*.

¹³⁶³ "In the nineties when asked if Yvonne had been a model ..." Arthur Boyd, David Chalker interview.

¹³⁶⁴ "Yet, across the decades, family and friends would watch as she steeled herself ..." Regarding Arthur's reaction to her comments on his paintings, in Gisborne in September of 2006, Yvonne Boyd would, always ready to step aside and let Arthur take any kudos, any credit, would comment that Arthur was "inclined to ignore" her opinion.

In Suffolk, in Highgate, in the Shoalhaven, in Paretaio, Yvonne was always there. She would wake him late morning for "he rarely had a lovely sleep", and make breakfast. Afterwards they would walk together and then, wherever they were living, he would retreat to his studio. In the quiet of Suffolk, with only the wind and the sea birds breaking the silence, Yvonne would wait. From the kitchen window she could look down the winding path, across the lumpy lawn full of mole holes, through the snowdrops or daffodils or clover, past the apple trees to the chicken coop next to the wire-boxed fruit and vegetable garden, and finally to Arthur's high-roofed, green painted, fourteen-by-eighteen foot timber studio. At twilight she would watch as Arthur's thousand-watt bulb began to illuminate the dusk, then slowly begin to blaze through the darkening countryside. As the evening progressed, if Arthur didn't come or forgot to come, she would send a signal by flicking a switch attached to a wire strung from house to studio, and his light would crackle; off and on, off and on, until he emerged. After dinner Arthur would often return to the studio and work late into the night.

At times assistants would come and interrupt the Boyds' monastic routine. Apart from the long-serving John Hull, and well before the arrival of Arthur's last English studio assistant and master pupil, Hugh Webster, there was a parade of untrained helpers. If the Birmingham brickie, Nobby, arrived for work (he would become an expert preparer of boards and canvases) he would bring Arthur's favourite lunch, pies, homemade by his wife Beatie. If George, a survivor of Belsen, was there, he and Arthur would wander through the high grasses, two silver heads bent together discussing the trees and shrubs. Anyone who came to the door; those who had been retired, put out to grass, lost their job and their cottage on the estate and had been put into council houses, would find employment. Even a redundant grave digger from the local church found work under the Boyds' thatched roof.

When John Hull visited from Norfolk he often brought his son, Christian, and Arthur would entertain him, wheeling him around the back garden in his buggy. Hull remembered Arthur always looking comfortable with children in his arms, "he was very lovely, very tender". In varying degrees, from Hugh Webster down to an ex-prisoner, Arthur trained them all. Yvonne affirmed, as did all of Arthur's pupils, that he had yet another great gift - "he could teach". According to Yvonne, he preferred people not grounded in art, as "art people tend not to be as practical". She observed Arthur's teaching practices continued to be "pretty firm... he could be very bossy, but never unpleasant".

When it came to the preparation and mixing of paint, Arthur was meticulous, working his assistants with the authority of a drill sergeant. Yet all Arthur's helpers, from the first to the last, placed him on the highest pedestal. In the 1950s Robert Langley found him "spiritually generous, which was worth all the money in the world. Arthur was a blessing in my life, I had no confidence, I dabbled in clay. He encouraged me, took me

on, became a father, gave me a belief in myself".¹³⁶⁵ Anna Glynn credited Arthur for changing her life, her perception of the world: "he was such a good man".¹³⁶⁶ And in the 1990s Hugh Webster considered him "almost a saint, a fantastically generous warm person with a spirit that shone out".¹³⁶⁷ Through the 1980s and 1990s Arthur's female assistants adored him. As Polly observed: "They flirted and he flirted back. Dad liked it if they were pretty and youngish".

The desperately shy young man had emerged, in his later years, as a hugger, a kisser, a hand-holder. While working on a series of etchings in 1993, later to be titled *The writer and his muse*, Arthur's muse was one Emma Walker, a beautiful young artist who assisted the printer, Diana Davidson. Several years later, beginning work on a series of etchings titled *The Prodigal Son*, Davidson produced another lovely assistant, Nerrissa Lea and Arthur fell to adoring her. As with so many young artists starting out he gave her great encouragement, to the extent of purchasing one of her paintings. While these encounters were innocent crushes, there are many stories involving Arthur's mid-to-late life magnetism, even down to a female doctor whom Yvonne felt did more hugging than pulse taking.

While passing flirtations came and went, there is a sense that Arthur may have been deliberately seeking his wife's reaction. According to Gabrielle Knox, a short-term studio assistant, Arthur kissed her in full view of Yvonne, well aware his wife was watching.¹³⁶⁸ On the night of his retrospective at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, in December 1993, at a time when every eye was on him, every camera pointed his way, Arthur walked around the show arm-in-arm with Anne Purves. Yvonne was left trailing behind. Discussing this incident Yvonne, as usual, attributed no blame to her husband. She described Anne Purves that night as being "in full sail" and Arthur "probably just being nice to his agent". Stuart Purves, her son, tended to agree with Yvonne: "maybe he was thanking Anne... my mother loved Arthur".¹³⁶⁹ The dynamics didn't go unnoticed: Barry Pearce, despite his own first night jitters, was struck by it, understanding how "irritating it must have been for Yvonne". He believed "Arthur could have easily extricated himself".¹³⁷⁰

¹³⁶⁵ "Arthur was a blessing in my life ..." Robert Langley interview.

¹³⁶⁶ "Anna Glynn credited Arthur for changing her life ..." Anna Glynn interview, Berry, October, 2000.

¹³⁶⁷ "And in the nineties, Hugh Webster considered him 'almost a saint ...'" Interview Hugh Webster, Suffolk, November, 2004.

¹³⁶⁸ "According to Gabrielle Knox" Interviews Sydney 2002, Katooma 2007. Gabrielle Knox, a boarder with the Boyds for nine months in London, in 1960. In 1985 after a chance encounter with the Boyds on a train, Knox was employed as Arthur's assistant during the filming of the Featherstone documentary. According to Knox there were only cuddles and a single kiss. However, the 'romance' was conducted on a "powerful psychic level" to the extent for Knox, that she remembers the world seemed changed, colours intensified. Such was Arthur's emotional pull that she followed his plea and traveled to England to see him, believing, he would, as promised, give her work as his assistant. While at 'Bundanon' he had paid her double the salary she requested and given her a painting and a sketch with his usual instruction - 'don't tell Yvonne'. However, when Knox arrived in London Arthur was so distant and non-committal she promptly returned to Australia.

¹³⁶⁹ "Stuart Purves, her son, tended to agree ..." Stuart Purves interview.

¹³⁷⁰ "The dynamics didn't go unnoticed ..." Barry Pearce interview.

According to all who knew Arthur, he defined generosity. Within his immediate family, his instinct for giving knew no boundaries. Lucy considered it a fault-line in her upbringing: "I have never had a job...dad was incredibly generous, he 'spoil' us, in both senses". She saw her "whole life orchestrated by him" and rated it a bad thing.¹³⁷¹ When questioned on the pros and cons of monetary support, Arthur replied: "I could tell them to get along by themselves but this would only give the children extra trauma, and I don't mind supporting them".¹³⁷² A long-time friend and admirer of Arthur's believed he manipulated Polly. "He would tap his pocket and say, 'Now behave yourself, Polly, I've got a pocket full of money here.'"¹³⁷³ Helena Boyd also believed he "controlled with large amounts of money". On the occasions when Helena refused Arthur's gifts he would reply "then I won't work any more".¹³⁷⁴ Helena considered "Arthur had an amazing ability to emotionally blackmail". She had seen him pacing the street for hours if Polly, even at the age of twenty-one, had not returned home at a particular time. "Yvonne would say, 'Leave it', but Arthur would eventually bully her into phoning." If Yvonne went somewhere without Arthur's knowledge, according to her daughter-in-law, she would be "interrogated". Helena saw the father in the son: "He was like Jamie ... they don't mind as long as they know". Helena believed Arthur had "so much emotion to express ... he would hold me so close he'd squash me".

But for all of Arthur's passion his inability to discuss his deepest feelings never abated - even with those closest, and even after Yvonne and Arthur withdrew into the Suffolk woods and Shoalhaven bush, further from the world and closer to each other. "The older we got, the better it got", Yvonne admitted, "but the older you get the less you can discuss certain things because they cause too much hurt...there are areas you don't tread on". Did Arthur ever consciously contrive to use his pictorial allegories and symbols as a means of emotional blackmail, or were they a completely necessary and unstoppable form of release?

Arthur was a passionate painter. He couldn't keep his hands off the paint and for that he had his critics. Yosl Bergner was amongst them. In his late seventies, Bergner had grown into the habit of holding his hand, like a plate, under his coffee cup, mindful of the drips. It was, he said, a demonstration of how he had tidied up his act since the days of ignoring knives and forks. Yosl, in his seventies, kept his compact studio perfectly ordered: clean brushes neatly stacked, small canvases regimented in efficient piles. Waving his arms around his pristine working area, he held forth: "Arthur's studio was huge ... I don't want a bigger studio. His canvases were too big. I never saw such a big easel than the one in Arthur's house. He stopped using his brushes ... what's wrong with brushes ... not enough patience, not enough discipline".

¹³⁷¹ "She saw her 'whole life orchestrated by him' "Interview Lucy Boyd, England, 29 June, 2000.

¹³⁷² "When questioned on the pros and cons of monetary support ..." ITA, Dorian Wild, 'Born to Paint' December 1993.

¹³⁷³ "A long-time friend and admirer ..." Leslie Jones interview., Arthur enjoyed a friendship from the late seventies onwards. His occupation as a CSIRO scientist greatly appealed to Arthur.

¹³⁷⁴ "On the occasions when Helena refused Arthur's gifts ..." Interview Helena Boyd,

Barry Pearce agreed. While he worried about “the potential cocktail of poisons which might get into his skin”, he also believed that Arthur, by painting with his fingers and the palm and the heel of his hand, had “given way to an impatience, an over-anxious urgency”. Pearce’s criticism was based on his own predilection, “...the brush is the most beautiful instrument of all art though the centuries ... no more eloquent or subtle process has been invented” and “Boyd was a master of it.”¹³⁷⁵

One example of Arthur’s finger painting is the series known as *The Four Times of Day, Pulpit Rock*. Comparisons to Cezanne’s *Mont Sainte-Victoire* and Monet’s *Haystacks* can be immediately drawn when the soaring triangular formation of the cliff-face of the Shoalhaven, crowned by the jutting Pulpit Rock, is captured under the changing light of a single day. In one version of the series Arthur admitted “all the marks were fingermarks”. His hands, he believed, could provide fine lines and full: “the paint flow[ed] better”, enabling “a great deal of sensitivity ... quite detailed stuff ...”¹³⁷⁶ His fingers, he felt, “kept it broad”, making it “almost like a watercolour”. At the same time he could get “a great variation in the foliage ... a kind of crispness that sometimes isn’t achieved with brushes – they get in the way”.¹³⁷⁷

But Pearce had good reason to worry about Arthur’s health. Arthur had taught his studio assistant, Anna Glynn, to paint with her hands. After a year she gave up the practice. “I didn’t like touching all those chemicals. By the end of that year all the skin peeled off my neck from the fumes from all the solvents”.¹³⁷⁸ While Arthur remained fastidious about never eating what his paint-laden fingers had touched, the toxins were being consumed through the pores in his skin. Arthur was aware of that but paint was an overriding passion and he couldn’t resist making contact. He once bemoaned, “in the end you’ve always got to use a brush”.¹³⁷⁹ But before that necessity intervened Arthur delighted in the intimate connection between paint and canvas; his fingers teasing the silky oils, stroking and smoothing wet into wet. He appeared to be affirming Sid Nolan’s belief that “love is a form of punishment”¹³⁸⁰ when he explained, “...anything that is intensely satisfying is sensual – the actual business of squeezing out tubes on your palette, digging out paint with a palette knife, or smearing paint on your hands, is very sensual. There is the pleasure afterwards, or the agony if it is no good”.¹³⁸¹ Paint on hands was, to Arthur, a mark of the trade. His niece, Celia Perceval, recalled Arthur’s greeting to her as a child, gathering her hands into his and making much of inspecting

¹³⁷⁵ “Pearce’s criticism was based on his own predilection ...” Quoted from eulogy given by Barry Pearce at Arthur Boyd’s Memorial Service at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, on Thursday, 27 May, 1999.

¹³⁷⁶ “All the marks’ Arthur admitted were ‘fingermarks’ ...” Arthur Boyd, ABC archives, ‘Rainbow Maker’ 13 February, 1994.

¹³⁷⁷ “At the same time he could get “a great variation in the foliage ...” Arthur Boyd to Janet McKenzie, Bundanon, 1993. *Arthur Boyd, Art & Life*.

¹³⁷⁸ “Arthur had taught his studio assistant” Anna Glynn interview.

¹³⁷⁹ “He once bemoaned, “in the end you’ve always got to use a brush”. Arthur Boyd, *Testament of a Painter*

¹³⁸⁰ “He appeared to be affirming Sid Nolan’s belief” Janet Hawley, *The Age*, 11 June, 1983.

¹³⁸¹ “...anything that is intensely satisfying is sensual ...” Sandra McGrath, ‘A fleeting vision’ *Aspect*.

every inch, even under the fingernails, for reassuring signs to confirm that she had been painting.¹³⁸²

Arthur played the canvas, the drumbeat of his fingers like the jazz rhythms he had knocked out on the Brown Room walls, or the 'tum te tum tum tum' he hummed as he listened to opera on his grandfather's radio in Rosebud. He had never had any formal piano lessons but, like his father, he could never pass a keyboard without his fingers itching to play it. Every one of his studios sported a stereo system fingerprinted with paint. He would play the musical alphabet from Beethoven, Bartok, Berlioz through to Wagner. It inspired him, just as it had Vincent van Gogh, who held the hope that "...in a picture I want to say something comforting as music is comforting".¹³⁸³

Arthur saw music. In *Three Reflected Rocks*; 'Bundanon', he explained that he painted it abstracting the rocks and uprights into notes of music. From Beaumaris onward, all of Arthur's houses boasted a piano, be it a Bechstein or Steinway Grand, or an upright. His first Steinway Grand was painfully and slowly purchased with part-time payments stretching well over a year; but, by the time Bundanon rolled around, a mere phone call to a dealer ensured that the precious instrument soon made the journey down the rocky and precipitous road that led to the house by the river.

Of those who heard Arthur play, Yosl Bergner was the least kind in evaluating his friend's raw talent: "He used to put on a face when he would play... he didn't *play* ... just bang". James McGrath thought Arthur's playing was "quite listenable". He'd play the piano like he was painting, he'd feel no constraints". The strains of his never-to-be-repeated compositions¹³⁸⁴ could be heard often, but at irregular hours, wafting from the Ramsholt church organ and floating down the hill, out over the marshes. No doubt it surprised passing swans and perhaps, too, the odd cleric, for eventually a lock was placed on the church door. Such was Arthur's need to express himself through music he broke the lock.

Since Arthur's stage sets for *Elektra*, it had been a long time between operas. However, at the end of the eighties Arthur was approached by poet, art writer and long-time friend, Geoffrey Dutton, to design sets and costumes for an Australian production of Mozart's *Magic Flute*, to celebrate the bicentenary of the composer. The story of the opera, of love daunted and love redeemed, of a long road leading the hero away from home, and the magic of art (a flute and a painting) as symbols of happiness, would have fitted comfortably in Arthur's 'spiritual glove box'.

¹³⁸² "His niece, Celia Perceval" Celia Perceval interview, 24 January, 2007. According to Celia Perceval this was Arthur's habit with every child who came into range.

¹³⁸³ "It inspired him, just as it had Vincent van Gogh ..." Quote from a letter sent from Vincent to brother Theo, September 1888, Arles.

¹³⁸⁴ "The strains of his never-to-be-repeated compositions" Compositions were recorded on two exceptions. At one point Arthur, with no knowledge of reading music, wrote a score. It was recorded by . Another was taped by Yvonne on a summer night in Bundanon. Arthur accompanies his score with a narrative which involves a heron and a frog. The heron is America, the frog the universal victim. It is an anti-war protest.

The role of Papageno, the clownish bird-catcher, was to go to Barry Humphries, if his voice proved worthy. On an appointed weekend the wives of Dutton, Humphries and the musician of the trio, Berndt Benthak, together with Yvonne, hovered about in the Bundanon hallway leading to the drawing room and the grand piano. Behind closed doors Humphries was being tested. After three quarters of an hour the doors swung open and a proclamation rang forth: "He can sing". Yvonne recalls: "Everyone was exalted". That weekend Arthur and the trio explored Bundanon searching for potential backdrops for the antipodean production. They agreed that the single-man's shack (a convict sandstone structure with a massive central chimney that stood in the field outside the main house), the vast curtain of Shoalhaven cliff-face, and a shaded pool in the depths of the bush, would all be perfect. After the group left, Arthur immediately went to work producing huge oils. They would never see the stage. Despite the efforts of the producer Greg Hocking, and the enthusiasm of Yehudi Menuhin who had agreed to conduct, the production was never realised. However, Arthur's paintings formed part of a 1990 exhibition at Fischer Fine Art in London.

Prince Phillip and the Queen were to find themselves once again confronted by Arthur Boyd in May 1988. The occasion was the opening of the new Parliament House in Canberra, opened by the Prime Minister, Mr. Bob Hawke. When Hawke spoke of "the ghosts of the past" perhaps a shiver coursed through the royal blood as they sat in the Great Hall dwarfed by Arthur Boyd's monolithic art work. Over a quarter century had passed since they had been confronted by blowflies and pubic hairs. Now they were presented with the beauty of the Shoalhaven bush, transferred from oil into coloured wool, wound and bound and draped into a tapestry. A forest of trees, eucalypt upon shining eucalypt, with its seemingly endless strains of colour and form, all drenched in Arthur's reservoir of blue.

Apart from the tapestry that hung in Britain's Coventry Cathedral, this was the largest the Queen and Prince had ever seen. It was composed of four separate vertical sections, measuring 20 metres wide and 9 metres high, making it the second largest tapestry in the world. The project began in 1983 with discussions between Arthur and architect. After the approval of Arthur's submission, he produced three paintings. After the chosen painting was approved, Arthur's collaboration with the Victorian Tapestry Workshop began. After the fabrication of the cloth, and the production of a cartoon of Arthur's painting, up to fourteen weavers were engaged full-time over a two-year period to complete the tapestry. They produced, on average, one square metre per weaver every five weeks. They copied the cartoon onto the warp, chose their particular coloured threads and, day by day, centimetre by centimetre, worked alongside Arthur's gigantic oil that stood by the looms, constantly referencing it. The final result was not so much a copy, but a close interpretation of Arthur's painting, to which another medium had added another dimension. Fittingly the weavers sewed their initials into the hemline.

Another very public honour had been the invitation extended to Arthur to represent his country at the 1988 Venice Biennale. There he showed arguably the most shocking and disturbing image he had ever painted: *The Australian Scapegoat*. It had been completed a year earlier in his studio in Suffolk. Peter Fuller was a dedicated admirer of Arthur's work, to the extent he believed the Nebuchadnezzar series to be "the most compelling series of canvases" to come from Britain in the 1960s.¹³⁸⁵ Fuller championed this painting, delighting in the connection to Holman Hunt's *Scapegoat*. Arthur had talked about a parallel he saw with the Australian legend of Simpson and his donkey and the propaganda generated by that image of a brave but peaceable man collecting the injured off the battlegrounds of World War I. But to view the painting one needs no pre-instruction. Its message, to borrow the phrase of the artist, penetrates the viewer 'from the boots up'. The writer, Edward Albee, when speaking of his work *Silvia*, a play about a man falling in love with a goat, offered: "a good play is an act of aggression ... an argument against the status quo". Arthur Boyd's *The Australian Scapegoat*, although an argument presented in a completely different medium, is nothing if not that.

This apocalyptic image offers a view of a desolate world. A dried-up river/sea bed exposes a gutted skate, a weeping goat, and an Australian soldier co-joined to many symbols: to the biblical, to the British (Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat*) and to Simpson riding his donkey across a desolate battlefield. The wheel, a symbol of civilisation, is broken. It has been reduced to a slime-green, rubber tyre and stands partly exposed, a half-hoop, in the barren, spent river.¹³⁸⁶ The soldier, booted and spurred and wearing the digger's slouch hat, is a half-caste: blue-black and white. Is it a reference to the scapegoats of Gallipoli? Or is it that Australian soldiers, although they fought alongside the British, were considered outsiders in the sense their blood was not true British blue. The Australian soldier's mixed blood appears to boil, his tongue and ears burn fire-red. His tongue, the skate's gaping wound, and the tongue of the goat all mirror the other in their triangular form. The skate and the goat bleed and cry. Man rapes nature. His seed is sterile. Across the blood red sea is the mouth of the Deben, and the ancient watchtower at Ramsholt stands once again as witness to invasion.

While some of Arthur's symbolic paintings produced an immediate understanding, after a hundred hours of taped interviews conducted in various locations, including Suffolk and Tuscany and days working with him, side by side, at the National Gallery of Canberra, poring over his works, the author, Janet McKenzie, felt it "a violation to probe ... the deeper meaning of his paintings". Just as Arthur perfectly depicted guilt and trespass on the canvas, he could create it in life. McKenzie admitted she found that working so closely with Arthur made it "crippling because it almost immunises you from being tough and critical of him".¹³⁸⁷ John Read, during the many days interviewing

¹³⁸⁵ "Peter Fuller was a dedicated admirer of Arthur's work ..." Peter Fuller. 'Gate to a Landscape: Arthur Boyd's Suffolk outback'. *Age* monthly review, October, 1986.

¹³⁸⁶ "It has been reduced to a slime-green, rubber type ..." In the English spring of 1978 a Greek oil tanker was wrecked off the Suffolk coast. It leaked oil continuously while many futile attempts were made to beach the wreck or to blow it up.

¹³⁸⁷ "McKenzie admitted she found that working so closely with Arthur" Jennifer Sexton, 'Palette of Pain,' *The Weekend Australian*, 4-5 November, 2000.

for the BBC film, *A Man of Two Worlds*, described Arthur's reluctance to discuss his powerful feelings as "hiding his personality" as "a cover up". Read admitted he "hardly expected a man who paints so passionately to be so tantalisingly modest and shy". Although Barry Pearce realised that Arthur's work involved "his biography, himself" he admitted there were some things that he couldn't "winkle out of him".¹³⁸⁸

Janet Hawley and Don Featherstone, both expert inquisitors, came away from Bundanon chastising themselves for not acknowledging the elephant in the room; not questioning Arthur on the most erotic, sexually obsessive works in the history of Australian art. Featherstone found that, although Arthur was quite happy to talk about his landscapes, to admit to 'potboilers', when he was led into the mythology and symbolism Arthur "found it difficult ... he wasn't madly comfortable". As a result Featherstone "didn't push into sexual areas". It left him feeling that the job was not completed, that it "might have been a flaw in the film." Veteran journalist, Janet Hawley, fell victim to Arthur's manoeuvring, too. Even though both writer and artist spent a good deal of time in each other's company, regularly meeting throughout the eighties and nineties, with Hawley generating both public and private support for the gift of Bundanon, Arthur never let his guard down: "He always made me feel awkward ... it felt like asking your own father or grandfather to tell you about sex". Whenever she began working around to a pointed question, Arthur sensed what was coming: "He'd suddenly ask me about my children or domestic or family situation, say something to throw me off."¹³⁸⁹ No one who knew Arthur, or his paintings, would buy the act, but neither could they penetrate it.

Painful exposure had always been limited to the canvas. By the time Arthur entered his sixties and seventies he had become a peerless prevaricator. Even without his warm charm to create confusion, or props to distract ("let's have a cup of tea") or a door to walk through ("I'll be back in a minute ... talk to yourselves")¹³⁹⁰ he could manoeuvre his way clear of a direct answer ("You know what I mean, you finish it for me ...").¹³⁹¹ If all else failed, he would make a shamelessly obvious U-turn, as this verbatim radio interview illustrates:

Interviewer: *Can we talk about love? Your paintings show a vulnerability about love and...love being threatened ... by authority ...*

Arthur: *Yeah ... ah... well... but... yeah... being... yeah... well... I think ... yes... it's threatened by authority but and it's not condoned by authority ... but that's in all sorts of ways ... not just a sexual way ...in all ways...If we get too close to a nation ...if you become too sympathetic to a nation that's disapproved of by the government ... you get wrapped over the knuckles because you'd be what the Americans used to call a commie when you were sympathetic to the plight of the Russians ...*

¹³⁸⁸ "He admitted there were some things he couldn't 'winkle out of him'. Bruce James interviewing Barry Pearce, transcript in AGNSW archives

¹³⁸⁹ "He made me feel awkward ..." Interview Janet Hawley, Sydney, July, 2006.

¹³⁹⁰ "Even without his warm charm to create confusion ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes

¹³⁹¹ According to journalist Janet Hawley this 'fill in the dots for me' was a much used tactic employed by Arthur during their many interviews together.

Interviewer: *What about love in a personal sense?*

Arthur: *Love in a personal sense is always ah ... I think what I've seen in films people seem to be always looking over their shoulders expecting to be interrupted ... or that's what it looks like ... I think that in a personal way I would have been threatened ... but not me particularly it would be fairly general ...*

Interviewer: *Any personal experience along those lines ...*

Arthur: *Well ... only funny ones ... no it's not that I don't want to share them ...*¹³⁹²

Even if the questions weren't ones Arthur wished to avoid, this was Arthur's way. He led his life by suggestion, example, and saved the expression of his tough views and strong feelings for the parables of his paintings. "Art doesn't alter things...it points things out", was the philosophy that drove his work and his life. If Lucy had a criticism of her father, it was his seeming ambivalence, never insisting upon his word being final. "I have ended up with someone a bit like Dad... a man who has never taken the responsibility for saying 'no'." A manifestation of Arthur's 'do not disturb' approach to life brought embarrassment to Lucy as a young girl. In the middle of a Covent Garden performance, Arthur needed to make an exit. Hemmed in on both sides, he climbed up onto the back of his chair, scouted out a wiggling pathway of empty seats, and strode across the tops of them to the back of the theatre.

While certain social aspects of Arthur's behaviour caused discomfort, Lucy always felt physically at ease with her father: "He was loving ... kind ... all round loving. He reared me for the first months of my life, just as he helped nurse Ellen ... walking her up and down the veranda at Bundanon ... always called her Bubs". Lucy believes her parents "didn't want to be parents, they wanted to be friends". In an effort to keep Lucy close to them while they stayed at Earle Park, they presented a plan for her to stay at Frensham. "They tried to be rational ... I remember they talked to me for hours ... arguing the point ... they wanted to feel they had my co-operation. They never made a decision clearly".

All three children, at some point, felt varying degrees of absenteeism as their parents travelled to and from Australia, but all agreed with Lucy's statement that their parents were "very loving, very respectful and tolerant of each other" just as they were of them. Only once did Lucy experience her father's anger: "He chased me around the table with his hand held up". If Lucy was throwing a tantrum, Yvonne would calmly say, "Now go out of the room and come back in and say it again".

Alexander, who never heard one word of anger from his grandfather, never forgot Arthur's response to a transgression. While staying in Suffolk, fourteen-year old Alexander took his grandparents' car for a joyride. At twenty miles an hour, attempting a bend, he lost control, turning the car three times, eventually landing upright in a meadow. Racing home, crying, incredibly distressed, a contrite Alexander confessed

¹³⁹² "Interviewer: Can we talk about love? Arthur Boyd to Jenny Brockie, 1 June, 1994. ABC archives, Sydney.

everything to his grandfather, with one exception. In an attempt to minimise his reckless behaviour he censored the fact the car had rolled. Arthur didn't reproach his grandson then, or after he inspected the car. But the following day, when Alexander had calmed down, Arthur simply put a firm arm around his shoulders, looked him hard in the eyes, and said: "Shame about those vandals who came and dented the top of the car". Alexander says his grandfather, by the gentle handling of the incident, made his point: "To this day I drive carefully".

They were the kind of grandparents who rarely ate porridge but ate it every day for breakfast when their grandchildren came to stay. They were nurturing: children felt secure in their presence. Sandra McGrath's daughters recalled the effect when the Boyds arrived as guests at Bundanon and walked into rowdy gatherings being whipped up by Whiteley, supported by Olsen. Even at their young age they felt that the group, somehow out of deference, instantly lowered the temperature, capped the wildness. Julia McGrath, from her "child's perspective", saw Olsen as "big and gruff" and Brett as "loud and opinionated, but very exciting"; Yvonne was "strong and kind" and Arthur "the kindest, most gentle and generous person". On one social get-together at 'Bundanon', with the Boyds now the hosts, Julia, at the age of thirteen, was thrown from her horse and broke her arm.¹³⁹³ While Tony McGrath drove to and from the hospital, it was Yvonne who cradled and comforted her while her mother stayed behind interviewing Arthur. When they arrived back, Arthur, always attracted to the wounded, sat Julia in a chair, wrapped her up in a blanket and immediately began to sketch her, capturing her forlorn face and, Julia recalled, "turning a bad day into a memorable one".¹³⁹⁴

Arthur's concern extended to every corner of his life. He would rather make himself look like a fool than allow anyone in his company to feel that way. None of Arthur's peer group ever offered an example of him pushing himself forward, of him placing career interests at the cost of friends. Yosl Bergner, while travelling the globe and later settling in Israel, never lost contact with the 1940s group of Melbourne painters and, after a half century of observation, judged Arthur to be "the only person who made a successful career without pushing anybody aside". John Brack believed the same to be true. He had observed Arthur in the 1940s and found him unlike "most artists", who were "given to a good deal of jealousy, back-biting and spite where other artists are concerned".¹³⁹⁵

Perhaps it was not only Arthur's kindness but a strong self-belief that strengthened these attributes. While Arthur acknowledged that he appeared humble he turned that notion on its head by admitting, "that's only because I'm vain to the point of smugness. If you're so sure that what you're doing is right, you can afford to be self-effacing".¹³⁹⁶ Polly

¹³⁹³ "On one social get-together at 'Bundanon' ..." After the McGraths sold 'Bundanon' they moved to Earle Park for a short period before it was sold.

¹³⁹⁴ "When they arrived back, Arthur, always attracted to the wounded ..." Letter to author from Julia McGrath, 27 June, 2001.

¹³⁹⁵ "John Brack believed the same to be true ..." Linda Van Nunen *The Australian Magazine*, 24-25 August, 1991.

Arthur Boyd Family, *Fame and Fear of Flying*

¹³⁹⁶ "While Arthur acknowledge he appeared humble ..." Ibid.

believed her father to be “a strange mix of ego and non-ego ... you have to have a very solid ego to be a painter like him and to have done what he did ... you have to have a very strong belief in yourself ... the need became the belief.” Yvonne would become exasperated by everyone going on about her husband’s “humility and modesty.” She maintained “It didn’t go deep. He had a terrific core of self-confidence ... a pretty strong sense of moral values”.

Arthur never became infected by the malady that strikes the well-born and the self-made. Despite his considerable wealth, Arthur never possessed what Simon Sharma described as “the certainties of the rich”. He never forgot his years of deprivation. He would wander down to London’s Swiss Cottage to his favourite Chinese restaurant, travelling with a wad of money held together by an elastic band, ready to roll off fifty pound notes to hand to the vagrants who frequented the area. If someone asked him to buy a raffle ticket he would buy the whole book and, having no wish for the prize, give a false telephone number for his contact. No one was immune; from a house-sitter at Grove Terrace who watched as Arthur covered the kitchen table in over one-thousand pounds in notes under the guise it would serve to pay for a small electric bill;¹³⁹⁷ to the electrician at Bundanon who attempted to refuse Arthur’s handful of money, by informing him that he could not take the money as Arthur pressed him to do, “for his kids”, because he had no kids. “Oh, but you will”, was Arthur’s retort.¹³⁹⁸

Jamie, like everyone else, couldn’t pigeon-hole Arthur. He saw him as patriarchal; as a materialist, and a socialist, with sympathy for the highest ideals of communism. If any label could stick to Arthur Boyd it might be ‘the quiet anarchist.’ Arthur determinedly went his own way. Peter Herbst believed Arthur had “no time for orthodox society” and, until Whitlam’s brief reign, Arthur had no time for government. He avoided tax when he could, particularly lamenting any money that would circle back to support machines of war. Barter suited Arthur’s politics: a one-on-one exchange. He swapped paintings for legal advice, architectural design in part payment on a house, and for legal and accountancy services. A painting for a pig would have been Arthur’s idea of a perfect world. As far as being a worthy citizen, as far as paying his dues after his children and immediate family were cared for, Arthur gave everything he owned to the government – his work, his land, and his house; the gift, as far as he could label it, for ‘the people of Australia’.

There are endless stories of large amounts of money being thrust upon the unsuspecting and, if the encounter occurred between family or friends, invariably the gift would come with the caveat, “Don’t tell mum ” or “Don’t tell Yvonne”. Yvonne admitted that her husband was liberal with money because “he knew we wouldn’t starve” but she added ruefully, “people took advantage”. And Arthur could work quickly. On one occasion in a Melbourne restaurant, within the time it took Yvonne to make a trip to the lavatory,

¹³⁹⁷ “...from a house-sitter ...” Garry Willis interview, Melbourne, November 2001. Artist, Garry Willis, was the house-sitter at Grove Terrace, London

¹³⁹⁸ “No one was immune ...”. Michael Buckpit, worked on the wiring of Bundanon for over four years and was always being called from his work when Arthur was in residence to “have a cuppa”. Buckpit interview, Bundanon, November 1999.

Arthur underwrote a proposed retrospective of his father's art pottery to be staged at the National Gallery of Victoria for ten thousand dollars.

It had proved harder to give Bundanon away. The premier of New South Wales, Neville Wran, and his wife Jill had been full of superlatives and hopeful sentiments the day they had flown down in a helicopter from Sydney with art dealer Rudy Komon for lunch. However, when Premier Wran received a letter in mid-June 1981, suggesting Bundanon might be gifted to the state, by December Arthur had not received a reply of any kind.¹³⁹⁹ What followed for the next eight years was a paper-trail of procrastination by government officials; first State, then Federal. At one point Prime Minister Hawke had promised to come as a guest to Bundanon to discuss the bequest. Arthur and Yvonne rushed around preparing for the grand occasion: buying sheets, bath towels, table napkins, silver cutlery and clearing out the bedrooms for his security men. By the time the house was overflowing with linen, Hawke cancelled.

Arthur and Yvonne had considered giving Bundanon back to the original inhabitants, but finally, in the Aboriginal spirit of non-ownership, they held it out to all the tribes. Arthur envisioned Bundanon as a melting pot; a place for the community to enjoy the bush and the river, and a place to be used as a forum where artists from every facet of the arts could get together with scientists. As Arthur simply put it, "I like the idea of people talking to one another". After years of the gift being ignored and rebuffed, Janet Hawley helped bring the matter to public and political attention. A cover story ran in *The Good Weekend*, March 1989 headlined: 'Estate of the Nation? The \$20-million haven Arthur Boyd is trying to give away – and how the government is trying to stop him'. After that fluttering of the pigeons, Hawley didn't let go. In October that same year, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the headline read, 'Boyd pleads for his gift to be accepted soon'. Arthur's quote led the story: "Please ... I urge the Australian Government to accept my gift, while I am still alive to give it ... I am in my seventieth year now, and I will be greatly saddened if the gift is not considered important enough to accept".¹⁴⁰⁰

In the same year David Chalker, the man who would later become the first director of the 'Bundanon Trust'¹⁴⁰¹ prepared a submission on Bundanon for Arts Minister Clyde Holding to take to Cabinet. In 1990, the Bundanon gift was accepted in principle. Paul Keating was Treasurer at the time and the 'Bundanon' submission was one among hundreds. According to Chalker, Treasury and Finance believed the proposal too ambitious and wanted it narrowed and defined. The stalling continued. Clyde Holding, the Arts Minister, however, was a determined champion of the cause since his initial

¹³⁹⁹ "However, when Premier Wran received a letter ..." Letter from David Chalker explains to Edmund Capon that Arthur has not received a reply from the Premier and seeks an appointment for Arthur and Capon to discuss Bundanon.

¹⁴⁰⁰ "After that fluttering of the pigeons, Hawley didn't let go...." Janet Hawley, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 October, 1989.

¹⁴⁰¹ "In the same year David Chalker ..." David Chalker and his wife Margaret lived at Bundanon 1982-1983, cataloguing the collection, managing the property and furthering Arthur's concept for Bundanon. Chalker facilitated Clyde Holding's initial visit to Bundanon. In April 1993 he was appointed first director of Bundanon Trust, and served in that office for over eight years.

visit to 'Bundanon', instigated in 1989 by David Chalker, then a director in the Federal Arts Department. In November 1992, with no end to governmental paper-pushing in sight Holding went to the Treasurer to plead the case. Keating, who had been labouring under the impression the gift had already been approved, instantly agreed.

In January 1993, Keating, the newly appointed Prime Minister, accepted the gift of "an Australian living arts centre" from the Boyd family. It included, apart from some 2000 art works, 8 kilometres of river frontage and a package of land in excess of 1,100 hectares (composed of freehold and special leases over crown land). Later, the gift would widen to include Earie Park 2.¹⁴⁰²

Nolan had died in 1992 at the age of 75 in London, far away from the "light ...and smell" of his avowed true home where he had wished to "spend [his] last minutes ..."¹⁴⁰³ Perhaps it was expediency or a convenient PR segue, but the Government, in one all-encompassing gesture, incorporated a thank-you to Arthur within a memorial service for Nolan. Most believed it inappropriate and according to Yvonne even Arthur himself, despite his great fondness for his sorely missed friend,¹⁴⁰⁴ felt something of the same. However, by this time Arthur had received a host of plaudits. In 1979 he was awarded an AO. In 1988 he was named Irish-Australian of the Year. In 1992 he received the AC. And, after the gift of Bundanon, the gongs kept ringing. In 1995 he was named 'Australian of the Year' by the Australia Day Council, the first time it had been awarded to an artist. His countrymen embraced him. He had become, as Barry Humphries playfully suggested, the Donald Bradman of the Australian Art World. In 1999 he was chosen by Australia Post as the first artist to appear on a postage stamp.

Despite glimpsing some of Arthur's demons, it remains impossible to reconcile the softly spoken, gentle, 'pixie-like' Arthur Boyd with the ferocious works of art that came pouring from his hands like blood from a stigmata. To be added to the mystery of this man is a highly idiosyncratic trio of objects that, together with his passport, were never allowed to stray farther than his bureau drawer or a bedside table, in whatever part of the world he laid his head. They join those symbolic trinities scattered through his lifetime of work.

The first was his discharge from the army, always at the ready to wave at any official in the event he should be called up again.

¹⁴⁰² "Later, the gift would widen ..." "On 30 January, 1994, Arthur and Yvonne gifted their half share in Earie Park 2 (owned jointly with the Nolan Estate) to Bundanon Trust (valued at \$180,000) and in September, 1994, the Nolan Estate gifted its half share (also valued at \$180,000).

¹⁴⁰³ "Nolan had died in 1992 ..." Interview Sidney Nolan, *The Weekly Telegraph* 'Plus'. Issue No. 63, 27 September, 1992.

¹⁴⁰⁴ "...his great fondness for his sorely missed friend ..." After Nolan's death Arthur told a radio interviewer, "I miss him enormously. I miss his straight out physical presence". ABC radio interview. AGNSW archives.

The second was the torn half of a fifty pound note, acquired sometime in the 1970s. When whole, it had been scooped from Arthur's pocket and pressed into John Hull's hand outside Grove Terrace, in thanks for some service, or simply because Arthur had the money and John did not. John Hull protested and, as the fifty pounds bounced backwards and forwards between them, Hull solved the problem by tearing the bill in two, keeping one half and handing the other back to Arthur. These two men, travelling through different hemispheres, would both unknowingly always keep this symbol of their close and complicated friendship; a memory of a selfless moment and an understanding perhaps, of what they had both shared and what they had both lost.

The third was a battered little book; its stitched seam had loosened over the years and its hessian binding unravelled, but its graphic and brightly coloured pages were still in remarkably good condition. It was the book Arthur had kept tucked safely away, with his favourite toys, in his father's bureau drawer, *The Story of Snips* from the 'Tiny Tots Series.' It had been a gift from Aunt Helen, given in those years before Guy grew to become her favourite. Small enough to fit in the span of Arthur's adult hand, somehow this little book had been preserved through the post-war years at Open Country, been carried on to Beaumaris, and survived the constant circling of the globe.

The protagonist, Snips, lives with parents who wear slippers, who gather by a cosy fire, and whose father has a pocket full of pennies. But Snips is a naughty mouse - late to wake and tormenting of his baby sister. Snips finds himself in so much trouble he is packed off to boarding school. There he is given a dunce's hat and is so unhappy that he runs away one night from the crowded dormitory. After Snip's traumas induced by his experiences in the larger world, he feels both the delight and the guilt of tears shed over his absence by his parents, siblings and friends. From that day forward Snips becomes a reformed character. Diligent, dependable, a tireless worker, refusing to notice his naughty friends who want him to come out and play at lesson time.

But what was the real story? Did the book tell of Arthur's life before the kiln fire? When his father's pockets were comfortably full, when there was order and cosy was a word that wrapped round the day? Did it whisper of the quiet safe house before his father's illness, his parents' sadness, and the frantic crowds? Did it have the colour and promise of those early years, before his mother's evening dresses, pressed so long unused in the wardrobe, resembled the dried flowers of an old corsage? Did the smell and feel of the book transport him back to the fireside and into the laps of his mother and father, when the pages were turned by their hands and the words read by their voices and he felt the full circle of both strong and gentle arms? The story of Snips stayed with Arthur through those hated years at Murrumbidgee State School, then travelled with him during the time at the paint factory, on into his incarceration in the army, and down through all those hard years, when so many of his friends kicked over the traces while he stayed steady, painting through the night, hauling clay through the day, working solidly away until he found, like Snips, that "... his shelf was filled with prizes".

FINAL CHAPTER

And all his years of exile fell away

– A.D. Hope, *Man Friday*

***“The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt; the strong-based promontory
Have I made shake and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine and cedar: graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth
By my so potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure ...”***
Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.

By 1998 Arthur's world was shrinking. That December in Ramsholt it was reduced to his small bedroom, where he lay, depressed and ill, a blanket pulled up over his head, his face turned to the wall.¹⁴⁰⁵ Soon it would be defined by the perimeters of a hospital veranda in Sydney, and later to a small patch of lawn by Brighton Beach, in Melbourne.

For a year Arthur had rarely made the journey across the Suffolk garden, from kitchen to studio. He had lost the ability to work. Helena was against Arthur leaving England in that January of 1999. "He couldn't put his clothes on the right way, and I said: 'Come on Dad, you shouldn't be going ...'" When it was obvious he couldn't be deterred, Helena promised, "I'm coming to see you". Arthur quietly responded, "Don't leave it too late." When Mary telephoned to wish her brother a safe journey, she told him "I'm coming to Australia." Again, Arthur's reply was pessimistic: "You'd better hurry up."

In mid-February, the official opening at Bundanon of the 'Arthur and Yvonne Boyd Education Centre'¹⁴⁰⁶ took place and, despite his weakened state, Polly could see her father's great need to go home. When Arthur addressed the well-meaning (his doctor and accountant among them) who believed he should stay put in England he would screw his face up tight, and repeat, "I've got to go". Polly believed that, if he could have mustered the strength, he would have shaken his fist for emphasis. "He knew he was dying ... he was determined to come back." Arthur had once said, "I think I could put up with anything except not seeing the Australian landscape".¹⁴⁰⁷

In January, when a two-car convoy wound down the British freeways from Suffolk to Southampton, it was the last time Yvonne and Arthur would make the journey together. Arthur's studio assistant, Hugh Webster, was behind the wheel of his old clapped-out Mercedes and his last memory of Arthur was of "fifty quid for petrol" pressed into his hand and a wonderful smile "the kind that goes with 'dear boy' ... it was magnanimous". Webster had seen a dramatic change in Arthur: he had become "vulnerable ... away with the fairies".

Arthur's serious drinking had begun in the 1980s but accelerated enormously in the 1990s. Mary, in some way, seemed to blame Sidney Nolan for influencing her brother: "Sidney liked publicity ... Arthur couldn't take it ... Arthur didn't need people like Sidney". Nolan had embraced his fame with an energetic delight but towards the end of his life alcohol had undermined his well-being. When observing his father, Jamie saw it as chicken and egg: Arthur became anxious, so he would drink; jumpy, so he would take tranquillisers. The medication and the alcohol fuelled his depression. Yvonne believed he drank "because the painting was gone". Without the painting he began to lose balance.

¹⁴⁰⁵ "...a blanket pulled up over his head ..." All who saw Arthur that Christmas recalled his demise. Beryl Reid's description was used here." Interviews were conducted with Beryl Reid in London 17 March, 27 June, 7 July, 16 July, 2000 and 10 August, 2000.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Describe building and intention of usage: text to come from Bundanon Trust

¹⁴⁰⁷ "Arthur had once said ..." Arthur Boyd to Janet Hawley. May 1998.

By the 1990s any Boyd was bankable, particularly a Shoalhaven landscape. Australians were clamouring for them. Arthur's response was, "If you are a painter and people want a painting it seems churlish not to do one".¹⁴⁰⁸ That year, down by the Shoalhaven river, surrounded by thirty local schoolchildren, at the age of 73, Arthur gave an art class. For his own grandchildren Arthur, always the entertainer, would draw his subjects upside down, or even from the point of view of his head between his legs.¹⁴⁰⁹ For this particular performance he threw himself into what he called his "Rolf Harris act". His strong, long fingers twirled through a palate dominated by cobalt blue and his hair-thin brush wound through the air in a rainbow's arch of yellow-red. After just seven minutes ... hey, presto! the conjuror has turned a small white board into a gum-covered, stone-strewn cliff falling into a swath of Shoalhaven River bordered by sand. As the audience of nine-year olds headed for home, images of cricket-hero or pop-singer faded as the dream of becoming a famous artist began to form. Arthur's last instruction may have rung in their heads: "Just do it quickly ... the quicker you draw, the more you can draw". As one boy drifted away clasping one of Arthur's sketches, Arthur pulled him aside, confiding: "I'll sign it for you, that way you can sell it".¹⁴¹⁰

Arthur was internationally acclaimed. In 1990 in *Nothing If Not Critical*, Robert Hughes drew a holy trinity of English, Irish and Australian gods: Arthur Boyd, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon.¹⁴¹¹ The 1993 Retrospective, when Arthur's life's work poured like a torrent down the walls of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, it prompted Hughes to announce in *Time* magazine that Arthur Boyd deserved "to be seen as one of the West's major living painters",¹⁴¹² and for the director of the AGNSW, Edmund Capon, to claim him as an Australian "icon" whose message had contributed to "the Australian artistic psyche".¹⁴¹³

In 1991 Arthur still held the desire "to paint something out of this world".¹⁴¹⁴ Yet, two years later, in the year of his retrospective, he had lost the will, admitting he had given up his dream: "The sad bit is that you can't do a great picture. I suppose it's not the sort of thing you should say – it's very defeatist. On the other hand it's fairly realistic, I

¹⁴⁰⁸ "Arthur's response was ..." *ITA*, Dorian Wild, 'Born to Paint,' December 1993.

¹⁴⁰⁹ "For his own grandchildren ..." Arthur's interest in viewing the world from all angles was shared by Willem de Kooning. He would always turn paintings around, believing they should work on all four sides. Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan, *de Kooning: an American master*: Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2005.

¹⁴¹⁰ "That year, down by the Shoalhaven river, surrounded by thirty local schoolchildren ..." Richard Glover, 'Boyd takes the art class. Awesome' *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 20 November, 1993.

¹⁴¹¹ "In 1990, in his book ..." Robert Hughes, *Selected Essays on Art and Artists*, *Nothing if not Critical*: selected essays on art and artists', Alfred A. Knopf, United States of America, 1990.

¹⁴¹² "The 1993 retrospective ..." Robert Hughes, 'Fear and Yearning', *Time*, 2 May, 1994.

¹⁴¹³ "The director of the AGNSW ..." *Testament of a Painter*

¹⁴¹⁴ "In 1991 Arthur still held the desire ..." Linda Van Nunen, 'The Grand Old Man of art' *The Australian Magazine*, 24-25 August, 1991.

think".¹⁴¹⁵ A year or so later Arthur would confide to a friend and painter: "Maybe you've only got so many poems in you".¹⁴¹⁶

Arthur was feeling his power waning. Around the same time, when Arthur and Yvonne visited Aunt Beryl's London's flat, chaos ensued. At some point in the evening Arthur wandered off to the kitchen to help himself to more of Beryl's 17-year old whisky. Neither women saw him leaving the flat, and when they finally noticed his absence assumed he had slipped out to the pub or to get some air. When he didn't return, Yvonne began searching the square and the streets nearby. Discovering he was nowhere to be found, she became frantic; running up and down the stairs of the old mansion, calling distractedly, crying: "I can hear him ... I can hear him somewhere" From the distance, Yvonne had heard the ghostly call of Arthur's voice. When she couldn't reach him, she began keening. The doors of neighbouring flats opened, concerned neighbours spilling into the hallway. Beryl had never heard such a "primitive, mournful cry" before.¹⁴¹⁷

Finally they found Arthur lying in the basement curled on the floor with a bruised arm. He had pressed the wrong button on the lift, stumbled out into the dark and fallen to the floor. Later, returning home to Grove Terrace, it was necessary for the taxi driver to help Arthur to his door. Once inside, Alexander had to almost carry his grandfather up the four flights of the narrow, winding Georgian staircase that led to his bedroom. As Alexander laid his charge onto the bed, the grandfather looked into the face of his grandson and, in a rare moment, revealed himself: "I don't want to be old".¹⁴¹⁸

In 1995, on hearing Arthur had been offered the honour of 'Australian of the Year' a concerned Mary called Yvonne in Suffolk. Both wife and sister had witnessed the strain placed on Arthur, first with the bequest of Bundanon, then the retrospective. Yvonne and Arthur had only just returned from Australia and Mary thought her brother was looking well. She urged them to stay in England, rest, and for Arthur to refuse the honour. She believed "he didn't have the constitution" to cope.¹⁴¹⁹ The solitary occupation of the "pouring out of his being in his art" had led to Arthur becoming a public figure and Mary believed it was a role ill-suited to him; it was "the antithesis of his nature".¹⁴²⁰ Whether it was due to Arthur's innate graciousness, or his ongoing desire to strengthen and protect Bundanon, or both, he 'shaped up' and accepted his accolade. Fear of flying spared him the ordeal of an acceptance speech at the award dinner, but the media were marking time. After arriving in Melbourne in early June Arthur was smothered by the glad-handing press.

¹⁴¹⁵ "Yet, two years later, in the year of his retrospective ..." Deborah Jones, *The Australian Magazine*, Deborah Jones, November, 1993.

¹⁴¹⁶ "A year or so later Arthur would confide ..." Arthur Boyd to Gary Willis, London, 1995. Interview May, 2006.

¹⁴¹⁷ "Beryl had never heard ..." Beryl Reid interview.

¹⁴¹⁸ "As Alexander laid his charge onto the bed ..." Alexander Boyd interview, Bundanon, 1999. Yvonne Boyd interview. Beryl Hartland interview.

¹⁴¹⁹ "She urged them to stay in England ..." Interview Mary Nolan. Also, Yvonne Boyd interview.

¹⁴²⁰ "The solitary occupation ..." *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 'Arthur and me' Sally Begbie, 1 May, 1999.

The gift of Bundanon had demanded more than the material. Anyone vaguely close to Arthur could monitor the strain induced by public attention. Among the many sacrifices Arthur made in his effort to shore up Bundanon was offering himself up to the relentless media attention. It now exploded with the acceptance of 'Australian of the Year'. There was little he feared more but he could never say 'no'. Yvonne continually watched as Arthur gave "more than he could afford to give". His painting, *The Crucifixion*, an agonised man suspended on a cross over the waters of the Shoalhaven, nudges a comparison. The long, slow torture reached its peak when television crews and photographers surrounded the house, a satellite dish was set up in the adjacent field, boat-loads of VIPs were ferried in. It was the day Prime Minister Keating arrived to bestow Arthur's honour, having travelled by helicopter and then barge, so he and his family could wander up from the river and through Bundanon's white picket front gate, in a casual sort of media-driven way, to deliver congratulations to Australia's favourite son. To fortify against shyness and the trauma of speech-making, Arthur grasped tighter and tighter to the glass in his hand.

From this point on whenever Arthur moved there were commitments: film and radio interviews, journalists, art curators, people to be schmoozed into supporting the bequest, crowds trailing through the house and gardens, journeys between Melbourne and Sydney, regional art shows to be opened, awards to be accepted, grand lunches with governors, politicians and power brokers. The observer became the observed. There had been little escape in the clutch of years preceding the honour, and now there was none.¹⁴²¹ A television crew would track him down in England, crowding out his tiny Suffolk cottage, their mission being to film Barry Humphries quizzing Arthur on how it felt to be 'Australia's Legend' for his fame was now heralded by land, sea and sky with his face emblazoned on an Australian postal stamp. Yvonne would later admit, in the tone of a failed bodyguard who had not spotted the lethal shooter, "We did get out of some things that sounded absolutely menacing, but there were times I couldn't protect him".

She had been unable to protect him from the attacks that she began witnessing after their return to England in 1996. Yvonne would continually reconstruct that night in the Suffolk cottage, trying to understand exactly what she had seen. Arthur, suffering from high blood pressure, had been experiencing heart fibrillations and was taking several forms of medication. Around ten o'clock that night, he prepared for bed, put on his dressing gown, and wandered out into the sitting room where Yvonne was watching the British Film Awards. The television was roaring away as Arthur sat down on the couch and held out his hand, asking Yvonne to chose the pills he should take. Suddenly, with the speed of a temper tantrum, the pills were flung through the air and Arthur's body began to violently shake. During this massive electrical discharge, Arthur's eyes didn't register his thrashing dance; instead, they were focused, unblinkingly, on something out

¹⁴²¹ "There had been little escape ..." Anna Glynn, Arthur's assistant recalled: "Everybody thought they were the first people to turn up – you could have passed the baton at the gate." Interview October, 2000.

of range. Epilepsy crossed Yvonne's mind: "It was very frightening ... his eyes were very frightening ... I hadn't the faintest idea what it was".

After managing to pull Arthur down onto the rug and lay him on the floor, she dialled 999. It was a Sunday night and outside empty blackness stretched for miles. It was not until the ambulance arrived half an hour later that Arthur's breathing had calmed and he could speak. After a couple of days in nearby Ipswich Hospital, he was discharged by a heart specialist whom Yvonne thought "didn't seem terribly serious about anything". One thing that doctor and subsequent doctors would urge was abstinence, warning that alcohol would exacerbate the problems of Arthur's narrowing arteries and weakening heart. However, Arthur had been exposing himself to toxins long before alcohol became a constant; a lifetime spent breathing poisonous fumes, absorbing poisonous minerals.

In 1997 when Arthur arrived back at Bundanon his studio assistant at that time, Evelyn Young, saw an enormous change. "He didn't paint, he would come for just an hour, he just wanted to talk, he wanted to be distracted. Occasionally he would finish a painting. He always wanted to paint. He said he would never stop ... even if he didn't sell he wouldn't stop." Yvonne kept as many visitors (official and unofficial) away as she could, but family slipped under the radar; Aunt Beryl, her sister Carol and her family, among them. In that autumn Rob and Margot Beck were guests. Often Arthur would wander down in the late morning, barefoot, wearing only a nightshirt, looking for a drink. The hide and seek of wine bottles had become a losing game. Yvonne was at Arthur's disposal twenty-four hours a day; her sleep disturbed, her days spinning between telephone and visitors while her eyes rarely left her husband.

When Tim and Betty Burstall had met Arthur and Yvonne off the train in Melbourne, it was with a shock that they registered the figure walking in the shadow of Yvonne: his gait was different, he was unsteady on his feet, his shirt was out of his trousers and his fingers were twirling the tail of it, like a baby with a security blanket. During the time the Boyds stayed with the Burstalls at their house in Fitzroy (just a few blocks away from where Yvonne and Arthur shared their wartime flat above the garage) Arthur drank excessively. He knew the consequences. At the beginning of January 1996, when asked if he was in good health, he replied, "I would be if I didn't drink so much".¹⁴²² Betty was full of admiration for Yvonne: "She must have felt an enormous strain, but she was terrific, very positive".

Arthur's habit of welcoming any stranger who drove up to the Bundanon gates, offering them cups of tea or lunch, had to be constantly curtailed. Arthur's hospitality was so overwhelming a stranger could never guess at the strain. To promote the idea of Bundanon, apart from participating in promotional functions and delivering required speeches, Arthur and Yvonne accepted that their presence would be required on open days. The Bundanon Trust had made them 'artists in residence' for life. Under the deed of occupancy drawn up by the Commonwealth, they had residential rights for their children and grandchild in return for \$1 per annum, if and when it should be requested.

¹⁴²² "At the beginning of January 1996 ..." Arthur Boyd, Chalker interview

Arthur and Yvonne knew that the days of feeling truly at home at 'Bundanon' were gone, but its success meant everything to them. If a tour was going through and Arthur was working in the studio he would put on a show, answer everyone's questions, demonstrate his techniques. When they left, he would turn to his assistant, Evelyn and ask, "Was it all right? Did I do all right?"¹⁴²³ When visitors stayed for lunch or dinner Arthur would race around as he had all his life, filling plates, ferrying drinks, attending to the needs of all, his energy never faltering; but when they left he would just slump. Sometimes, if Arthur felt exhausted at the prospect of another group of sightseers he would sneak away. His escape route was out of the studio to the left, then a right past the big hedge at the side of the house, right again onto the front terrace, through the door, and up the stairs to his sanctuary. To ensure they weren't caught in the downstairs kitchen having breakfast in their dressing gowns while a horde of people trooped past, the upstairs veranda became a hidey-hole complete with a toaster and a kettle and all the necessary provisions

But during that fierce year of public attention, towards the end of 1995, they purchased a refuge slightly farther a field on the coast at Culburra, near the mouth of the Shoalhaven. It was a compact, modern, architect-designed wooden house sitting on a high rise overlooking the ocean. The block was small, forty-feet wide, and so they bought the two adjoining blocks and planted them out with masses of tea-trees.¹⁴²⁴ They used the house that year, and in 1998 when Bundanon was busy with lots of activities. They would walk along the beach and swim when the ocean wasn't too dangerous. For the rest of the time they lent the house to friends and staff at Bundanon.

This 'open house' attitude extended to every house they ever owned. Many old faces were among those given keys to doors: Barry Gordon from the early days at Open Country stayed regularly in Suffolk; Denison Deasey, on extended leave, lived for many months at Grove Terrace; and Max Nicholson would be given carte blanche at Hampstead Lane. An arrangement had been made with the Australia Council's Visual Arts Board to use Paretairo for a major part of every year as a study centre for visiting Australian artists and writers. The Boyds may have spent a king's ransom on houses but there wasn't one they didn't share or give away.

In the past, Jamie had watched his father look around for subject matter, "simply to enjoy the painting". Stuart Purves, knowing Arthur was searching for inspiration, approached Hendrik Kolenberg asking for suggestions. Kolenberg's choice of *The Prodigal Son* held immediate appeal and, during the frenetic year of 1995, with uninterrupted work time impossible to find at Bundanon, Arthur hid away from journalists and ringing phones in serviced apartments in McMahon's Point, Sydney, close to the printer Diana Davidson and her studio. For two weeks, every morning, he would arrive to work on the etching plates in her summer room. After Davidson learnt to

¹⁴²³ "When they left ..." Interview Evelyn Young, 2000, Bundanon. Evelyn was Arthur's assistant in 1994 and 1997.

¹⁴²⁴ "The block was small ..." By 2007 the two blocks devoted to tea-trees would be built upon.

hide the booze, Arthur would work through until lunchtime and on occasion return to the studio in the afternoon.

The following year, Purves and Davidson followed Arthur to England with the printed etchings to be signed.¹⁴²⁵ They rented a serviced flat in Kensington, with access to the private gardens of Ovington Square. There they set up a table and chair and Arthur would come and sit under the trees while he tackled the task of repeating his signature almost a thousand times. During one of these sessions it began to rain. As they took shelter back in the flat Purves produced a series of small copper plates he had optimistically packed in the hope Arthur could be convinced to attempt another series. "Yeah, fantastic", was Arthur's response, but he declined to use a scribe, he wanted something stronger with which to gouge the copper. Davidson raced to Harrods and bought knitting and darning needles while Purves raided the kitchen drawers breaking knives and forks in half to achieve a jagged edge. Holding a bunch of darning needles Arthur knelt down on the floor in front of the plates lined up in a row, and with continuous fluid strokes floated an image of a curving twisting wave morphing into a tidal sweep of his symbolic images. This small series, titled *The Journey*, can be read both as a whole, or as separate works.

During that summer, at a family dinner in Tuscany, apropos of nothing, Arthur made a definitive (therefore rare) statement: "There is *only* work". Jamie was taken aback and Yvonne made no comment. Jamie was of the opinion that his parents' relationship "could encompass" that remark. What held this enduring relationship together? Yvonne offered, "It is breadth of thought ... and, in the end, love."

On a visit to Bundanon in 1988, Margot and Rob ('Bunny') Beck had found Arthur fit and well. One evening Rob played an impromptu piece on the piano. When he finished, applause erupted from the hallway. So as not to disturb him, Arthur and Yvonne had snuck down and sat side by side on the staircase steps, listening quietly and appreciatively to the music. On the Becks' second visit in 1997, despite Arthur's alcohol dependence and his weakening body, Margot still found "the same lovely, gentle Arthur, always wanting to look after everybody before himself". But at the end of these days, Arthur would need help to climb the stairs to bed. Margot and Rob were given the room across the hall from Yvonne and Arthur's bedroom, and many of their nights were broken by Arthur's loud calls of distress. The sound was different, more alarming than the cry of a sleeper trapped inside a nightmare: definite, sustained. The first night the Becks woke to these cries, Margot didn't recognise the tenor of Arthur's voice: "It was aggressive". She wondered if he would live until the morning.

The following day Yvonne ignored the night before, batting away any inquiries. Adept as Yvonne was at hiding her exhaustion and worry, one evening, at the end of a particularly gruelling day Margot found her sitting alone, hidden away on the downstairs terrace in the half light with a glass of wine in her hand, "looking pretty down about everything".

¹⁴²⁵ "Kolenberg's choice of *The Prodigal Son...*" insert Kolenbergs quote here

During those restless nights at Bundanon, Margot had heard Arthur “calling out for dead people”. Arthur had been experiencing bad nights for decades. In the past his work had got him through the night: his fears for the world, for his family, for himself, exorcised by pencil and paper. “When I’m going to paint, I think for quite a long time before – in bed at night – and do a whole lot of drawings and see if there’s something ... I might latch on to”.¹⁴²⁶ As early as the 1960s, mogadon and temazepam had been taken regularly. By the 1980s the drugs had lost their potency. By Arthur’s reckoning, his sleep was broken “every three minutes”,¹⁴²⁷ “I wake up in the night with nightmarish thoughts.”¹⁴²⁸ He described those fearful times as his “ghastly struggle with the black Gods.”¹⁴²⁹ Jamie believed: “My father had a noble fear ... out of an intense awareness of what it is to be alive... death was too raw, too mysterious ...he couldn’t deal with it on a mundane level.”

Yvonne recalled one night Arthur struggling out of bed, demanding, shouting that he needed Doris. Brushing Yvonne aside, he displayed all the insistence of a small, spoilt child: “Where is my mother, where is my mother ... *I want my mother*”. To this point, Arthur had always called “Where is my wife?” In a small boat ferrying him and Yvonne and Lucy to Heron Island in the early 1970s Yvonne had disappeared below deck for a brief time and Arthur created a ruckus, insisting his wife be located. Later in that decade, when Yvonne made a mercy flight home to her ailing mother, Arthur, back in London, would telephone around Melbourne if he couldn’t find her at the expected number. Beryl believed Arthur worried more about his wife than his children, observing his anxiety even when Yvonne left a room: “Where’s Yvonne ... Where has Yvonne gone?” Yvonne was the point of Arthur’s compass. When he circled the galleries with Nolan on Thursdays he would always need to know Yvonne’s movements, her whereabouts. Equally, Yvonne would need to know his. Helena believed “Arthur wanted Yvonne’s attention all the time. There was something unresolved between them. He needed more physical attention I think”.

Although Yvonne had spent these last years desperately trying to keep Arthur’s condition from everyone, when Bill Lasica asked Yvonne in 1997, “Is Arthur painting?” she opened up with a defeated: “Oh, Bill, he’s bugged”.¹⁴³⁰ Lasica knew Arthur as “a very self-critical man.” He saw that when Arthur believed he was no longer painting good paintings he began to lose energy. Lasica summed it up in this order: “He was tired, disenchanted and drank too much.” Perhaps it was disenchantment that had caused the first domino to fall. In 1982, film-maker Don Bennetts had bumped into Arthur on a wintry night on a Toorak street. Arthur had just dropped off a painting to Joe Brown,

¹⁴²⁶ “In the past his work ...” Thomas, Laurie. *The Most Noble Art of them all*. University of Queensland Press, Queensland. 1976.

¹⁴²⁷ “By Arthur’s reckoning ...” Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹⁴²⁸ “I wake up with nightmarish thoughts ...” Arthur Boyd, Janet Hawley, ‘Good Weekend’, *Age Magazine*, 4 March, 1989.

¹⁴²⁹ “...his fearful struggle with the black Gods ...” Ibid

¹⁴³⁰ “Although Yvonne had spent these last three years ...” Interview, Bill Lasica, Sydney, 21 February, 2003.

and as he stood, seemingly shrinking in the rain in an overcoat that seemed a size too large for his stooped frame, he told Bennetts: "You know Don, art is just a racket".¹⁴³¹ That sentiment re-emerged in 1985, when Arthur confessed to a journalist:

The terrible thing about painting is that you are making furniture. Describing it that way isn't insulting to painters, it's a reflection on the attitude of the commercial world. The rare ones who buy something because they love it are very few. Most people buy a painting as an investment.¹⁴³²

Arthur suffered at least one unobserved attack. Polly had discovered her father sprawled across the small corridor leading from his bedroom in Suffolk. Yvonne was present for the second observed attack, "horrible, unexpected", at Culburra. Their bedroom occupied a tiny attic that stood up, on the roofline, like a rounded hood. That morning had been peaceful, pleasurable. While Arthur dozed, Yvonne negotiated the small, steep spiral staircase down to the kitchen and prepared an unusually big breakfast of bacon and eggs. They had sat in the sun and watched the ocean, and after eating and taking his blood-pressure pills, Arthur went back to bed; by 1997 this was a common occurrence. Then came the sound of Arthur's groaning. This didn't immediately alert Yvonne to a seizure: in Suffolk Arthur he had made no noise at all. By the time she had raced up the stairs, Arthur was crushed on the side of the bed pressed up against the attic wall, wildly shaking. Clamouring into the bed beside him, Yvonne wrapped her arms around him, clasping him tight in a futile attempt to calm his moaning and stop the shaking. For a terrifying time "he just wasn't there at all."

By 1998 it seemed to Jamie that his father was unable to ever pause or relax; constantly moving, to no end. Helena maintains Arthur worked himself, and drank himself, to death: "Once Arthur didn't have painting he was stuck with reality." Yvonne admitted that "he certainly never rested ... he felt responsible for everyone". She alone knew the myriad demands made upon him, and the results of Arthur's inability to ever say 'no,' as she once despairingly revealed: "Everybody always expects that Arthur can do it, and Arthur can't do everything."¹⁴³³ Jamie believed his father always battled against depression and work had kept it at bay. Mary saw darkness behind her brother's drinking, telling Jamie she was convinced Arthur "just wanted to go into oblivion in a quiet way".¹⁴³⁴

In these last years, even though Yvonne would not admit it to herself at the time, she knew Arthur's increasing inability to paint was a tolling bell: "He had to paint ... it was more like I have got to eat". Of all the possible reasons for Arthur's decline, perhaps this is closest to the core: his continuing inability to pick up a brush. He was Prospero with

¹⁴³¹ "In 1982, film-maker Don Bennetts ..." Interview Melbourne 1999. The author is indebted to Don Bennetts who, at the onset of the project, gave many hours of his time to share his knowledge of the Australian art world. At the time of bumping into Arthur, Bennetts had just finished filming a Sid Nolan documentary at Bundanon, titled, *An Australian Dream*.

¹⁴³² "Most people buy a painting as an investment." Lynne Bell, *Woman's Day*, 5 August, 1985.

¹⁴³³ 'Crowning a half century as an artist.'

¹⁴³⁴ "She alone knew the myriad demands made upon him ..." Interview Frank McDonald.

¹⁴³⁴ "...Arthur, 'just wanted to go into oblivion in a quiet way.'" Interview Jamie Boyd.

his broken staff. Jamie had seen his father conjure the magic in the past: "When other things weren't available in unhappy times ... he channelled it ... he'd fall back on work". Polly, too, saw her father's work as his release: "He wouldn't tell people his feelings, he'd paint them." Arthur described painting as if it were key to his health, a vital prescriptive: "Everyone has private agonies. You can work them out of your system ... immerse yourself in your work. That's how you get through it. I have a burst of straight landscape stuff, then a burst of something that is eating into me."¹⁴³⁵ However, at some point, Polly believed that "the art became secondary...Dad wanted to save the countryside, he wanted to leave a place that would last".

Arthur's fear for the environment was deeply ingrained. In 1989 the destruction of the Grange was on his mind. He had never ceased feeling "so sad"; the memory would bring tears to his eyes and, although he tried to push it aside, anger still simmered.¹⁴³⁶ Just as environmentalists bewailed the ancient rainforests of Queensland felled for sugar cane and the aboriginals mourned sacred sites destroyed for uranium, throughout Arthur's life he had watched the land that connected his life being drilled, bulldozed, wrecked: the orchards and farms and gardens of Murrumbidgee subdivided, the outlying hills of Bendigo and Ballarat dug for gold and poisoned by cyanide, the countryside of Berwick and the Grange destroyed for blue metal, the church at Yallourn, and the entire town, obliterated for coal, his grandparents' Rosebud cottage knocked down. And finally speedboat engines and mining shovels threatening to slowly and insidiously dig the Shoalhaven's grave.

In 1997 Arthur was telling anyone who would listen: "You cannot *not* look after a place like this – it's so rare."¹⁴³⁷ The New South Wales State Government turned a deaf ear. In 2006 plans were approved to pump as much as 105 billion litres a year from the river to supply the ever-increasing population of Sydney. "Man is always trying to push against and around the landscape, Arthur once said, "it confuses everything".¹⁴³⁸ Perhaps Arthur's seizures, the alcohol and the drugs were merely a by-product of a deal he had made. Perhaps, like Prospero, in the interest of shoring up Bundanon, Arthur had sacrificed his 'most potent art' for the establishment and conservation of another kingdom.

Yvonne said, "Sometimes he had to paint quickly, for money, and he hated that idea."¹⁴³⁹ The 1990s became the peak of that sometime. In 1984 he had admitted a great deal of the paintings propped up in his Bundanon studio were "studio seconds" done "to pay the rent".¹⁴⁴⁰ According to David Chalker, Arthur had been convinced if he kept buying more surrounding land, if he kept making the gift bigger and better, the

¹⁴³⁵ "I have a burst of straight landscape stuff ..." Dorian Wild, *ITC*, 'Born to Paint', December, 1993.

¹⁴³⁶ "He never ceased feeling 'so sad' ..." Arthur Boyd *The Sun-Herald*, February 5, 1989. "Oh, it makes me so sad ... there's no point in being angry ... but it still rankles."

¹⁴³⁷ "By 1997 Arthur was telling anyone who would listen ..." ABC interview Marius Benson, 1997.

¹⁴³⁸ "Man is always ..." Arthur Boyd to Sandra McGrath, *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 24-25 June, 1978.

¹⁴³⁹ "Yvonne said ..." Yvonne Boyd interview

¹⁴⁴⁰ "In 1984, he had admitted" Janet Hawley interview 8 June, 2006.

government would be more receptive. This beneficence achieved the opposite effect, making the package more unwieldy, the government's responsibility greater and therefore less attractive to accept. During the 1980s, Arthur's bills burgeoned. Apart from the gift of houses to the immediate and widespread family, there were maintenance costs on overseas properties and particularly the vast outgoings on Bundanon and Riversdale. The farm needed to be equipped and run. Apart from bad roads and bad seasons there were always unexpected pot holes into which money needed to be poured, with one farm manager demanding 'long-service leave' of forty thousand dollars to depart Arthur's employ. Arthur revealed a degree of panic and pressure during the eighties, when he confided to Chalker, "They don't realise it's all in this wrist; once this doesn't work anymore there's no more money." In 1993 Arthur asked Chalker to find a studio assistant: "He was frustrated that he didn't have the physical capacity to sustain his work".

The Wimmera landscapes Arthur painted himself, to order, while living in Canberra.¹⁴⁴¹ But as the Shoalhaven landscapes became popular and dealers became more and more insistent, unlike the sixties, when John Hull had been berated by Arthur for leaving a smudge mark on a painting, working practices changed dramatically. As demand increased, Arthur fell back on assistants to help produce his work.

Helena believed "people wouldn't give him a break. He was a fanatical painter but even he couldn't keep up the pace ... to make money, to please people". Yvonne regretfully admitted: "If someone ordered them he'd supply them. I hate to say it ... it was done with a certain eye to churning it out. A bit of a formula". Jamie called them "the Shoalhaven quickies." Jamie, by the end of the eighties, had learnt that "selling a painting is a great stimulus ... there's a tendency to keep reassuring yourself by producing easily saleable work." Naturally enough, criticism of Arthur's work came swift on the heels of the flooded market. In 1994, Robert Hughes spoke of "real clinkers among the more recent work".¹⁴⁴² Arthur confessed, "you get trapped ... if something becomes extremely popular ... if it's got a name on it ... Shoalhaven ... you can sell it, but you can't sell anything else."¹⁴⁴³ Polly's summation: "Dad became an industry".

Denis Savill, Arthur's most energetic art dealer, had been known to drive away from Bundanon with a trunk load of Shoalhavens. Savill saw in Arthur's work "a simple formula ... that the average Australian can identify with immediately". The small, relatively affordable Shoalhaven oils, mere shorthand for the larger works, were easily identifiable; Barry Pearce rating them "pretty harmless little pictures that people loved to hang on their wall because the blue looked really nice".¹⁴⁴⁴ Although Arthur had practised 'row' painting with his Wimmera works many years before, he now employed assistants to continue the technique; small boards, painted in line – slices of sky, cliff, river – one, two, three.

¹⁴⁴¹ "The Wimmera landscapes Arthur handled himself ..." Bob Dickerson interview. "We went to visit Arthur in Canberra and he was copying the Wimmera things out of a book."

¹⁴⁴² "In 1994, Robert Hughes ..." op cit

¹⁴⁴³ Arthur confessed, "you get trapped ..." Dorian Wild, *ITA*, December 1993.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Barry Pearce interview December 2000, Whale Beach.

At Paretaio, Ben Birdsall, the caretaker and Arthur's assistant in the nineties, watched Arthur's unhappiness and listened to his rationalisation about the age-old precedent of studio apprentices: "he thought it perfectly acceptable, a renaissance creed". Birdsall believed "Arthur could teach anyone ... you could see Arthur knew exactly what he wanted to do ... it was a sort of osmosis". A copy of the book, *The Artist & the River*, still floating around Paretaio in 2003, read like a message pad. Thumb and finger marks, etched in paint, covered the pages marked in brown tape: 130, 134, 136, 140, 148, 186, 202, 214, 220, 223, 270.

In Suffolk, Arthur's contribution to Hugh Webster's 'assisted' paintings was, according to Webster, "either very little, or a lot".¹⁴⁴⁵ This practice continued with assistants everywhere. Gallery owners would phone Italy as they would Bundanon, saying, "I'd like number 130, do one of those".¹⁴⁴⁶ Or: "I want the water of page 5 and the figure of 10",¹⁴⁴⁷ at times detailing, "Put a cockatoo here or a black swan there".¹⁴⁴⁸ James McGrath believed Arthur was hoping his assistants "wouldn't make it that good so he would have to think about how to fix it, introduce a variable into the formula ... have to resolve the piece by an enormous creative leap". Just as Arthur would say to McGrath, "Put something in ... I insist ... put in a bird or a tree", Arthur began asking visitors to his studio to add their brush strokes to his paintings, or to tell him what they would like to see him add. Most declined, in disbelief.

At some point in her father's slow exit Polly felt that he "stopped talking". At his second to last Christmas, as the family gathered in Polly's home in Gisborne, Victoria, she gave Arthur a small piece of clay to mould. "In seconds he had made a little bear and it was one of the most expressive pieces I have ever seen. I think he was saying, 'We're all animals ... all part of the same kingdom.'" This tiny, simple piece, small enough to sit in the cradle of a hand, is an amalgam of strength and weakness. In the eyes and mouth, with a few quick strokes of Arthur's fingernail there is a vastness of feeling, both resigned and forgiving.

Did Arthur believe in oblivion, or was he just too polite to presume there was anyone at home? Given Arthur's devotion to the idea of metamorphosis, he may have embraced the notion of continuance. The scarab, the ancient symbol of eternal existence, of renewal of our own substance, appears throughout Arthur's life work, on the bodies of his lovers and victims. By endowing human characteristics not only to the landscape, but myriad species of life forms, Arthur enforces the notion that humankind is inextricably aligned to the animal, vegetable, mineral chain. As such, human bodies become "containers for flowers" and the half arcs, the physical and the spiritual, the bent tree bough and the rainbow, together form a cycle of hopeful regeneration.

¹⁴⁴⁵ "In Suffolk, Arthur's contribution ..." Interview Hugh Webster.

¹⁴⁴⁶ "Gallery owners would phone Italy ..." Interview Ben Birdsall, 'Paratio', Tuscany, 4 May, 2003.

¹⁴⁴⁷ "James McGrath believed Arthur was hoping ..." Interview James McGrath. "I used Mum's book as reference."

¹⁴⁴⁸ "...at times detailing ..." Interview Anna Glynn.

In the *Pulpit Rock at Four Times of Day* series we see Arthur's church, his daily times of worship, and experience his sense of emanations from the rock and the power he felt flowing from the river. In the cloistered isolation imposed when the river was in flood, Arthur felt "a presence, a force to contend with".¹⁴⁴⁹ When asked about his 'religious' crucifixion studies, a his and hers, with the female body resembling the curvaceous body populating his works of the sixties, Arthur replied, "I am a great believer in the life force; in that sense I am very, very religious".¹⁴⁵⁰ In his last painting,¹⁴⁵¹ the Shoalhaven becomes the River Styx, and a boat and its passenger approach a dark womb-like cave formed by the rocks at the foot of the cliff. At the entrance to this cave, in another late painting, Arthur envisioned a loving father, placing tender hands upon the shoulders of his burdened son.

Arthur would contradict himself about his belief in an after-life. In his seventieth year he told Peter Fuller, "I can't remember ever having a belief in God. I didn't think it was necessary, it just didn't crop up".¹⁴⁵² At seventy-one, Arthur said he was religious, but not about "religion." He felt "a great bewilderment... if there's good, then the good is not good enough and the bad is so frightful that you can't imagine how it got there".¹⁴⁵³ At seventy-three, on the night of his retrospective, he told Phyllis Boyd, "You know, Phyllis, I'm so interested you've become a catholic, I'm interested in becoming a catholic myself". Phyllis, "terribly taken aback" replied, "Arthur I don't believe you ... you're trying desperately to think of something nice to say". People were queuing up to speak to Arthur, so Phyllis didn't continue the conversation but, as they parted, she thought he said, "I mean it".

A year before his death, while vacillating between the existence or non-existence of a 'grand plan,' he finally offered, "I do believe there is an after-life".¹⁴⁵⁴ One interviewer reports Arthur Boyd had a strong apprehension of a "consciousness beyond the self", another plainly states Arthur Boyd was "an atheist." Atheist, gnostic, pantheist, agnostic? Certainly Arthur Boyd was a humanist. Although Arthur admitted he was "not religious in the sense of belonging to a particular church" he was "religious enough not to want the human race to fall to bits".¹⁴⁵⁵ Perhaps he would have agreed with his old friend, Yosl Bergner, who in his later years believed "God should exist and people

¹⁴⁴⁹ "Arthur felt 'a presence, a force ...'" Arthur Boyd: McGrath: *The Artist & the River*.

¹⁴⁵⁰ "When asked about his religious crucifixion studies ..." Carolyn Ford, 'Canvassing Views on Religion,' *Herald* October 1988.

¹⁴⁵¹ "In his last painting ..." Interview Yvonne Boyd. "Waiting by the Styx" ... there was no assistant ... no mucking about ... it was his last painting"

¹⁴⁵² "In his seventieth year ..." Peter Fuller, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 3 No. 2.

¹⁴⁵³ "He felt 'a great bewilderment ...'" *The Australian Magazine*, 24-25 August, 1991.

¹⁴⁵⁴ "A year before his death ..." Janet Hawley, *The Age*, 26 April, 1999. 'Janet Hawley recalls Arthur Boyd's private world. He let his brush speak for him.' Arthur to Hawley: "If there isn't a plan, we haven't got a lot to look forward to. But if there is a plan, we've got a lot of look forward to. I do believe there is an afterlife."

¹⁴⁵⁵ "Although Arthur admitted he was 'not religious ...'" Arthur Boyd. Interview Jane Nicholls. 'Seven Persistent Images.' *Harper's Bazaar* Australia, July 1985.

should not know".¹⁴⁵⁶ Arthur spoke of a "hope" that God was watching, but believed "we should watch over ourselves".¹⁴⁵⁷

Arthur's 'selves' were not defined by borders or flags¹⁴⁵⁸ but through the landscape, the last two hundred years adding to the previous forty thousand, of blood and bone mingling to create the 'genius loci', the spirit of the place. To preserve it, one imagines, would have been salvation enough for Arthur Boyd. While Robert Hughes perceived a "a kind of tribal wisdom"¹⁴⁵⁹ in Arthur's work, art historian, Richard Haese, saw "...the forces of life in the opposition to those of destruction," expressed with "an unsurpassed level of mythic force and regenerative power".¹⁴⁶⁰

His sister, Mary, believed in the possibility of Arthur harbouring an "unorthodox type of religiousness". She felt that Arthur "may have been aware of the good religion had done in keeping the stability of our family. It did do that because we all mattered tremendously to each other. Rather than 'God' the word was 'Love'. That was the word my mother and father used as all-prevailing". Alexander was positive about two things: his grandfather "believed in God, definitely" and his grandmother definitely did not. Jamie could not see an expression of "a great faith" in his father's paintings. "Everything would be talked about in an obtuse way. I remember Italy, dark nights with stars, and he'd speculate what was out there. But he had scepticism, he wasn't prepared to give it his whole-hearted backing ... art had a better chance". "In the end", Arthur once said, "I don't believe for one minute that anything comes out of nothing".¹⁴⁶¹ Ultimately, Arthur's faith, or lack of it, was ambiguous: like *Nebuchadnezzar, Blind on a Starry Night*, it remained unclear whether he was desperately groping into, or through, the dark.

In January and February of 1999, at the age of 78, on his last voyage home, Arthur rarely appeared on the deck. His took his meals in the cabin. In 1995, returning on a container ship that was travelling without a ship's doctor, he had been required to supply a statement by a physician certifying him in "good general health ... not expected to require ongoing or recurring medical treatment for the expected duration of the voyage..." By 1998 no doctor would have signed such a form. Towards the end of the journey on the *Arcadia*, when Yvonne eventually succumbed to her concern and requested a doctor, she was refused, the physician insisting that Arthur be wheeled down to the infirmary. "Every thing scared him, every move", recalled Yvonne. When Arthur was eventually examined, the diagnosis suggested that while on board he had suffered a stroke. Yvonne slept by his side in the ship's hospital. When they docked in Sydney, an

¹⁴⁵⁶ "Perhaps he would have agreed with his old friend Yosl ..." Interview Yosl Bergner.

¹⁴⁵⁷ "Arthur spoke of a 'hope' ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

¹⁴⁵⁸ "Arthur's 'selves' were not defined through a flag ..." In 1995 Arthur suggested to arts editor and writer, Sally Begbie, that the Australian flag should be two figures, one black and one white, lying side by side. This way, when the wind came, they could wriggle about a bit and get happy. Begbie interpreted this as "only half a joke."

¹⁴⁵⁹ "While Robert Hughes perceived ..." Robert Hughes, *Time*, 2 May, 1994.

¹⁴⁶⁰ "...art historian Richard Haese saw ..." Arthur Boyd c1940-1960, 'Symbols of Transformation,' BMG Fine Art Sydney, 4 May- 27 May, 1989. Introduction by Richard Haese.

¹⁴⁶¹ "In the end", Arthur once said ..." Arthur Boyd, Gunn tapes.

ambulance was waiting. After Arthur was wheeled to it, after he listened to the sirens wailing as they rushed him through the city, on arrival at St Vincent's Hospital he suffered a cardiac arrest.

The family from England, from Melbourne, gathered around his bed. Polly was the first of her siblings to see her father. "He was trussed up like a turkey, pipes and things, not even conscious". Her mother had been by her father's side every minute and, when Polly arrived, Yvonne was sleeping in the waiting room. When Helena flew in from England with Jamie, she saw "this little man in a bed, a lost soul, not connecting" and thought, "It's not possible he'll recover from this". She bought him a dressing gown and slippers from David Jones, and he asked her "Why are you so kind to me?" When she fed him, he called her Doris. There was talk of brain damage, talk of dementia; Alzheimer's was mentioned. Once out of danger they moved Arthur from ward to ward, each move signalling a tick in a box.

Arthur improved to the extent he could be moved into the War Memorial Hospital in Waverley, to convalesce. Parrots would fly up to the veranda's edge: it was gentle, atmospheric, but Arthur would have been aware of shadows gathering. The day Arthur was rushed into St Vincents, the day he teetered on the edge of death, John Brack was being buried in Melbourne. It had also been the day Anne Purves had died, disproving her prophecy to her son Stuart that she would "go just after Arthur".

During Arthur's time at the Memorial Hospital, Yvonne slept nearby in separate quarters in the grounds and the family visited. As part of his daily therapy he rode an exercise bike, walked around mazes of plastic cones then, as he progressed, around the garden, frail and hunched, across the lawns to visit Yvonne and the family. Finally the therapist allowed him out of the grounds. He dined with Yvonne in a little restaurant behind the hospital, taking a cab back, and on another occasion they ventured to Bronte. Time plodded by, each day bringing another small mercy. Yvonne found "the bloody thing ... so encouraging." They even managed a trip to the Art Gallery of New South Wales and looked at his biblical works: "I thought it would give him some pleasure". At this point Yvonne believed Arthur had no idea of "giving up".

Finally Arthur discharged himself. His Australian accountant, Tom Lowenstein, suggested arranging a car to drive Arthur the thousand kilometres back to Melbourne, but not until after Easter, when the roads were less crowded. In the meantime, Arthur and Yvonne spent Easter with David and Hermia. The two brothers hunkered down in David's studio, built in the grounds of his rambling, dark, two-storeyed, grand old terrace in Silver Street, Redfern. David found Arthur "perky enough ... cheerful and we talked about all sorts of things, about childhood and painting and remembering incidents". David discerned no trace of sadness in his brother's demeanour: "Arthur was never morbid". Considering David believed his brother had come to say goodbye, this observation speaks of Arthur's quiet courage. During these bouts of reminiscences, against every doctor's order, Arthur began drinking. David, concerned, asked Yvonne what he should do, but Yvonne, desperate for Arthur to feel normal again, was

disinclined to play warder. Polly remembered her father acting like “a kid in a lollyshop, drinking everything in sight”.

“Arthur came staggering back to Port Phillip Bay”. That was how Tim Burstall and many old friends assessed the prodigal’s return to Melbourne. Arthur said he wanted to see his sister, Lucy. According to Yvonne, the car would never have bypassed Bundanon if Arthur had been fitter, but she could not fathom how to manage it. The house would have needed rearranging to accommodate Arthur, the bedroom relocated to the ground floor, and she didn’t feel they could put everyone to such a great deal of trouble: “I would have to be dependent on everyone. I didn’t feel I could ask, it would have been a tremendous thing”. Instead, she resurrected their old dream of a cottage by the sea, in a position like John and Sunday Reeds’ beach house, “a back gate with climbing geraniums and be right on the sand”. She jollied him both along with talk of a three-month hiatus, a “marking time” before the house hunting began.

Meanwhile, the little rented flat in North Road, Brighton, found and furnished by Sylvia Lowenstein and Polly, was sunny and within a short distance to the sea. With Yvonne by his side, Arthur would eat his meals in a cane chair by the window where the sun fell. During the day Yvonne would move the chair onto a tiny pocket handkerchief lawn and wearily Arthur would silently accept whatever sights the day offered. He was without stamina. In two weeks he managed only one walk to the sea.

“It wasn’t”, Yvonne explained, “getting any better”. Arthur’s restless nights meant she got less sleep than the little she had grown used to: almost nothing. Exhausted, she put a call into Dr George Leidl, a heart specialist they had previously consulted a year earlier, who had come recommended by Tim and Betty Burstall,. When Yvonne and Arthur visited his office, Leidl leaned back and said, “Well go on, talk to me”. Yvonne had been staring at a painting by Sidney Nolan hanging on the doctor’s wall. Leidl was attentive and accommodating. Like every other doctor, he urged abstinence from alcohol; but it didn’t happen. Despite his status as the leading consultant in his field, when Yvonne requested it, he made house calls.

On the last house call Leidl made he found Arthur incapacitated with pain, when Leidl asked Arthur to describe his discomfort, Arthur dismissed it as though it wasn’t worth discussing.¹⁴⁶² Throughout their life Yvonne had observed that, although Arthur allowed his worry to surface on behalf of the kids, “he never accepted any real anxiety on his own behalf”. Leidl turned to Yvonne and said, “I can’t treat him here ... I’d like to get him into my hospital”, Yvonne couldn’t say yes, couldn’t bear to think of Arthur “being carted off”. She pleaded, “Can’t we get a nurse, do something else?” When George Leidl suggested he arrange for a bed for Yvonne, she looked to Arthur for his agreement, “I’m coming with you and we’re going to be in the same room”. But Arthur wasn’t paying any attention at all. Leidl himself drove his patient to the hospital but, before they arrived, Arthur suffered another attack in the back of the car. Yvonne saw it as the same as, and yet nothing like, the seizures that had come before: “It was like a fit. He wasn’t

¹⁴⁶² “The last house call Leidl made ...” Interview George Leidl, 30 June, 2006.

registering me, but he was semi-conscious, agitated ... convulsive ... jabbering". Yvonne would put it down to "a culmination of worry ... the realisation he was being taken to hospital probably had a depressive effect". Leitzl slammed on the brakes and Polly, who was following in her car, pulled alongside. Leitzl described the attack as "something quite odd," Arthur looked like "a rag doll". For a short period Leitzl felt no pulse. He raced at high speed for the Mercy Hospital, ignoring every red light.

In the two weeks that followed, there was little improvement. While his blood pressure had dropped and heart rate come down, Arthur's cheerful attention to the kids when they visited had fallen off. He had stopped walking. For certain periods he was going blank. "It was dashed hopes", Yvonne recalled. She now regretted ever submitting to the ship's doctor, and the wheelchair that had arrived at the cabin door to carry him down to the infirmary. According to Polly, Arthur's belief, no doubt stemming from his Christian Science background was, "if you had to go to a doctor you may as well let nature take its course". Polly felt her father "put up with being poked and prodded and tested because it pleased everyone that something was being done"

Each day, while the nurses bathed Arthur, Yvonne taking the opportunity to get a little fresh air and exercise, would walk to nearby Fitzroy Gardens. One morning, wandering past St Patrick's Cathedral she saw the image Arthur and Sidney Nolan had sought out at The Hermitage: a large poster of Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son*. It was hanging inside the cathedral doors, close by a small fund-raising stall selling postcard versions of the larger image. Desperately searching for something that might rally Arthur, Yvonne ventured inside to ask one of the church helpers how she might acquire another poster; only postcards of the image were for sale. A priest, wandering by, overheard Yvonne's story and immediately set off to his office to retrieve a spare copy. Soon she was pinning the poster up on the screen that surrounded Arthur's hospital bed, urging him, "Look at *this* ... *look* at this ..." Such was Arthur's weakness and general deterioration that when he opened his eyes and saw the inspiration that spurred him in his lifelong quest "to paint the great picture", his response was merely a murmur, "Oh!"

When Dr Leitzl bustled into the hospital room that Saturday morning in April, he recommended a brain scan Monday morning. Barely conscious, Arthur was beyond making complaints. He was unable to eat, found breathing difficult and had spent the night groaning in his sleep. It reminded Yvonne of the deterioration that had occurred on the ship. That day, as Leitzl gave the crestfallen Yvonne a pat on her shoulder, he ordered Arthur's airways be cleaned. As the nurse went about her duties, wriggling the naso-gastric tube down into his stomach, Yvonne anxiously asked, "Do you have to do that?" When the nurse finally stepped back to observe her work she pronounced: "That was pretty painless". Yvonne agreed. She could see no angst on Arthur's face. Relieved, with thoughts of Monday's tests evaporating, Yvonne sat down and started writing.

When Arthur sneezed she was instantly on her feet, thinking "That's odd, the tube must be irritating him". There were no convulsions, no other sound. Yvonne must have called out for a doctor, a nurse, but all she recalls was the sneeze, and then a young doctor saying, at 1.30p.m on 24 April, 1999: "I am afraid he has definitely passed away." The

nurse told Yvonne to sit by the bed and hold Arthur's hand, but Yvonne's thoughts were for her daughter. Polly had been visiting that morning, and to save her distress Yvonne had sent her away before the procedure was conducted. Now, expecting her return at any moment, she raced out of the room to head her off, to warn her of the terrible news. In one of those fateful accidents Arthur had spent his life imagining, they had crossed each other's path. As Yvonne waited in shock by the lifts, Polly stood alone by her father's bedside.

After seventy-eight years on the earth one of the major things Arthur had devoted his life to changing remained the same. On the day of his death, the front page of the *Age* was weighted by the memory and the reality of war: massacre in Timor, slaughter in the Balkans, Slobodan Milosevic manipulating the United Nations, and a pre-Anzac day story of pilgrimages to Anzac Cove, Gallipoli. War book-ended a warring century. Arthur Boyd had departed, but in an ongoing act of protest he had left behind *Melbourne Burning*, *Mars* and *Australian Scapegoat*.

Although Arthur had spoken of going back to Melbourne to see his sister, Lucy, that event never occurred.¹⁴⁶³ It would appear Yvonne's stoic nature deserted her briefly, for, no one contacted Arthur's sisters. They would not hear until the following day, and then second-hand. The last words Lucy heard from her brother had been relayed over the telephone: "I have paint on my hands", he said, as if he was reassuring her that his blood still flowed, multi-coloured and normal.¹⁴⁶⁴

Arthur, eschewing all thoughts of the event, had left no instructions for his funeral. Recalling Doris's last minute switch from cremation to burial, and perhaps feeling this was the closest she could guess to her husband's wishes, Yvonne opted for her mother-in-law's choice. When the undertaker enquired if the family cared to view the body, Yvonne declined with a firm "No." But, at the last minute, feeling an urgent need to see Arthur's face one last time, she changed her mind and, without telling anyone, sneaked away to the funeral parlour by taxi. When Yvonne's lips touched Arthur's brow, it was as still and cold as the marbled feet of his dead grandfather. Strangely, for a man who refused to face death, Arthur looked resolute. Yvonne then realised that the undertaker had altered the shape of his jaw: "Arthur was always going around holding up his chin, saying 'shape up' and they had given him a firm mouth, which he didn't have". Yvonne had told the taxi to come back in an hour, but now she had no desire to stay. She was presented with a selection of garments to clothe her husband. She dressed him in a pink shirt and a pair of smart checked trousers; then she left his body, and carried him, and his weak jaw, and their memories of over a half a century together, away with her.

¹⁴⁶³ "Although Arthur had spoken of going back to Melbourne to see his sister Lucy..." Interview Lucy Boyd. "He said he wanted to see Lucy ... and you know, I don't think he ever did".

¹⁴⁶⁴ "The last words ..." Peter Ackroyd in his biography *Blake* relates a story of the British painter Turner: "Show me your hands", Turner demanded. They are entirely clean, and Turner whispered to an assistant, "Turn that fellow out. He's no artist".

Yvonne had no idea how to arrange a funeral. Yvonne left it in the hands of Sid Cairns, the son of their great friends. He organised the simplest of ceremonies, choosing an Anglican service. Yvonne viewed Arthur's funeral, held at St Mary's Church, North Melbourne, May 3, 1999 as "a nothing occasion ... just something to get through". After a lifetime's need of privacy, and a horror of pomp and cant, Yvonne had no wish for a grand public send-off. The service was textbook, devoid of heroic phrases and ceremonial posturing. There were Psalms 23 and 103, the expected words from the minister and the Lord's Prayer. One addition lifted the event above the ordinary: Alexander, sitting at the piano placed by the coffin, played his grandfather to his rest with Chopin's Polonaise-Fantasia Opus 61. Within twenty-four hours of Arthur's death, laudatory obituaries circled the world. Eulogies flowed from Prime Ministers, both present and past, and peers, poets and musicians composed verbal and musical bouquets. Yet, if the Pope himself had appeared the day of Arthur's funeral to preside over Requiem Mass, Yvonne would have felt the same. Her husband was dead, and she could find no consolation in the promise of an after-life.

At the funeral, although Yvonne had lost the person who had been throughout her life the "only intellectual and spiritual influence", she did not weep. She remained vigilant and efficient, calmly wiping the streaming nose of her distraught grandson, Merric. Several years would lapse before she would shed a tear, and then the sorrow would be prompted by an article in the paper that detailed a woman's devotion and selflessness to her sick child. Yvonne had not truly wept for over half a century, not since the hysterical walk through the gates of Melbourne University and out into the streets of Carlton. She chided herself, worrying that perhaps there was "something lacking".

Arthur once said of his landscapes that, if he got the sky right, the rest of the picture would work.¹⁴⁶⁵ Yvonne appears to have been Arthur's sky. Although much of her life had been devoted to Arthur, when it came to outward displays, an unexpected hug, a kiss for no reason, there was a stubborn refusal, beyond Yvonne's grasp, to describe her undeniably deep and necessary connection to her husband. However if, as some believe, time is how you spend your love,¹⁴⁶⁶ Arthur Boyd could not have been left in any doubt of his wife's dearest intention.

The Times obituary would claim Boyd's chief theme was "the divine frenzy of love".¹⁴⁶⁷ As a painter, Arthur likened himself to a musician; the continual metamorphosing of his symbols and his images as "a piece of music ... a set piece with a few variations". He saw painters as composers, in the sense that they "carry one image, one vision, right through their whole work". But of course Arthur would go no further, he left the big question of his lifetime's vision dangling, unexplained. Except, perhaps, for that one sunny summer day, on the lawn of Bundanon, at the age of sixty-four, relaxed and making jokes with Sidney Nolan. On that day, while offering images that conjured

¹⁴⁶⁵ "Arthur once said of his landscapes ..." Margaret Goldrick, *Eureka* magazine.

¹⁴⁶⁶ "However, if as some believe, time is how you spend your love ..." Author Zadie Smith, quoting her husband's sentiment, in her 'Acknowledgments' from her novel *On Beauty*.

¹⁴⁶⁷ "The Times obituary would claim ..." *The Times*, 26 April, 1999.

nihilism, love, tragedy and redemption; the major concerns that had challenged one of Arthur's first great influences, Dostoevsky, Arthur revealed: "... there's an amorphous atom bomb going off over the horizon, a creek going down, a black dog watching some lovers on the opposite bank, a lot of black crows and a rampant ram. The allegory is the triumph of love in the midst of disaster ... it's what it often is".¹⁴⁶⁸

Arthur Boyd was buried in the manner he lived: without fuss, quietly, modestly. He was laid in the earth on which he had stood forty years before, supporting his mother, as they buried his father. His headstone was as small and plain as the stonemason could manage. The man's immortality lay elsewhere; in his works, his gifts, and in the faces of those gathered around his grave.

Arthur admitted to hating two things: "artificial light and low ceilings".¹⁴⁶⁹ When Lucy last saw her father he was lying in his small, low-ceilinged hospital room under artificial light. The blinds were drawn. As she walked over to raise them her father said: "That's right, let a little light in, I want to see the trees".¹⁴⁷⁰ The man who, together with his wife, had given away over 1000 thousand hectares of grazing land, river frontage, rainforest and bush; the man who had showed Australians their land, from desert to shoreline, watched, as the blind rattled up to reveal a bare brick wall.

Up on the Shoalhaven hundreds of eucalypts, with bark as varied as the colours on a painter's palette, crowded the hill guarding the north flank of the house. At sunset, kangaroos and wallabies sprang down from the forested hills to graze on the valley floor. The half-arc thumps of the roos' passage fell like soft heartbeats, while across the paddocks, wombats, resembling shuffling earth mounds, moved slowly through the half-light. Cries of homeward passage filled the darkening sky: the black wail of crows, the screech of cockatoos and the kookaburra's cackling, larrikin send-off call to the disappearing light. Along the path down to the river, at a turn in the field, needled casuarina branches sighed. Down by the river's edge an echidna snuffled along the sandy shore negotiating the tufted grasses. The two-inch long spikes covering its helmet-shaped body lay flat until an alien sound disturbed and, just as swiftly as they rose, the body flattened, burrowing deep. The last light as it fell created shadowy caves in the spaces between the giant rocks lying at the base of the cliff on the opposite side of the river. At daybreak the water's edge would draw the line Arthur Boyd drew between two worlds, and Pulpit Rock would rise above the river to bear his testament.

¹⁴⁶⁸ "Arthur revealed ..." Arthur Boyd to Janet Hawley. *The Age* Saturday Extra Arts Centre Special, Part 2, 27 October, 1984.

¹⁴⁶⁹ "Arthur admitted to hating two things ..." Arthur Boyd, Pearce tapes

¹⁴⁷⁰ "When Lucy last saw her father ..." Interview Lucy Boyd.

Bibliography

BOOKS & CATALOGUES

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|--|
| Ackroyd | Peter | <i>Blake</i> , Great Britain: Minerva, 1996 |
| Adams | Brian | <i>Sidney Nolan: Such is Life: A Biography</i> , London: Hutchinson, and Melbourne: Century Hutchinson, 1987 |
| Anderson | Patricia | <i>Art and Australia Debates, Dollars and Delusions</i> , Sydney: Pandora Press, 2005 |
| Allen | Christopher | <i>Art in Australia, From Colonization to Postmodernism</i> , London: Thames and Hudson, 1998. |
| Barrett | Reid | <i>Of Dark and Light: The Art of John Perceval</i> , Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1992 |
| Blackman | Barbara | <i>Glass after Glass</i> , Australia: Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 1997 |
| Berger | John | <i>Selected Essays</i> , New York: Pantheon Books, 2001 |
| Bergner | Josl | <i>What I Meant to Say</i> , Israel: Hed Arzi Book Publishing, 1997 |
| Boyd | Martin | <i>A Difficult Young Man</i> , Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1965 <i>Lemon Farm</i> , London: Dent, 1935 |
| Burke | Janine | <i>Australian Gothic, A Life of Albert Tucker</i> , Sydney: Knopf, 2002 |
| Burke | Janine | <i>Joy Hester</i> , Melbourne: Vintage, 2001 <i>Heart Garden</i> <i>Dear Sun: The letters of Joy Hester and Sunday Reed</i> , ed. Janine Burke, Victoria: William Heinemann, 1995. |
| Clarke | Jane | <i>Sidney Nolan: Landscapes & Legends: A Retrospective Exhibition 1937-1987</i> , Sydney: Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1987 |
| Dobrez Patricia | and Herbst Peter | <i>The Art of the Boyds</i> , Sydney: Bay Books (1990) |
| Dostoevsky | Fyodor | <i>The Idiot</i> , Wordsworth Classics, Wordsworth Edition Ltd, Hertfordshire, England: 1996 |
| Edwards | Geoffrey | <i>The Painter as Potter: Decorated Ceramics of the Murrumbidgee Circle</i> (catalogue), Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1982 |
| Gleeson | James | <i>Modern Painters 1931-1970</i> , Sydney: Lansdowne Press, 1971 |
| Grimal | Pierre | <i>The Dictionary of Classical Mythology</i> , Oxford, UK: Beachwell Publishers, 1998 |
| Gunn | Grazia | <i>Arthur Boyd: Seven Persistent Images</i> , Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1985 |
| Haese | Richard | <i>Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art</i> , Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books, 1981 |

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Halliday | Nigel Vaux | <i>More than a Bookshop, Zwemmer's and Art in the 20th Century</i> , London: Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd, 1991 |
| Hawley | Janet | <i>Encounter with Australian Artists</i> , Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1993 |
| Hetherington | John | <i>Australian Painters, Forty Profiles</i> , Melbourne: Angus & Robertson, 1964 |
| Hodin | J. P. | <i>Kokoschka, the Artist and His Time</i> , London: Cory, Adams & Mackay, 1966 |
| Hoff | Ursula | <i>The Art of Arthur Boyd</i> , London: Andre Deutsch, 1986 |
| Hughes | Robert | <i>The Art of Australia</i> , Harmsworth: Penguin, 1970, 2nd ed. |
| | | <i>The Shock of the New</i> , New York: Alfred A. Knopf, inc, 2000, 7th ed. |
| | | <i>Things I Didn't Know</i> , Australia, Knopf, 2006 |
| | | <i>Nothing If Not Critical</i> , New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990 |
| | | <i>Goya</i> , London: The Howell Press, 2003 |
| McCulloch Alan | And McCulloch Susan | <i>Encyclopaedia of Australian Art, Revised and Updated by Alan McCulloch & Susan McCulloch</i> , Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994 |
| McGrath | Sandra | <i>The Artist and the River: Arthur Boyd and the Shoalhaven</i> , Sydney: Bay Books, 1982 |
| | | <i>Brett Whiteley</i> , Sydney: Collins, Angus and Robertson, 1992 |
| McKenzie | Janet | <i>Arthur Boyd: Art & Life</i> , London: Thames & Hudson, 2000 |
| Musa | Mark | <i>Luigi Pirandello - Six Characters in Search of an Author and Other Plays</i> , Introduction and translation Mark Musa, Suffolk, England: Penguin Books, 1995 |
| Niall | Brenda | <i>The Boyds</i> , The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Press, 2002 <i>Martin Boyd: A Life</i> , Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1988 |
| Osborne | Charles | <i>Giving it Away: Memoirs of an Uncivil Servant</i> , London: Secker and Warburg, 1986 |
| Philipp | Franz | <i>Arthur Boyd</i> , London: Thames & Hudson, 1967 |
| Plant | Margaret | <i>John Perceval</i> , Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1978 |
| Pont | Margaret | <i>Arthur Boyd and Saint Francis of Assisi</i> , Melbourne: Macmillan Aust. Publishing, 2004 |
| Pringle | John | <i>Australian Painting Today</i> , London: Thames & Hudson, 1963 |

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|--|
| Rosenthal | T. G. | <i>Sidney Nolan</i> , U.S.A.: Thames & Hudson, 2002 |
| Roskill | Mark | <i>The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh, Selected, Edited and Introduced by Mark Roskill</i> , New York: Touchstone, 1997 |
| Saunders | Tom | <i>Spare the Face, Gentlemen, Please</i> , Melbourne: Phoebe Publishing, 1993 |
| Sayers | Andrew | <i>Australian Art</i> , U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2001 |
| Schama | Simon | <i>Rembrandt's Eyes</i> , Great Britain: Penguin Books, 2000 <i>Landscape & Memory</i> , London: Fontana Press, 1996. |
| Smith | Bernard | <i>Australian Painting 1788-1990</i> , Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962 <i>Noel Counihan, Artist and Revolutionary</i> , Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993 |
| Thomas | Daniel | <i>Outlines of Australian Art: The Joseph Brown Collection</i> , South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1989, 3rd ed. |
| Thomas | Laurie | <i>The Most Noble Art of Them All</i> , Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1976 |
| Timms | Peter | <i>Australian Studio Pottery and China Painting</i> , Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986 |
| Usherwood | Nicholas | <i>Nolan's Nolans: A Reputation Reassessed: An exhibition of paintings from the estate of Sir Sidney Nolan</i> , London: Agnew's, 1997 |
| von Bertouch and Anne | Hutching Patrick | <i>Guy Boyd</i> , Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1976 |
| von Maltzahn | Imre | <i>Arthur Boyd, Etchings and Lithographs</i> , London: Lund Humphries, 1971 |
| Wetering | Ernstvander | <i>Rembrandt by Himself</i> , London: Thames & Hudson National Gallery Publications |
| White | Patrick | <i>Patrick White Letters</i> , ed. David Marr, Random House, Australia, 1994 |
| Wilson | Gavin | <i>Rivers and Rocks</i> , Arthur Boyd & Brett Whitely catalogue, Bundamar Trust 2001 NSW <i>Arthur Boyd: Retrospective Exhibition</i> (catalogue), with a introduction by Brian O'Shaughnessy, London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1962 <i>Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings and Other Works by Arthur Boyd</i> (catalogue), with introductions by T. G. Rosenthal and Cordelia Oliver, Edinburgh: Richard Demarco Gallery, 1969 <i>Nolan's Nolans: A Reputation Reassessed</i> , London: Thos. Agnew and Sons Ltd, 1997 |

Letters of John Reed: ed. Barrett Reid and Nancy Underhill, *Defining Australian Cultural life, 1920-1981*, Australia: Viking, 2001

Angry Penguins and Realist Painting in Melbourne in the 1940s, (Marianne Ryan ed.), catalogue, Hayward Gallery exhbn by South Bank Centre, Australian National Gallery, and Australian Bicentennial, 19 May-14 Aug, London: 1988

Illustrated by Arthur Boyd

| | | |
|-------------|------------------|--|
| Baybar | Taner | <i>A Trap for the Burglar</i> , with fifteen drawings by Arthur Boyd, London: Peter Owen, 1965 |
| Boase | T.S.R. | <i>St. Francis of Assisi</i> , with sixteen lithographs by Arthur Boyd, London: Thames & Hudson, 1968 |
| Boase | T.S.R. | <i>Nebuchadnezzar</i> , with thirty-four paintings and eighteen drawings by Arthur Boyd, London: Thames & Hudson, 1972 |
| Boyd Arthur | and Peter Porter | <i>The Lady and the Unicorn</i> , London: Secker and Warburg, 1975 |
| Boyd Arthur | and Peter Porter | <i>Narcissus</i> , London: Secker and Warburg, 1984 |
| Boyd Arthur | and Peter Porter | <i>Mars</i> , London: Secker and Warburg, 1988 |
| Boyd Arthur | and Peter Porter | <i>Jonah</i> , London: Secker and Warburg, 1973 |
| Hope | A.D. | <i>The Drifting Continent and Other Poems</i> , illustrated by Arthur Boyd, Canberra: Brindabella Press, 1979 |
| Pushkin | A.S. | <i>Pushkin's Fairy Tales</i> , with lithographs by Arthur Boyd, translated by Janet Dalley, London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1978 |
| Stark | Peter | <i>Tomorrow's Ghosts</i> , twenty-eight poems with twelve original etchings by Arthur Boyd, Guildford, UK: Circle Publications, 1971 |