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## THE OTHER FELLOW'S MIND



### "Voss"

Max Harris seems to fall into the same error of which he complains in Douglas Stewart's criticism of Patrick White's novel (B. 26/3/58). The overseas critics must be right, and ours must be wrong! Three of ours—Ross Campbell, Kylie Tennant and Douglas Stewart—said substantially the same thing about the book. Yet a more diverse trio it would be hard to imagine.

I think the divergence between home and overseas reviewers comes this way. *Voss*, to the man overseas, portrays a wayward character in a wayward background. The whole thing is completely unreal, a certain waywardness in the writing, and the whole becomes "different." Being "different" is the only thing worth-while these days.

To the Australian, *Voss* is a historical novel. And, of course, a historical novel is neither flesh, fowl nor good red herring. To write a biography the author has to travel an arid wasteland of sheer hard work. Not only must his central character be exact, like the portrait Cromwell demanded, "warts and all," but all the minor characters are also real people, and you can't turn a police-sergeant into a Simon Legree just to give your biography "color." Once the names are set-out in black-and-white, the author is open to criticism from a host of people who also know the facts, either through relationship or historical research.

The historical novel avoids a lot of work, because it doesn't have to conform with truth, yet can still pick the eyes out of history for vivid color, and so be far more popular than biography.

To an Australian, *Voss* is based on Ludwig Leichhardt, and Leichhardt, though unknown overseas, bristles with difficulties for any writer who tries to reach the public with a portrait of him.

Kennedy, too, met with tragedy in exploration, but Kennedy and "Jacky-Jacky" are material for an epic. Edward John Eyre, rescued at the last gasp by an American ship near

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Esperance, has the same appeal. Burke and Wills, although many a criticism could be shipped home to them, had all the ingredients because of the very characters of Burke, Wills, King and Gray.

But Leichhardt was a bad bushman; the typical migrant who sets out with a pannikin of water to go to the next Northern Territory settlement and tells nobody his intentions. If anybody hoped to make a legend of Leichhardt, the final squelch came with the BULLETIN'S offer of £10,000 reward for some concrete proof of his end. Perhaps there is a story in it. Perhaps there is a story in "King Lear," but it is still bad theatre.

To the three critics, Patrick White's novel is not the story.

Should Voss be Leichhardt, or Leichhardt be Voss? That is the crux of the matter. As



"Yeah—wonderful change since we started callin' 'em bus-hostesses."

long as they cannot be divorced the story remains an historical novel, and such a thing is an abomination in the world of letters. — Mrs. J. M. FORBES (N.S.W.).

### Voting Systems

The article on Queensland electoral reform (B. 19/3/58) suggests that first-past-the-post voting is outmoded and should be scrapped. It has, it says, been "long ago abandoned by every State and by the Federal authorities." However, it has not been abandoned by Great Britain or the United States. Mere conservatism may be the explanation, but plurality voting (that's its official name)

has nevertheless a good deal to commend it.

It undoubtedly encourages public opinion to express itself through two major parties and gives every incentive to parties of either wing to compromise over divisive issues. Certainly it tends to produce clear majorities in the House, ensuring stable government.

Preferential voting may give a more accurate representation of the differing shades of public opinion, but there are many Queenslanders anxious for electoral reform who would be sorry to see first-past-the-post voting jettisoned. — F. A. O. (Qld.).

### Reforming the Divorce Laws

Neither the English nor the Australian legal system punishes adultery. The idea of the law as a dictator of private morality died in the Middle Ages.

Problems arising from homes

*The Bulletin*  
only because the husband's demands were more extreme than usual. There are numerous cases where the children of earlier marriages do not receive proper care and affection. Much of the present formality in divorce proceedings could be dispensed with safely if there were a requirement that the parties could only remarry after satisfying the court that remarriage would not harm the interests of the children of the earlier marriage. — FIAT JUSTITIA (Vic.).

### Postal-box Design

Three or four years ago I suggested to the Postmaster-General that a simple piece of equipment be attached to street post-boxes so that letter-posters might know whether the receptacle had been already cleared or not, said idea being a clock-face device operated by the postal collectors by a key, showing "next clearance" and time, but it was rejected. In Melbourne's museum last week I was amazed to see the very thing I'd suggested, on a tall red pillar-box about seven-feet high! I discovered that a gentleman in the P.O. Department named Tyrell had antedated my idea by over 70 years, but with the same result.

He constructed a beautiful model which afforded not only the "next clearance" information (turned by a key), but also made record of the number of articles posted, so that collections could be checked. In addition, there were phone-call boxes in the octagonal section of the outfit, for summoning police, ambulance, doctor, communicating with tram-office, fire-brigade and the newspapers. Batteries supplied the electricity needed.

I still think that his "Combined Postal Electric Signal Alarm and Telephone Pillar" as its designer called it, or some modification of it, could be very useful even today. — W. H. M. (Tas.).

### Steam Locos

Having read all that "Transporticus" has written on the subject, I wonder if diesel-electrics have really been successful—at the cost of £100,000 each.

Agreement with his way of regarding the matter was definite after last week's trip to Perth, the section Adelaide to Port Pirie behind "Essington Lewis" a 520 (Pacific) class speedy and comfortable. And, apparently, three such mighty