

The Lies We Lie Behind

Adrian Hall

Carl A. Mears hailed from New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A. sometime in the mid-sixties. He gleaned a lot in the ambiance of a great university, and from its superior art-collections and libraries gained a love of culture, learning and librarians. He is a Veteran of a Foreign War, and served in a junior officers' mess somewhere or elsewhere. Until recently peripatetic, he lives now at Walden Pond. He enjoys his own micro-radio commentary on life and on the arts where he hypothesizes and hyperventilates fortnightly on a local radio station. Sometimes he writes things on paper, sometimes on walls. Reiterating as of habit, he ponders how it should be. Assembling fragments in his mind, he takes his perspective on the mirror, and realises there is no hiding. Today he is only his Father's son, and Carl is not his name, nor that his history.

Today, now, here

Teeth again this morning. How many times for them? Even forgetting the forgotten times. I strike again with the electric brush - jittering and splashing - blood shows this time. Just a little. His head turns again gazing out the window dwelling pensively on the grey sky and cold rainy bushes. A slight drizzle splatters from the dull clouds. Pearl Drops spatter the mirror. The two minute timer blips and I can relax. Time to focus again tonight but maybe tomorrow there will be a clear view again. Two minutes can be eternal.

Belfast N.I. 1972

Darkness - no street lights, Army patrols and bricked up buildings. Walking out in the open under the moon, hoping the flickering camouflage of the soldiers will not galvanise with my movement. The agora open and myself phobic because of it. The alleyways glint like coal chips and the patrol flickers across, hiding in the shadows. Why are they dressed in old rags and twigs in this red brick Victorian Market place? Two minutes is enough to pass swiftly across and disappear. The squaddies continue unfazed in blackface: another tour of duty: another set of patrols. This time they ignore me.

Aramoana N.Z. July 2008

I have marked John's Monday Melbourne walks. Eight times eight. I dwell on the distance and try to visualize the tram-cars. Perhaps the other Adrian, my avatar, is the knight? Out on sorties, out on patrol. I'm a pawn though. I dwell on his voice. Gentle against the background of city street noises, this is a rare telephone conversation of which I am not sure. I like it but like the mystery better. I'm glad he seems to like the idea of neo-Plato, a white Saarnen goat who chances his luck against the two dogs and the International cat duo, who live here with us, at the mouth of Dunedin Harbour.

On the telephone I heard a tram bell I think. The goat bleats here against the raindrops, that would sound different in the City. The radio conjoins with Kiwi accents and the whirl of hard drives. I wait for the auto back-up. A dog barks somewhere else. The radio follows its own path, the hourly time signal, incessant non-news. 'Nine to Twelve' just like yesterday, and the day before. I hear the surf and the wind and at high tide a low throb of a freighter, chugging down Scott's passage from Port Chalmers. Once there were whales calving down there. Aramoana means, 'The Pathway of the Sea'. Sometimes there are orca, and even an elephant seal. Today there are just the sheep. And one goat. And one old man.

Dunedin, August 2008

Every other week on the Saturday morning the radio show comes around, I panic, the day before and from early in the morning too, what other words can be said about A.R.T . A Winter Ale can help when I get there, and a strong black coffee just for a kick first thing. Later another Winter Ale. And a Guinness at the Eureka Bar. A full pint glass, mild and cool. There were many of those too - in Ireland especially, two pints at once, another for in a minute and some cashew nuts please. Most nights we were there for a while, many nights chugging Guinness, sometimes Jameson's. Waiting for the bombs to finish. Waiting for the smoke to clear. Not thinking casualties. Running my fingers idly under the bar, feeling the splintered cavities of the machine gun bullets from the week before.

Aramoana, NZ August 2008

When I polish these shoes again, my mind wanders off. Saturday mornings was for shoe polishing. Monday, wash-day. Saturday was for tripe. They appear newish and burnished now. Everyday then was for walking. To work, to School. If I were a Laneway walker, I would think deeply about my shoes. I am content with the way these appear, and I would wear them with their crisp click of leather soles. Although they seem a little old they do have an old fashioned sense to them of deliberation and style. No bouncy athletic shoes for me on the Laneway walk. I would walk the Cityman walk, the Salaryman walk. And when I thought of a meeting point, I remembered the Nepalese Resturaunt and remember clicking back then on the maroon tiles. Like a cart-horse.

Sydney, 1998

I was immersed in a terrible time then, when my lawyers were working for me. They were ecstatic, bubbling over inconceivable sums of money which meant little to me, for at that time I could hardly afford the shuttle from the International Airport. They, the lawyers, kindly recommended me to a hotel in Melbourne, it was large, and refurbished industrial. The attendant was clad in tails and a top-hat, he was polite. The cost per night was more than the value of my car. Like a London department store in the sixties it dazzled me. Puddled in a wealth of nostalgia, it just waited to be reminded of the reality which exists for some folk, of not needing to think of such tedious trifles as budget. I found somewhere else, and also discovered the Ghurkha Resturaunt which I entered because of my late Father.

Melbourne, Summer 2004

In the cool of the Ghurkha resturant. I was sipping a beer slowly to make it last, and not impressing the young woman looking after my order for I was too calculating. She knew that if there was to be a tip, it would be the minimum. And if I got it wrong then there would be big embarrassment. With this lumpy white man in his cheap, sweaty clothes, for he seemed to be counting the coins in his pocket. I needed the rest though, I was hungry, and I needed to sit in the cool for a little. I found myself inside that cafe salivating because of my Father. He was a Navy man: the Royal Navy of course, shoulders back and set like clamps on a lathe. Discipline.

Aramoana, August 2008

In the years since he had died, I had continued to chat with him as I was right then. Amongst all his hard living and School of Hard Knocks fables, he had built up a fund of mixed histories which buttressed his old authority as Chief Petty Officer. If he had not been known as 'Knobby' Hall, I think he might have been pleased to have been called 'Doc', on account of his military knowledge. And somewhere in all that reading was an admiration of the Ghurkha people of Nepal, and their Second World War escapades with the Allies. As with all servicemen, there was a brutality which crudely camouflaged a profound sentimentality, and his respect for those people was based on mythological bravery, and fiercely admirable fighting of the most bloody kind. The thought of which made him chuckle with a patronising glee. I remember his stories of their traditional weapon, the Khukri and its bloodletting.

Melbourne, 2004

So there I was without my Father. He had never been East to the sub-continent, or places more glamorous than the rusting Mediterranean, so I don't know what exactly fascinated him about such histories, but I think knowledge of the secrets of metals contributed to his peculiar Freemasonry, and the knowledge of the old ways of metals and machinists gave him strength. Among service men there is mate-ship but also the mystique of Trades.

Aramoana, August 2008

I would have liked to eat with him there in Melbourne, as he always regretted not emigrating. I know he had wanted to become a Ten Quid Pom. He would have gravely investigated the menu, teasing his palates with unfamiliar favorites, maybe looking for an unfamiliar mountain-climbing fish. Maybe he would have been reminded of his Ghurkha histories and start to tell me again about how that traditional knife was formed. Damascened steel I believe, and then he would go off about Damascus and Rommel, and T.E. Lawrence, Monty and the glorious Desert Rats of Tobruk, and before long we would be back again in Cornwall, wondering how much my Aunt's few Jersey cows were worth, and how come farmers never seemed to have any money. Cattle and pigs seemed to go and come, sometimes with a trailer, but often through the shed which had no back door. Which reminds me too of that last time there, when we saw the spout of blood up the wall. In the Laneway.

Melbourne, Victoria, Summer 2004

There was not a lot to see. There was not a lot of space, it was a coincidence. No other activity was connected with the radio report we had heard while driving into the city. People dodged and ducked, parcels, carry bags and cameras. We brushed against, and scurried on. The tube of the light shaft cut deep into the Federation structure, and became confused by iron stairways, drain pipes and conduit. Mildewed stains, and damp-rot festered the stratae of old paint. There was just the curve of dried blood. Just a vicious gout of dull brown stuff at shoulder height to the lanky delivery guy in his Stubbies. There was no cordite in the air under the monoxide, just steady throbbing of diesel engines and the mixed stench of

persons unknown. The crime scene crew had cleaned up after a fashion. Of the fifty or so beings in this alleyway, there must be other firearms to hand. My own small knife, was firm and friendly, I could feel it at my hip. I could slice tomatoes, or cheese, or sharpen a pencil, or there were times before when I had grasped it in the darkness in my pocket; just in case. In Belfast in fact, and in Brooklyn.

Destructo the Mouse gaped at the brown stain, knowing blood full well. It runs and falls and measures by the beat even when still. Connotations of life-force arise and subside with the change of colour. With the flow. Half-cracked breathing, cut and sudden dried, and when the gurney leaves tyre tracks in the rain, that team of rueful specialists seem to soak the brief excitement from the fear amongst those still present. There is the dull ache. We try to imagine the unimaginable and there it is. That brown arc from that dumb diver. And within an hour other lives go on regardless, and everything except the rust parabola is as was. Any more fares please - move along there please. In myriad ways, in flux.

Tokyo, 1982

I went to Japan a few times, on the run it seemed. Frantic exhibitions with remote connections to older memories. Japhy was in there somewhere. Kerouac on the road and up in the forest. He was up a fire look-out, alone of course and writing madly. He was spacing out and sensing his isolation. Haiku functioned to a degree but self-consciousness inhibited his poetic growth. The stasis he sensed within himself did little to help his ease of constructing verse, red wine and reds neither. Blank or rhyming, all words splattered wide and meant little. Somewhat vague, nevertheless a sense of solidarity helped through Yoko. It was twenty years before I would find myself there, on my fortieth birthday. She had never handled cash money until she was seventeen years old, she said. The height swam for me and I counted up the years, and then I was thinking of throwing myself off the twelfth floor, but rescued myself in time by organising a haircut and shoulder massage. It cost more than my car. Now of course I am gratefully sixty-five years old and moving forward slowly, but not so slowly as John.

Two days later, I found my way there again. I recognised the roast coffee aroma, but did not remember the Mykonos blue paint on the window. Nor the petit point cushions. Two uniformed constables seemed not to notice anything, not the faint stain still on the wall. I wondered how many people had noticed anything at all in that small entryway. Some of these folk were walking to their day jobs, after the tram ride. Conceivably some were hurrying off-shift, to rest and salvage something of the day and then to return again to work that coming night.

Melbourne, 2006

Strangely, during the weeks which slithered slowly through the lawyer's fingers, leaving me wandering and wondering about my own time, I had time to speculate about that spark of haemoglobin against the wall. I peered at my own blood trail in the shaving mirror, thinking of progress and technologies. Multi-blade razors make small, precise, multiple scars which bleed copiously.

Tokyo, Summer 1983

Japan was fine. I would have wished to visit again, and would have cherished making more work there. I travelled to Tokyo first with mammoth extra luggage. There was a huge welcome and we were all made much of, I tried to sleep alongside a garrulous holographer, on the flight over. She terrified me with her incessant stories, jammed into the centre of a Skyliner seat. She was blabbering but anticipating everything, even the marriage proposal from MegaDashi San - on his knees in the backseat of a limousine for Chrissake. For myself, I was fed there by my art dealer, with hashi while I struggled to savour the minute flavour of the tiny petals of the Chrysanthemum. Then she presented me with a small piece of something, maybe wallpaper glue, my throat contracted and tried to expel everything it could sense. My throat whipped into some kind of discipline - and it chose to swallow the impassible. Discipline over reflux.

Coronet Peak, Otago, N.Z. July 2008

The small blonde woman turned to me, chatty in suspension, flurries of snow spun about us. Nervously she blurted out her affection for Victoria's State capital. "It's the best city in the world she said. And I have been to a lot of places. I teach in a Catholic School. Next winter I'm going to Japan so I've got to work on my Snowboarding-for-powder-slopes." I nodded, and fortunately the cable-car lurched into motion again. Gobs of snow fell twenty metres, I grasped my ski poles. "Last week I got concussed on that big slope there." she said, "And I was wearing my helmet." That same day my tiny Granddaughter did fourteen rides up to the top of the mountain and down, I only managed six. Each one was memorable though. I was not concussed. I later sat beside an Italian boy from Melbourne, he liked what he saw of New Zealand but wished there were more Italians. Me too - I was thinking of Smoked Buffalo Mozzarella. We both fell getting off the lift.

AAP, Thursday, 14 August 2008

Man shot in head, drives himself to hospital

A man jumped in his car and drove himself to safety after being shot in the head while on his way to buy cigarettes in Melbourne. The 25-year-old man told police he was "jumped" by two men when he left a female friend's home in Melbourne to walk to a petrol station for the cigarettes.

The victim had been visiting the friend in St Albans before he was shot at about 9.30pm yesterday, armed crime Detective Senior Constable Andrew Tait told reporters today. Blood stains from the incident covered the footpath outside the unit today.

"During a scuffle that broke out, a shot was fired and he fell to the ground and received a single gunshot to the back of the head," Det Snr Const Tait said. "He is extremely lucky the bullet has gone in just behind the left ear. The fragment is still there." The man ran to his car and drove off, despite his wound.

While driving to Werribee Hospital, near his Hoppers Crossing home, the man rang a relative who picked him up and drove him the rest of the way, Det Snr Const Tait said. "He is a very lucky man and it is beyond belief that he drove himself to hospital."

The friend, a young mother, said she knew the victim from school days but said she did not know he had been shot. "I don't know anything about what happened, I don't know, was he shot?" she asked AAP. "If he was shot, it is not unusual for this area."

Det Snr Const Tait said the victim did not have a criminal record and had told police he did not know his attackers. "We have no indication of any motive, we don't have a description because the victim was attacked from behind and he has not been able to say much," he said. "We are hoping to speak to him (again). We have spoken to the woman and investigations are continuing. "We are hoping there are witnesses that have heard or seen something at around 9.30pm in the area."

The victim was taken to Royal Melbourne Hospital but had since been discharged, a hospital spokesman said. Police believe the two offenders fled on foot south down Kings Road towards Gillespie Road.

Just 24 hours earlier there had been another shooting in the area, with Victorian police and commuters witnessing a gunman shoot himself dead moments after shooting his estranged partner in the face.

The 65-year-old Keilor Downs man shot his former partner, a 49-year-old Sydenham woman, after she walked to her car at Watergardens railway station. She is recovering and is in a stable condition.

Winter, Cornwall, U.K. 1950

My grandfather shaved with a cut-throat razor. He patched himself with a torn-off corner of the Daily Mirror, and was able to repeat the circus each Sunday afternoon to my fascination when we visited. And to my Mother's horror. He enjoyed his control over the razor, stropping it against the patent leather formula, and testing it against his arm. Clearing the dishes off the kitchen table for his shaving bowl, flicking Erasmic foam into the scullery sink behind him, he made the gas heater pop and blow, as a part of the drama which was his world. The thin world of carbon steel was his treasure, machine steel, lathe-beds, micrometers, mechanical controls and the mathematics of screw threads all counted in his world. Electricity was a fierce horror of demonology, which he wisely bequeathed to his son, my Father. But that honed blade burring against his bristles with soap, water, blood and steel was the guts of it. Independence was his own, and it was proudly held in the workingman's hand.

Devonport Dockyard, U.K. Winter 1955

At day's end when he and the other Dockyard workers streamed through the Great Gates, Jack London roared in my ears, and I sometimes gave out pamphlets on behalf of International Socialism. The chiaroscuro of stained work clothes, rags really; soot streaked faces and scarred limbs, left fit young men stumbling after their ten hours of labour. This is true: my Grandmother would change, into 'best' and freshen herself to greet him. Then he would fall asleep without noticing before he had finished his 'tea', or half way through a radio serial, "The Archers - an Everyday Story of Country Folk."

London, 1964

It was many years before I would encounter "Metropolis", by the great German director Fritz Laing and I would recognise my Grandfather and his colleagues in the Weimar Republic of the nineteen-twenties, twenty-years before their time and in another country. But non-the-less, there they were. That was when you could find good labour. When 'trade' always delivered around the rear, when one thousand, or two thousand, or five thousand hired hands, would be grateful for what you could provide. And not only that, but they would travel at your convenience. At the rear - deliveries were in daylight, and collections were made in the darkness of early dawn, clanging bins and sharp smells in the crisp air. Then slowly the scents would change throughout the day, as the temperature would funnel new ones in from traffic and citizens.

Malta, 1948

There was a time when air-fares allowed only the most urgent journeys. Even ocean liners allowed for slum-dwellers to cross the high seas, as there was always 'steerage', while airplanes served only the military and the wealthy. Or both. My mother and I, flying to Valetta with a tiny baby sister were military, on our journey right after the Second World War to meet my Father and to take up residence in the suburb of Gzira, on the island of Malta. I was 4½ years old. A new flashlight was held firmly in my new school macintosh pocket and I could see the peer of orange bulb through the cloth as it began to fade, even from the first moment. Oddly it was possible to see the rivets swiveling and turning in the aluminium channel and the skin of the plane, but holding my small torch in my pocket was some kind of strength. The rivets rattled. My mother looked firmly and straight ahead into the noisy darkness. She may have been praying. We could see the city lights below, around Blackheath, they spiralled emulating the greater spiral nebula far above us. I was starting to become frightened and the new blue school mac was heavy and itchy and cold. We were to land in Italy, at Milan, to refuel. This was a Vickers Viscount transport 'plane, limited mileage and manual navigation. I remember the bright yellow lights in the Mediterranean darkness. When we swooped onto the landing strip my ears popped, and just too late a yellow barley-sugar sweet was delivered. It tasted soapy. The 'plane landed and taxied across irregular tarmac. But it was not tarmac, it was 6 inch rusty steel mesh - ready for rebuilding, slumped over the bomb damaged runways. We bumped over the stacked sheets of mesh and when we disembarked, tottering over the mesh stacks. My new school shoes were scarred, for my small feet had been stumping down into the steel hollows. The new School uniform mac was now hot and scratchy. I was given a paper cup of orange liquid to drink. It tasted soapy. Orange drink, and orange nightlight, and hot, dark, air. Military aircraft. Military men. Military smells. Two hours later we were in Valetta. My Father met us in his number one uniform, with medals, he would have been in his mid twenties.

Melbourne, Victoria, Summer 2002

Sixty years later the F1 restyled international Airport in Melbourne is as familiar as any number of coffee shops anywhere in the world. No money is needed even, no paper, just plastic and faith. No, not faith, just 'belonging.'

Aramoana, Winter, 2008. Melbourne, Spring 1978

The most secret place in the world they said; I heard of it on the radio. We weren't told where it was, just that nuclear materials were stored there. The most secret place in the world. I think it may be here in my head though - this is it, the one without the bullet. I had been thinking of the secret Adrian in Melbourne. His walks round the Laneways. His fun times in Frank Hardy's unrecognisable glass and global centre. His clever girlfriend: she would have to be, and pretty too. I remember Kenny's Cup Day, O Vanitas! And I remember the first time I was there, Melbourne. I remember the train from Sydney. A sleeping compartment overnight with maybe kangaroos glimpsed in the waxing, paddock light. I found accommodation which suited. Eight dollars a night, near the Railway Station, by the Laneways. Including breakfast. I had never ever seen boiled mince, rice and onions for breakfast. I had never even thought about the noise of old men at night. Now I am one and know I fail the noise criterion. Cornflakes still work for me, but never the mince. I had been embarrassed, but not now, I could merge with those old men invisibly and without embarrassment over cornflakes, scraping the plates and managing not to drool. I am aware of my own noises too, how could it have happened? This body is so less tuned, and so much more - less! O Vanitas!

Cornwall, U.K. 1953

Of course my grandfather's house had a back lane. I had heard that in the North of England they were called 'ginnels'. There was a Sally of whom my Mother sang in a pastiche of a Lancashire accent to the vast amusement of her sisters: 'the Pride of our Alley!'. Our mouldy, mangy, Victorian cobbled laneways were redolent of steel tyre wheels, and 'night-soil collection' from worker's dwellings. Dray horses; steel shod and sparking from the granite, defecated and pissed in those back laneways. The carts barely had room to pass between the slate and rubble walls - of my grandfather's work shed, and the next door 'office', where he would spend a good half hour alone each morning. Sometimes it would be my job to fold up the newspapers and cut them trimly into squares with a dinner knife, to hang on the rusted hook by the cistern. We artisans took pride in our skills no matter what. It was the Royal Navy tradition.

Those were the ways of men and horses at the rear of the terraced houses; in the Laneways, for the delivery and collection of echoing tanks and long oak boxes. In the front room though, the parlour with heavy, faded curtains and net drapes, dried flowers, and souvenirs of two world wars; brass shell casings, and model lead airplanes; my tidy, tiny, wisened and vicious Grandmother, who also smelt of moth-balls, kept watch on her village through the yellow lace. She metered the monthly, meter men. And them from th'Insurance - who called weekly for the funeral money.

O Vanitas!