

but which heightens the sense of existential absurdity. Ellis suffers an irrational fear of *catching* death and of the problem of extinction. But the twin of this anxiety is a heightened need to discover or even just to decree what constitutes meaning in his life. Fifty pages and one year on from Spears's death in 2007, Ellis finds his hook. It is the defining passage in the book.

Ellis is riding the bus, 'reading [Peter] Costello's life, or [Peter] Coleman's orchestration of Costello's life, which is disappointing'. Ellis objects to the auto/biography, saying that he was 'none the wiser at the end of it. [Costello] was a smirking, evasive enigma still ... For he told us almost nothing of himself.' Ellis goes on to list the things he would have liked know that are not touched on in *The Costello Memoirs* (2008), such as growing up with Tim, Costello's conversions (religious and political), 'why he thought Christ anti-union', and so on. In a remarkable paragraph, Ellis proceeds to list the sorts of things he still doesn't know about Costello but that one ought to know about an autobiographer who is a potential prime minister; indeed, the sorts of things *we* know about Ellis himself, 407 pages into this long journey through these 501 nights.

We don't know if he ever saw a movie, or went to a play, an opera, a ballet, read a novel or bet on the Melbourne Cup. We don't know if he was raised tee-total, and what pain attended his first alcoholic drink. We don't know if he had a pet dog, or a visiting parrot he befriended and fed. We aren't told where he stood on apartheid, Nelson Mandela, Bobby Kennedy, the hanging of Ronald Ryan, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Pogo, *Peanuts*, Pink Floyd. His grandparentage, parentage, childhood, school days, undergraduate years, adolescent comradeships and rapid marriage take between then twenty-two pages; the fight for the GST seventeen.

No great emotions trouble the rising young mover and shaker – no lust, no fleshly disappointment, no drug-bust, no hangover, no detailed

love of football team, no hot, rousing day at the cricket, no beloved eating house, no detail of how he first fell in love or felt at the sight of his firstborn. No thrill at first putting on a lawyer's wig or walking at thirty-two into Parliament House.

The point of all this is not really the book: Ellis ends by upbraiding the member for Higgins for living a complacent, unemotional life. Ellis is convinced that the job of the biographer, especially the autobiographer, is to get to the messy, visceral, touching reality of life. More importantly, it is the job of all humanity to live this sort of life: it is the only sort of life that, for him, defies death. And it is just this sort of existence that we are privy to in the misnamed but deeply engaging *And So It Went*.

But if the title is off-kilter, the subtitle is dead-on: these are the nocturnal musings of one of our most interesting and eclectic thinkers. I have not come close to cataloguing his range of interests. Nor have I mentioned his encounters with luminaries great and small from politics and the other dramatic arts; or his ruminations on people he does not know or knows only slightly. The index is impressive, but as you read you realise it is only the half of it.

Ellis is like a magnificent dinner guest, who adopts outrageous positions, discourses brilliantly and obstreperously, gets riotously drunk, opens your sole bottle of Grange, stays far too long, tells wonderful stories (more or less true) about famous and semi-famous and obscure people, quotes long passages (more or less accurately) from plays and speeches, celebrates life and laments its disappointments, felt keenly in his swelling heart. But you can also put him down for a few days and pick him up again when your strength has returned. *And So It Went* is heavy-going, even for fellow travellers, but it is always compelling, thoughtful and vigorous. ■

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GOING DOWN SWINGING, NO. 28

edited by Lisa Greenaway
and Klare Lanson

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For once, it's fine to judge a book by its cover. Stephen Ives's busy image of Buster Keaton captures, in co-editor Lisa Greenaway's words, 'the essence of [*Going Down Swinging*] – the slapstick/serious; the cultural ruckus; the unwavering stare'. *Going Down Swinging* is an unapologetic miscellany, distinguished by its vibrant eclecticism.

This issue is divided more or less evenly between poetry and prose, and also features several comics. Of the latter, 'Flic's Tale', by writer-artist Jo Waite, has charming moments but fails to ripen into coherency. Vanessa Hutchinson's succinct 'How to Sit In Designer Chairs' is more successful. The prose pieces are of a higher standard. Some stories cleave to familiar domestic settings, such as Julia Chiera's 'The Piercing'. Others are more exotic, including 'Madeleine and the Wheel of Death', Libby Angel's dark and dynamic narrative of a circus tragedy.

Greenaway and her co-editor, Klare Lanson, share a taste for free verse; their selections include pithy and expansive poems. Jonathan Shaw's 'Correspondence' is a concise, sardonic jab at historical amnesia and bureaucratic impotence; Ali Alizadeh's 'The Armistice' is a requiem in terse, non-rhyming couplets. Another highlight is Jillian Pattinson's 'Choose Your Own Advent (For the Children of Unknown Fathers)', which develops the punning conceit of the title into a wry and affecting plaint.

The accompanying CD maintains the high standard of the print journal. Its twenty-one tracks offer a variety of styles and production techniques, and the use of instrumental or sound-collage backing is imaginative. Notable contributions include Don Walker and StJAM's evocative 'Country Trains', Rchilaux's deconstructed groove on 'Crooked Destiny' and Jody O. Lloyd's 'Recipe for a Perfect Nap'. Melbourne poet Alicia Sometimes's stark 'Cold Was the Ground' is perhaps the highlight of a varied, collection.

Tim Howard