

stick-women of contemporary fashion. Give him a girl like Consuela Casatillo, 24, who has "really big, beautiful breasts". A girl reminiscent of the reclining

Cuban *emigres* and a former student of his. "I, her teacher in Practical Criticism, the Sunday-morning PBS aesthete. New York television's reigning authority on what is the current best to see, hear, and read — I had

the other young women who preceded her: "The jealousy. The uncertainty. The fear of losing her, even while on top of her. Obsessions that in all my varied experience I had never known before."

dy turned deeply tragic in this instance, not because Kestel loses Consuela (though he does), but because he gets her back, in the end, but under circumstances more horrible than he could have imagined.

# No duuds are to be found in 'Dark Twists'

**NEW WRITING.** Edited by Penelope Lively and George Szirtes. Picador. 317pp. \$26  
**DARK TWISTS.** Ginninderra Press. 107pp. \$17.

**THE QUEEN OF AEGEA.** By Craig Cormick. Mockingbird. 217pp. \$16.50.  
**COLLECTED STORIES.** By Liam Davison. UQP. 217pp. \$29.95.  
Reviewer: PETER PIERCE.

IN AN ALL-STAR, or rising-star collection of writing, homogeneity strangely asserts itself. The differences of reputation and accomplishment between, say, Alan Sillitoe and Helen Dixon, Tom Pow and Louis de Bernieres are blurred, if not altogether erased. That is why volumes such as *New Writing* (try harder with the title next time), "published in association with the British Council and the Arts Council of England", and edited by Penelope Lively and George Szirtes is — well — less lively and assured than it ought to be.

Everywhere are good things to read, but they are usually earnest in their demands on our attention, ephemeral in their holds on our imaginations. And when such collections as this — of poetry and short fiction and works in progress (but think of essay collections as well) — become hardy annals, ossifying institutions, it is time to call a halt to them. New writing is always best discovered by chance, travelling under its own colours, and with the name of a single author who may soon cease to be obscure attached.

Much more modest in scale, yet more surprising and enjoyable, is the Australian an-

thology *Dark Twists*, published by the Ginninderra Press. Here there are no duuds to be found, and plenty of variety despite another lame title, this one leaden and coercive. There's a sparkling beginning with Anne-Maree Britton's boisterously cynical tale of modern times, *You*. Look out also for Peter Frank's *Sleeping in Red City*, David Green's *Renoir Man* (the longest story in the collection) and Sandy Sutherland's grin, tant effort *Piggin*.

Unless one had spent many years reading unsolicited stories for magazines or judging them for competitions, the quality of those arrayed in *Dark Twists* would suggest that the level of competence in Australian short fiction had shown a national rise; that the ghost of Lawson had at last been exorcised; that dutiful treatments of multicultural life had been consigned to a literary age just past and better forgotten. But almost certainly it isn't so.

Craig Cormick's second volume of stories ("of men and women"), *The Queen of Aegae*, follows *The King of Patagonia*. The publisher is Mockingbird, a Ginninderra imprint. The foreword is by Anne-Maree Britton. Indications of a Canberra coterie abound. No Tasmanian jokes from that quarter please.

All this is less than fair for Cormick, whose dozen stories are skilful and resonant with the sense of male pain, and estrangement. Numbers of them are repetitions with variation of tales of severance, bewilderment and loss. Cormick has found a line of counter that suits his talents. He writes fluently, but not riskily. One hopes that — next time — more will be ventured, more explored.

If intelligence, moral intuitiveness, imaginative reach, clarity of intent and elo-



Craig Cormick: variety in new anthology.

quence of prose were valued as they ought to be, Liam Davison would be enjoying a degree of acclaim that has yet escaped him.

Among Australian authors, durable and accomplished, his case is hardly exceptional. Think of Alan Gould. Think of literary-political fashion. With his *Collected Stories* (not much of a title either, but that is what they are) Davison puts the evidence on public display. He is clearly one of our finest short-story writers (leaving his novels out of the calculation). What is gathered in this collection is material from *The Shipwreck Party*, other stories under the rubric *Land Sounds* and prose writings of a discursive and analytical kind, *The Landscape of Fiction*.

The first encompasses haunting stories of the sea and the seaside, by turns wistful, beguiling, full of menace. None of them has the feeling of an exercise, but rather of a potent, controlled energy, of a fiction forcing itself into form. The title piece in the *Land Sounds* section owes something to Les Murray's inventories of lost and enduring aspects of bush life. Davison writes of anvils, wood, tankwater, the platted hide, the sawdust floor, stringing the paddocks; does so with a fine and sympathetic detail, a loving yet disciplined eye.

The last part of the book is about others' stories, or ways of remembering them. It begins with *Landscape Figures/Figurative Landscapes* and treats of statures, signs, sculpatures, scarecrows ("not adapted well to this country"). Then Davison turns to legendary if perhaps once living folk — William Buckley, the lost white woman of Gippsland (subject of one of his novels), the three lost children of Daylesford. His gaze always illuminates and complicates the scene that it has chosen. Time to give him his proper due, for Davison to have his well-merited spell in the sun.

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