

Satirical, acerbic collaboration



inkangel by Stephen Harrison

WHEN ANGELS CALL. Prose by Craig Cormick. Poetry by Hal Judge. Visual Art by Stephen Harrison. Aberrant Genotype Press. 95pp. \$14.95. Reviewer: RALPH ELLIOTT

THE HIGHLY successful collaboration of a short-story teller, a poet, and a creator of black-and-white pictures has produced this challenging, well-made book of political satire, acerbic comment, and bitter but sometimes engaging humour.

Craig Cormick's stories are all highly topical, ranging from the plethora of Olympic advertising and media coverage, inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film *The Birds* with its avian invasion, to the elderly Baltic pensioners recalling their past in Konrad Kalejs's Latvia, while enjoying their peaceful seaside evening in a private nursing home in Australia.

One of the best pieces is a brilliant short skit on ever-increasing bank charges. The automatic teller is out of order, while the human tellers wear Ned Kelly helmets and greet every customer with a curt "Bail up!" — a directive from the bank's central office. Asking for \$20, the wretched customer is given a receipt slip showing a deduction of \$15, "the new bank charge for withdrawing small sums of money".

"That's robbery," says the customer. "Bail up,"

says Ned Kelly, duly represented in two very appropriate images by Stephen Harrison.

Srebrenica, as the title implies, deals with one of the most gruesome episodes of the Balkan killing fields, in which the writer suddenly finds himself involved. Not surprisingly, he iterates the expletive "Shit!", though most of the time Cormick has no need to vulgarise his diction, however abhorrent the theme.

In a similar vein Hal Judge offers his modernist verses, largely unpunctuated, although the final piece in the book should also end without punctuation: the Joycean monologue should be allowed to go on and on in the reader's mind. There are some good poems here, notably *Lost Dreaming*, where, after listening to a black man telling about his *Dreaming*, the writer knows no response to the question "And what's your *Dreaming* white fella?"

Another fine poem, *The Secret of Boundary Street*, ends thus: "Boundary Street./back in the 1890s, early 1900s./a black fella get shot/for crossing this boundary after midnight./official policy . . ./now it's unofficial./Yeah. Boundary Streets/all around Brisbane."

Although I happily concur with the line "Elliott wants more" in Judge's poem *Invisible Hand*, I shall always remember especially his telling phrase "the rot in erotica" in *The Mad Truth*.

Stephen Harrison's haunting pictures complement the prose and verse well: writing that deserves to be read — and re-read.