



An Iron Rose

by Peter Temple; Harper Collins 1998; 276 pp.

This is just so stylish. Temple's pared-back but lyrical prose is beautifully suited both to Australian idioms and the crime fiction genre. Nothing superfluous here. Ex-Australian Federal Police hero Mac Faraday is a blacksmith, part-time gardener and unsuccessful amateur footballer in his new life in rural Victoria. Thus the superb laconic locals:

Bloody, doctors, What do they know? Know buggerall, that's why they blame the fags. Could be somethin else entirely. Could be — could be bloody potatoes kills ya. Carrots. I read where everybody in China smokes, from ba-

Anh Hai: Young Asian Background People's Perceptions and Experiences of Policing

by Lisa Maher, David Dixon, Wendy Swift & Tram Nguyen; UNSW Faculty of Law Research Monograph Series 1997; 68 pp; \$20 from Associate Professor David Dixon at UNSW: D.Dixon@unsw.edu.au or fax 9385 1175; softcover.

Anh Hai reports the findings of a survey of 98 young Indo-Chinese heroin users in South West Sydney about their experiences as consumers of policing. Sadly, the findings are predictable. Most of the young people spoke of routine intimidation, hostility and racism. Even where there is no malice, police practices are often culturally inappropriate.

They treat people really bad — very rough — take people money let them go. [p.23]

They are very bad. They racist. They hit me. I didn't do anything, I just quiet do whatever they want. [p.33]

I just wish they'd get it through their thick heads that we're human and stop treating us like shit. They call me 'little Asian bitch' and they strip search us in the street. [p.35]

The report is clearly laid out and is made particularly compelling by the regular use of quotes such as the above from transcripts of interviews with the young people.

The authors are academics and come from legal and community medicine

backgrounds, they don't bloody die any more than anyone else. Look at that Mao Tsebloodytung, used to smoke in his sleep, couldn't get him to die. Same with the other bloke, whatsisname, thimgummy, shot them students, eighty fags a day, still runnin the place at ninety, whatever.

But Faraday, smoking in his sleep, realises that the old days aren't over yet. Pastoral tranquillity is upended as local murders converge with Fed corruption. In a typically poetic moment Faraday states: 'It was highly unlikely that my life was connected to the future'. But Mac doesn't die any more than anyone else. The Melbourne solicitors he comes across are almost totally useless and the Victorian Attorney-General doesn't end up looking too good. Spooky, tense and brilliant. • JM

Anh Hai is of interest in terms of drug-taking patterns and availability, as well as policing. All participants in the survey were daily heroin users. The majority had been using for less than two years and smoke rather than inject the drug. The varied responses to the proposal for 'shooting galleries' are particularly thought provoking.

The final thank you on the acknowledgments page goes to 'the young people themselves, who spoke freely, frankly, and often courageously, in the hope that something could be done'. This respectful, consultative approach is something we desperately need more of in these days of disregard for the rights and needs of young people by both the federal and State governments. The Common Youth Allowance, the de-funding of the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (AYPAC), new police search powers in NSW, mandatory sentencing laws in the Northern Territory and the NSW Department of Health directive that doctors are to report all sexually active

under-16-year-olds to the Department of Community Services are just the tip of the iceberg. • FW

Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country

by Gillian Slovo; Abacus 1998; 282pp; \$16.95 softcover.

Every Secret Thing is a portrait of the author's activist parents Ruth First and Joe Slovo, white South Africans instrumental in the overthrow of apartheid. Both were prominent in the SA Communist Party. The tensions that run through the narrative result from the conflicting demands of country and family. It's a reminder of the price that revolutionaries' families pay, without being a whinge. The author's quest to find out the identity of her mother's murderer is paralleled by the tracing of South Africa's political rebirth.

At the recent Sydney Writers' Festival I heard Indigenous Australian activist Bobbi Sykes interviewed. Among other insights she explored the mainly non-Indigenous audience not to 'leave us the hard ones'. For me, reading about the work of First and Slovo emphasised the importance of white people taking their share of the responsibility for overcoming racist attitudes and regimes; for standing beside black people rather than expecting them to fight alone. In the space of 30 years, Joe Slovo went from being the bane of white South Africa to its favourite son.

Every Secret Thing is a reminder of the importance of judging events in context. Throughout his life, Joe Slovo was heavily involved in training the ANC army, MK. When in charge of the ANC Special Operations Unit, he oversaw the 1980 bombing of the Sasol Oil Refinery. This was widely touted as a major tactical victory for the ANC as, without loss of life, it undercut the government's ability to circumvent sanctions by storing oil. I was staggered when I read this, not at the need for such extreme tactics but at the environmental cost. The fire burnt for three days and nights.

Slovo is a novelist who mainly writes crime. The functional style she uses in *Every Secret Thing* suits the dramatic and highly emotive material, not flattening it but making it bearable. • FW

Bits was compiled by Jonathan Morrow and Frith Way.