

DENNIS DAVISON

The Foreword to number 15 of *Explorations* reported the sudden death on 4 June 1994 of Dennis Davison, one of our two Associate Editors, and promised a longer account of his achievements during the three decades he spent in Melbourne. Although I am far from sure that I am the best person to undertake this, not having worked alongside him in his major spheres of activity, I can bring the testimony of someone who knew him as a faculty colleague at Monash University and who was aware of his impact outside a purely departmental framework.

Dennis chose not to have a prominent role in ISFAR. However, he did consent to help with *Explorations* and played a major part in seeing one number through the press at a time when I was absent from my home base. His experience with *Margin* and with *Poetry Monash* was invaluable in so far as he was familiar with all the material constraints of producing little magazines on very tight budgets. It was important for us to have access to his advice on the ways of printers. More than this *Margin* provided a model for a magazine that sought to be useful and to avoid pretensions. Dennis was quite appropriately a contributor to our first number in May 1985.

Alan Dilnot's obituary in the *Australian* on 22 June 1994 sets out in some detail the claims of our former colleague to public notice. An extensive range of scholarly publications, an interest in creative writing, both plays and poetry, solid involvement in amateur theatre, encouragement of novice authors, these were some of the paths taken by a participant and a doer. In the process he demonstrated his capacity to move outside the academic world and to appeal to people of good will in the wider community. Melbourne cultural life was enriched by a variety of initiatives in which Dennis Davison offered people with hidden talents the chance to be published or to appear on stage.

There is much written these days about the importance of "public intellectuals". Academics are reproached for their failure to make their voices heard and to take stances on current controversies. Universities and a part at least of the public seem anxious to have scholars achieve the visibility of polemicists and pundits. None of this happens without envy, backbiting and generation conflicts, needless to say. Access to the media and investiture with *auctoritas* are in themselves occasions of debate and questioning. Ultimately one is tempted to see the more modest outreach

of a Dennis Davison as a surer path to fruitful interaction with the world beyond the Faculty.

He was notable too as one of the people who brought to Australia something more than a desire to be an apostle for the literature of the Northern Hemisphere. Residence here and familiarity with the local scene made of him a genuine contributor to the study of the Australian past. That this was done with full awareness of links and traditions underscores how close his position was to that of ISFAR and *Explorations*. It is good to know that a mission cut short so early in Dennis's retirement is being continued by Victor Crittenden's work at *Margin*.

W. K.