

My Beautiful Beach

There is nowhere else I'd rather be, nothing else I would prefer to be doing. I am at the beach looking west with the continent behind me as the sun tracks down to the sea. I have my bearings.

Tim Winton
Land's Edge

Flying into Perth over the Indian Ocean, one of the first landmarks one notices is the line of Norfolk Island pines, tall and erect as if on sentry duty above Cottesloe Beach. For weary passengers confined for endless hours inside an aircraft, these stately trees are a welcome sign of an imminent end to their journey. But for those who live in this isolated urban outpost, these proud pines carry much more weight. With their widely spaced, parallel branches they symbolise things familiar in a vast and sometimes frightening world, containing within them all the joy and pain associated with the word 'home'. For Gerald Glaskin, Cottesloe's pine trees had a special significance. When he would return to Perth from his numerous trips abroad, the sight of them triggered deep memories, some pleasant and some he would rather forget. They marked the place where he grew up as a young boy, where he returned to constantly as a writer seeking inspiration, where he had a devastating surfing accident, and where his life came full circle when his long-time companion scattered his ashes off the Cottesloe groyne. Other beaches would figure in Glaskin's life – Pantai Cinta Berahi [The Beach of Passionate Love] on Malaysia's northeast coast, Singapore's Ponggol, and the Costa Brava in Spain – but Cottesloe was his first and very own beach, his 'beautiful beach'.

A short distance from his early childhood home in Palmerston Street, Mosman Park, Cottesloe Beach was a place of refuge and excitement for the young boy who grew up the eldest of seven children, the closest of whom was four years younger and the most distant 21 years younger. The long ribbon of bleached white sand, buttressed on one side by walls of eroding limestone and skirted on the other by a translucent sea, provided an idyllic playground for the young Glaskin, and especially for his ripe imagination. Much of the beach's fascination for him is captured in the character of 14-year-old Gavin in *A Minor Portrait*, Glaskin's second novel. In spite of his disclaimer that 'the book is *not*, in any way whatsoever, autobiographical' – a caveat he might wish to claim for later developments in the book but hardly for this aspect – it echoes the strong attachment to this place that Glaskin repeats in correspondence with friends and others throughout his life. In the first chapter of the book he writes:

Whenever he stepped on to *his* beach, the old sense of proud possession surged within him. He kicked joyfully at the sand that was marked only by wind-waves. Looking backwards as he walked, there were only his own footprints on the virgin sand; it reminded him of the pleasant feeling he always experienced when writing his name in a new book. Dropping his case at the foot of the limestone cliffs, he walked to the water's edge.

Yes, the basin was there again, deeper now that the white sand had been scooped out by the winter seas. But towards the end of summer it would fill up again; the water would be shallow, almost too shallow for him to dive from the ledge.... Those were always wonderful days, and the beach the most precious thing in his life; he was quite certain there was not another like it in all the miles of Western Australia's coastline.¹

Given that his mother, Delia, was an avid swimmer, it is not surprising that the young Gerald might have developed similar proclivities. People would say of Delia, 'You swim like a fish.' 'No,' she would correct them. 'I swim like a seal, equally at home on water or land.' Glaskin followed suit, becoming a keen body surfer and an accomplished water skier, but he also cherished a love for the land that is apparent in several of his books, notably his travelogue, *The Land that Sleeps*, his novel *Flight to Landfall*, and his children's novel, *A Waltz Through the Hills*.

Most of the time he lived in Australia, Glaskin resided close to the ocean in Cottesloe and Mosman Park. At 44, in the midst of seven years of alternating between living in Australia and The Netherlands, he purchased a small strata-title unit in Warnham Road, which he affectionately referred to as 'my little box by the sea'. This compact apartment was one of his favourite places to write and to take in the view he treasured dearly. 'Here we live up with the gods with views of the Indian Ocean to Rottnest – and it costs nothing compared to Europe,' he said.² Rottnest had a mystique for Glaskin, as it does for many Western Australians. References to 'the thin purple line of Rottnest Island' appear in several of Glaskin's novels. Only 20 kilometres from the port of Fremantle, it is visible from the mainland on clear days, standing alone as the last speck of land between Australia and Madagascar. First visited by the Dutch in 1696 and used as a prison for Aboriginals in the Swan River Colony, it has had a chequered history. Glaskin's great-great-grandfather, Charles Dockwrey Jackson, was superintendent of Rottnest from 1867 to 1883. Known fondly as 'Changa' – 'a white man with a white heart' – he gained a reputation for his humane treatment of Aboriginal prisoners.³

During Jackson's time on Rottnest, the island was favoured by a visit from the noted British author, Anthony Trollope. Trollope was received as a celebrity, with welcoming arches made of wattle trees, elaborate feasting and an Aboriginal corroboree. As Glaskin noted sadly, 'In those days, a writer meant something in Western Australia; not so today. If anything, no one is more disliked, nor treated with distrust and disdain, than a writer, ironically enough especially by his nearest next-of-kin, so to speak, the journalist.'⁴ Australia's low regard for its writers is a theme to which Glaskin frequently returned. It became an obsession with him and led to his falling out with many individuals and organisations. Although his passion for the plight of the writer could be attributed to his own vanity and need for approval, that would hardly do him justice. Glaskin was a crusader for a number of causes and this was one with which he had much firsthand experience. He resented the assumption that to be a writer, one must first succeed in another occupation in order to be able to afford the 'luxury' of writing, as he himself had to do. For him, stockbroking provided this necessary cushion, although after he had given up his lucrative job in

¹ GMG (1957, 7).

² No author listed. *The Subiaco Post* (2001).

³ Smith (1953, 95).

⁴ GMG (1975, 141).

Singapore he continued to apply for a plethora of other positions, from a Southeast Asian liaison officer with the Western Australian Department of Industrial Development to a lecturer in English and creative writing.

Glaskin's never-ending battle to garner respect for writers and to enhance his own reputation as one went hand in hand with his love-hate relationship with Australia, and with Western Australia and its capital, Perth, in particular. Triggered by the reception accorded Trollope in the mid-nineteenth century, he wrote, 'No creative artist can survive in indifference, let alone hostility, and regretfully enough I cannot see any change in this heinous attitude here where the cult of the moron not only prevails but is idolized. The more callous and uncaring, the more "masculine" is the Australian, poor brute.'⁵ His lifelong correspondence with the Belgian/Chinese author, Han Suyin, is riddled with similar references. In 1960 he wrote to her, 'Life here is all decadence from bottom to top, merely to have the biggest TV set, refrigerator, transistor radio – no, smallest transistor radio. Commerce flourishes, culture fades. Writers do exist, readers do not. TV, golf and football.'⁶ And again, 20 years later, 'I live on the moon... and on the wrong side of the moon at that.'⁷ In *The Eaves Of Night*, a memoir of his maternal grandmother, Alice Selina (Nan) Guger, he wrote like a tormented soul, 'Oh, the isolation of this exiled outpost of the world!'⁸

However distressed he was about the place of his birth, there were moments when Glaskin did acknowledge his attachment to it. The one thing that would make the pain of Perth's provincialism and isolation bearable was his beach and his favourite pastime, bodysurfing. Choosing a wave just before it curls to break and having it catapult you on an exhilarating ride to shore was a prize, even erotic, moment for Glaskin. 'It may be more spectacular to watch today's youth catching waves on their surfboards,' he said, 'but to me there is an intimacy with the water, almost like the caress of a lover, that can only be experienced with bodysurfing. It could be likened to flying like a bird rather than having to resort to a plane, be it only a glider.'⁹

Ironically, it was while bodysurfing that Glaskin suffered one of several near-death experiences. It was a sunny afternoon in late October 1967 and he and woman friend had gone to an almost-deserted Cottesloe Beach to sample the surf. A strong northwesterly breeze was stirring up waves over two metres high. Glaskin had just taken one he estimated was nearly three metres and was on his way in when his friend decided she would venture into the water. By the time he noticed her, barely half a metre of water was in front of the wave, making it impossible for him to dive under. At the last minute he swerved, managing to avoid a head-on collision, but in the process his left shoulder caught her right hip and he was thrown sideways under the water. Hitting the seabed was like diving onto a block of cement. Had he been only a metre or two to the right, he would have hit solid rock. The turbulent water tossed and turned him before dumping him on the beach. Pain raged in his nose and neck. Blood poured from his nose. Although assured by a doctor that his nose was not broken, Glaskin had aggravated injuries he sustained to his neck in the Second World War, while serving with the Royal Australian Air Force in Canada. Persistent headaches, increased pain and a tingling sensation in both arms resulted. These lasted for weeks, then months and eventually years. He was forced to wear a surgical collar for much of the remaining 33 years of his life.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ GMG to HS, 20 September 1960.

⁷ GMG to HS, 2 October 1980.

⁸ GMG (1975, 109).

⁹ GMG (1978b, 3).

Once it became clear that the repercussions of this injury would be with him for the rest of his life, depression set in. His ability to write withered and never really recovered, even though he eventually produced more manuscripts, most of which never saw publication and did not exude the quality and promise indicated by his early books. He felt, literally, washed up. In his unpublished memoir, *Never Again*, he wrote, 'I was beached, stranded and exiled at the wrong end of the earth.'¹⁰

This was not the first time the beach had proven Glaskin's undoing. On a warm December day in 1960, he had just dropped off his Russian translator Oksana Krugerskaya and her fellow Russian writer Alexei Surkov at their Perth hotel. To refresh himself and to escape 'the relentless press', he headed for a lonely stretch of beach known as the Sun Bowl a couple of kilometres south of the popular Scarborough Beach. A gusty wind made for a rough sea, causing him to be frequently dumped and his yellow racing bathers to become filled with sand. Since the beach was apparently deserted, he took off his trunks to reveal a *fundushi* underneath. But according to a couple of police officers who were in the area at the time, Glaskin revealed more than just a Japanese G-string. They claimed he was walking naked along the beach in the presence of at least three other men and charged him with having 'wilfully and obscenely exposed his person'.¹¹

Whatever the veracity of the charge, Glaskin was not about to let it go unchallenged. At his hearing in the Perth Police Court, mustering all the theatrical skills he could, he requested the suppression of the word 'person' from the records and more particularly from press reports, for fear that 'I would soon find a queue miles long from my house of people wanting to view this so generously sized "person", only to disappoint them'. In another reference to the size of his pudenda, police witnesses reported being able to identify him as a naked male at a distance of 400 metres. Glaskin's instantaneous response was a smiling 'I'm flattered'.¹² Continuing his remarks on the male anatomy, and a part of it he alludes to a number of times in his writing, 'Buttocks might well be indecent to some but hardly obscene; moreover if two policemen should find them so, they shouldn't be in the police force'.¹³ Ripples of laughter spread out across the courtroom. Reporters on the local crime beat hadn't had so much fun in a long time. Fearful that his decorous courtroom was becoming a decadent cabaret, Magistrate Parker called for order. He made it clear he was not impressed with Glaskin's performance. In closing, he asked if the defendant had any other 'literary comments' to make, to which Glaskin couldn't resist in replying, 'I am now indeed guilty of contempt of court'.¹⁴ Under the circumstances, he was lucky not be charged with that. Instead, the magistrate curtly dismissed Glaskin's *fundushi* claim and maintained that Glaskin had 'wilfully paraded himself, and that his behaviour in doing so was in itself an offence against modesty and decency'. Parker found him guilty, fined him four shillings and placed him on a £10 good behaviour bond for 12 months. Much to Glaskin's chagrin, the courtroom drama didn't escape the attention of the local press. It was reported in both the morning and evening papers.¹⁵

One columnist, Dan O'Sullivan, described Glaskin's case as 'another blow for Mother Grundyism in WA'. Pointing out that Glaskin could have been gaoled for 12 months, O'Sullivan

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹ No author listed. *The Daily News* (1961a).

¹² Alan Seymour to JB, personal communication, 24 May 2001.

¹³ GMG (1995a, 84).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁵ See *The Daily News*, 4 January 1961, 9 January 1961; *The West Australian*, 5 January 1961, 10 January 1961, 14 January 1961.

stated that since Glaskin was prosecuted under Section 66 of the Police Act, his conviction put him in the category of being ‘a rogue and vagabond’. He noted that there was no evidence that Glaskin was seen by anyone other than the two policemen who arrested him and no evidence that anyone was offended by his conduct. O’Sullivan stressed that what Glaskin did was ‘lumped in with all sorts of sexual obscenity’ and that there were other provisions in the law against public nudity with much milder connotations that the magistrate had ignored. Instead, the magistrate ruled that there did not need to be ‘some overlay of perversion to substantiate the charge’.¹⁶ O’Sullivan delivered his final blow in Glaskin’s defence by posing the question: ‘How small would be the percentage of men in this state who could say in truth that they had not enjoyed a nude swim or had never been naked or near-naked on a beach?’¹⁷

Writing years later in *A Many-Splendoured Woman: A Memoir Of Han Suyin*, Glaskin was a little more philosophical about the whole affair. ‘Unwittingly, and even internationally, I achieved far more publicity, if not of the right kind, from this one little incident than from all my books.’¹⁸ *The Straits Times* in Singapore, Glaskin’s home for 10 years, ran the story, causing a former Singapore colleague to send an anonymous cable with references to characters in Glaskin’s Singapore-based novel, *A Lion in the Sun: RE YOUR PERFORMANCE SCARBOROUGH BEACH CONSIDER YOURSELF SACKED STOP GRANT MACCAULEY LAUGHING STOP NO DUCKS IN OUR FIRM... JOHN DRAKE*.¹⁹ Glaskin acknowledged that the episode caused him to lose some friends and acquaintances, though his family mainly laughed it off. But he also had his loyal supporters. Han Suyin, then Dr Elizabeth Comber, wrote, ‘Saw the silly nonsense in the paper – it’s absolutely ridiculous, dear Gerry. You know I’m all on your side. I think people have *putrid* minds, anyway as you know they are horrid little lice, nothing else... Cheer up. I’m cheering for you...’²⁰ Han’s then husband and acquaintance of Glaskin, Leonard Comber, was equally supportive although more restrained in his comments. ‘I was most sorry to see the unnecessary publicity that was given in *The Straits Times* last week to the ‘Perth Affair’. My first reaction was “Good! This will surely have the effect of making your books sell well”, and then, secondly, I felt rather unhappy that some people like to make capital out of other people’s misfortune. The newspaper report of the whole proceedings did not read smoothly and gave me the impression of having omissions.’²¹

Among others who backed Glaskin in his humiliating showdown with the law was fellow Perth writer, Tom Hungerford. Never an admirer of Glaskin’s writing – ‘It was slipshod and often a lot of sly dirt’²² – Hungerford represents those who found the police surveillance activities on this isolated stretch of beach and the magistrate’s somewhat antiquated notions of prudery equally abhorrent. Some of Glaskin’s friends believe he was being hounded by the police. This is not at all out of the question. Given his outspoken and sometimes aggressive nature and the fact that he was often in newspapers or on radio and television, Glaskin would easily have attracted attention in a city the size of Perth. In addition, his regular appearances at the beach and the isolated nature of the place would have lent themselves to intimidatory tactics. Indeed, Glaskin’s version of his encounter with the police suggests this. He claims that Constable Doherty, calling himself Detective O’Dowd, exhibited ‘almost fanatical belligerence’ in

¹⁶ No author listed. *The West Australian* (1961c, 14).

¹⁷ O’Sullivan (1961).

¹⁸ GMG (1995a, 85).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

²² Tom Hungerford to JB, personal communication, 21 September 2001.

demanding his name and telling him to 'get his things or he would knock his teeth in'.²³ According to Glaskin's domestic partner, Leo van de Pas, one of the two policemen tried to extort money from Glaskin in lieu of laying charges. Glaskin refused, so they took him to the police station, where he tried a little interrogation of his own. 'Did you see me take off anything after I had dressed myself on the beach,' he asked the two policemen. 'No,' they replied, at which point Glaskin dropped his trousers and showed his G-string. Now it seemed it was the police who had been caught with their pants down.

But if the beach had been the cause of pain, suffering and humiliation in Glaskin's life, it had also played quite the opposite role. It provided him the space to think, brood and to stretch his imagination to its limits. Although he often admitted to having a lazy quality with which he credited most Australians, his regular beach walks were, in part at least, a chance to let the muse take charge. In an interview with a newspaper reporter, Glaskin described the way he used the beach as an integral part of his writing routine.

I work for about three hours every morning and by noon I expect to have 2000 words written. After lunch I always go down to the beach unless I have something else I must do. The beach stretches for miles and it's an ideal place to think; there's no telephone to ring or people to get at me there. From the beach, I come home, edit what I wrote that morning and send it off to be typed. At night I sleep on what I've thought out while walking on the beach and next morning it's bursting to get out and on to paper.²⁴

Contemporary Western Australian writer and fellow beach devotee, Tim Winton, expressed a similar sentiment with a different twist. 'On the west coast in summer the morning is for the beach and the afternoon is a time to find shelter. The western summer is ruled by wind. Here the wind is a despot... The afternoons are the time to be inside on a bed with a book.'²⁵ Or, if you prefer, writing one. Reflecting on the role of the beach in Australian society, Winton quoted fellow Australian writer, Robert Drewe, who argued that 'almost every Australian rite of passage occurs on or near the beach. The beach is where we test and prove our physical prowess, where we discover sex, it is often the site of our adulterous assignations and where we go to face our grown-up failures. In the end, it is where we retire in the sun to await the unknown.'²⁶ Glaskin's varied beach experiences would seem to bear out Drewe's argument.

From the writing of his first novel, *A World of Our Own*, the beach provided the wellsprings for Glaskin's creativity. In January 1949, he took up the invitation of his grandmother, Nan Guger, and spent six months at her beach cottage at Safety Bay, 50 kilometres south of Perth. Grandmother and grandson, they shared a strong mutual affection, reflected in his later published transcripts of recorded conversations between them, *The Eaves of Night* [in *Two Women*]. Her companionship was a welcome relief from his sustained periods of writing, interspersed as they were with breaks for swimming, sunbathing, sailing and crabbing, not to mention sexual exploration. According to his diary, the breaks often won out over the writing, although there were times when he would remain chaste to the task and produce an impressive amount of work

²³ No author listed. *The West Australian* (1961b, 16).

²⁴ Hetherington (1961a).

²⁵ Winton (1993, 15–16).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

– ‘Settled down to work straight away and wrote till exhausted at 10 p.m., going consistently from about 2 p.m., completing Chapter Four.’²⁷

Apart from those two staples of a Perth summer – ‘the temperature at 97 degrees and the flies as prolific as sand grains on a beach’²⁸ – Glaskin had to contend with other irritations as well. Most difficult of all was the continual stream of family and friends who chose to take advantage of Nan’s hospitality. In the midst of these disruptions, he managed to churn out a book that told of the challenges faced by ex-servicemen and women returning from the war to civilian life in Australia. Its central character in a rotating cast of many, Alan Ross, wrestles with his relationship with the attractive young Dorothy Reeves, only to finally call off their engagement, ostensibly because of his impotency caused by a war injury. When a friend asks him if that is the reason he is going away, Ross replies, ‘Partly. There are other reasons as well.’ What these other reasons are we are left to surmise. Ross quits Australia and sails overseas, as Glaskin was to do within six months of writing this.

Glaskin’s difference from other men was brought home to him by his growing awareness that he was sexually attracted to them, an awareness no doubt exacerbated by his wartime experiences in the navy and air force. The war provided abundant opportunities for men to explore their same-sex inclinations, not only because they lived in close proximity with one another in almost totally male environments, but also because they were removed from the restricting mores of their provincial upbringings. Returning to 1950s Perth must have been a difficult adjustment for Glaskin to make. And Safety Bay was not exactly urban Perth, if it could be called urban at all in those days. Given his stunning good looks, this 25-year-old Australian male with Italian blood coursing through his veins would have caught the eye of women and men alike. Glaskin’s diary at this time contains several references to his sexual adventuring, although none is explicit about the gender of his partners. And when he does mention friends by name, he carefully avoids any overt reference to a sexual dalliance, although the inferences are lurking between the lines.

The question of matrimony kept stalking the eligible young Glaskin. Pressure to marry would have been immense, he being the eldest of seven children. But his nagging doubts would not go away. Like Ross, he never could quite bring himself to take the leap, although twice he seriously contemplated marriage. One of those occasions was while he was in Canada during the war. Stationed near Winnipeg, he was befriended by the Workman family whose daughter, Norma, became a close friend. She and Glaskin were engaged to be married, but as she wasn’t inclined to leave Canada and he wasn’t about to relocate there, the engagement was called off. He was barely 21 years old, a long way from home, and still trying to sort out the confusing and competing urges he had had since his earliest sexual awakenings. As he confided to van de Pas, he fell in love with girls but in lust with boys.²⁹

While grappling with his ambiguous sexuality, Glaskin threw himself into writing his first novel. It was a challenge that caused him to seriously question his writing ability. He soon discovered a gnawing gap between the quality of what he wrote and what he imagined he could write. His internal critic was fiercely at work, reflected in numerous diary entries, including ‘The writing is both involved and immature – far from what I hoped it to be’ and ‘It is even more stilted in style and distressingly adjectival’ or even ‘when I read it through it so disgusted me, I

²⁷ GMG’s diary, 28 January 1949.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8 January 1949.

²⁹ LvdP to JB, personal communication, 18 October 2000.

burnt it.’³⁰ One day, he, like many a young writer, came to the shattering realisation that, ‘Perhaps (and more likely) it is just lack of talent with which I thought I was bursting. Enthusiasm is evidently no proof of talent.’³¹

Despite these grave misgivings, he produced a book within the six months he had allotted himself for the task. Indeed, he wrote a mammoth 420,000 words, later reduced to around 250,000 and finally to around 125,000. Its length was a major disincentive for publishers to accept the manuscript. After Angus and Robertson rejected it in Australia, Glaskin tried Constable then Heinemann in London, with no success. Only when he contacted Humphrey Hare at James Barrie Publishers did Glaskin finally succeed in finding a publisher to take it on, but not without considerable effort. Introduced to Glaskin through Singapore connections, Hare was a literary advisor to James Barrie, the great-nephew and godson of the playwright, J. M. Barrie, creator of Peter Pan. He initially rejected the manuscript outright, not only because of its length but also for structural reasons. Not surprisingly, Barrie took Hare’s advice, but before making a final decision he sought another opinion – that of noted British writer C. P. Snow. Snow carefully evaluated the manuscript, pro and con, and despite harbouring misgivings about its imperfections, recommended that Barrie publish it, while cutting certain sections. In his report to Barrie, Snow wrote:

It is one of the most interesting manuscripts that has come into my hands for a long time. The author... shows most of the vices that a novelist can show; but he also shows many of the virtues, including the cardinal ones... [they] come from a complete imaginative abandon to his people and scenes... he is one of those writers who, without any effort at all, breathes, as the French neo-realists say, in the odour of man. He is very close to them, knows a good deal about them, both how they make love and also earn a living... The city of Perth itself becomes remarkably sharp... Like Moliac’s Bordeaux, it happens to be a peculiarly evocative literary background... I take Mr Glaskin seriously. It all depends on his temperament. If he has an ambition directed enough so that he is willing to learn, I fancy he might become an important novelist, and certainly the best spokesman of contemporary Australian society.³²

A World of Our Own was published on 20 June 1955. When it went to press, Barrie had more than 3000 subscriptions for it, which Hare described as ‘very remarkable’ for a first novel sold at fifteen shillings. A second printing was ordered and by the end of September nearly 6000 copies had been sold, with fresh orders coming in every week. None of Hare’s publisher friends could believe the figures.³³ James Barrie was glad he had asked for Snow’s counsel and not let his reservations dictate his decision. Glaskin was ecstatic. Six years after those beach-bound days at Safety Bay grinding out chapter after chapter, he had been rewarded for his efforts.

Well, sort of. Not all reviewers were enamoured by Glaskin’s literary skills. *The Times Literary Supplement* criticised him for writing ‘carelessly and without restraint’. It noted that ‘flashback impressionism needs discipline, and the author, overcome by the flow of a lurid

³⁰ GMG’s diary, 12 February 1949, 13 January 1949 and 17 January 1949.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3 February 1949.

³² C. P. Snow to James Barrie, 8 July 1954. Typed copy, Glaskin archives, Murdoch University.

³³ Three editions (12,000 copies) of the English hardcover were printed. The book was translated into Dutch, French, German and Norwegian. The Dutch publisher alone printed 120,000 copies.

imagination, surrenders too uncritically to it.’ Despite these and other shortcomings, it begrudgingly conceded that the book was ‘none the less readable’.³⁴ Australian literary reviews did not offer much solace either. Writing in *Southerly*, the anonymous H.H. and J.L. declare that Glaskin ‘has no natural gift, nor has he set himself to learn those arts of selection and compression which create the illusion of a three-dimensional world. His characters do not live or grow...’ They concluded that ‘his talents do not lie in the direction of the novel’ and suggested he try writing documentaries or radio serials instead.³⁵ Marjorie Barnard, in *Meanjin*, discerned what she deemed to be flaws of a first novelist – overwriting, too many characters, overplaying realism, and a writing style that had a text book quality about it. However, she was a little more gracious in acknowledging that these were faults that time could cure.³⁶

But if the literary establishment gave him the cold shoulder, the popular press, both in the UK and Australia, embraced him much more warmly. *The Glasgow Herald* called *A World of Our Own* ‘exceptional with its quality of imaginative realism’ and the *Liverpool Daily Post* said that it ‘makes us wish for more from this promising writer’.³⁷ Sydney’s *Sun Herald* called the book ‘authentically and typically Australian’. It singled out his characters as being ‘recognisable human beings’ and praised Glaskin’s ability for ‘looking behind the mask of normality and ferreting out what really goes on.’ Whereas others rejected his technique of telling his story through the individual lives of six men, this reviewer found that it created the effect of seeing ‘characters in the round, not just from a certain standpoint.’³⁸

A similar sentiment was echoed by John K. Ewers, who reviewed the novel for Glaskin’s home audience in *The West Australian*. ‘For all its apparently loose construction, here is a novel with a very closely integrated plot. Each character has a direct bearing on the others and the elements of love, sex and tragedy are blended with all the sophistication of a mature writer.’ Summing up his review, Ewers referred to *A World of Our Own* as ‘a first novel of more than ordinary quality’. He emphasised that with his depth of understanding of human motives and knowledge of human behaviour Glaskin had produced a novel of character, ‘a rather rare phenomenon in Australian writing’.³⁹ In a subsequent article that appeared in the same paper a fortnight later, Ewers described the process Glaskin went through to produce his first novel, calling it ‘a story of enterprise, industry and persistence’.⁴⁰ Receiving such an affirmative nod from one whom Glaskin regarded as a mentor and adviser must have been most reassuring. It motivated Glaskin to enter the novel in the 1951 Commonwealth Jubilee Literary Competition, in which it received the judges’ commendation out of nearly 300 entries, even though it was not selected as one of the first three prizewinners.

At 32, Gerald Glaskin, had arrived. Nineteen more books would follow before his death in March 2000 – novels and short stories, travel and memoir, plays and filmscripts, even a trilogy on parapsychology. They ranged widely in subject matter, style and quality. Mostly through his fiction, he dared to tackle subjects that raised uncomfortable questions about issues many then regarded as off limits, including homosexuality, youth suicide, incest, Australia’s treatment of its

³⁴ No author listed. *Times Literary Supplement* (1955, 345).

³⁵ H.H. & J.L. (1956, 231).

³⁶ Barnard (1957, 205–206).

³⁷ Fiction editor. *The Countryman* (1956, 8).

³⁸ A.A. *The Sun Herald* (1955, 79).

³⁹ Ewers (1955a, 28).

⁴⁰ Ewers (1955b, 32).

indigenous people, and its phobias about Asia. Several of his novels were acclaimed by critics and readers alike, especially in Europe, and a number were translated into other languages, including Danish, Dutch, French, German, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish. Eighteen of his 20 books were published outside Australia and only one in his native Western Australia. Yet in spite of this impressive track record, few people have heard of Gerald Glaskin.