

# westerly

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STORIES, POEMS, REVIEWS, ARTICLES



# westerly

a quarterly review

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# westerly

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MICHAEL WILDING

## An Afternoon for Political Dissidents in Texas

1

This is going to be shorter than the first draft, a bit more economical than when I first wrote it. I've been striving for economies. And as I work through it again there will be things I shall want to cut—those revelations that come through untransmuted, undisguised; those rents through which one's unprotected personality can be glimpsed. Cutting those out helps with the economies. And a two month's delay before the second draft gives a cooling distance, enables one to see more aesthetically, isn't that the word? And the third draft just adds to the process.

2

You were asking me about unicorns, not even as a question but to make some point about Did my statements become questions, or was it did my questions become statements? I didn't understand what you meant and this was the example you gave, something about unicorns. Which struck me as rather fey. And I still couldn't work out what you were talking about. But sat in the sun on that day that in fact was cold, and the patches of sun insufficient to keep us warm, but we sat there, and I looked across at the stretches of scrubland below, and wondered for chrissake what was I doing at an open air art auction for political dissidents in Texas. It wasn't a place I'd ever associated with political dissidence. Or, for that matter, with unicorns. And as far as I could see there was none of either group around. But we looked down from this ridge at the stretching trees below us and some way off the city, with high blocks of offices and the capitol standing up rather absurdly amongst all that unencroaching unrestricting scrub. If I try to write down everything this account will be inordinately long: and already there are my own intrusions, already I am playing with my own idiom, rolling around my inordinatlies, making my spaced references to the landscape at the expected, my expected, intervals. When it's your idiom I want to be capturing. But just as I can't this minute (or: just as I couldn't that minute) in Mexico City at 6.28 p.m. on 24 February 1969 remember those specific examples of your idiom that amused or puzzled or enchanted me, nor can I remember every detail anyway. And not remembering every detail how do I know the significant ones, how can I select the representative, the meaningful, the touching ones. But before our touching, your enchanting. I suppose I do remember your arriving on the patio of that hillside house when I was looking at the signed books, photographs, paintings, and other auctionable exhibits. I think I do remember. But you were with someone

so I only partially registered. But I glancingly observed your black and white herring-bone trousers, and the poncho, was it a poncho, in black and white, because I looked round later and was aware of being unable to see them. But, like I've been meaning to write ever since I began writing this, something that should have come in the first sentence or second as a striking juxtaposition to your (reintroduced now for the intended juxtapository effect) unicorns, I was looking round for a simple fuck and someone with someone else, and later someone talking about unicorns, that virginity stuff, wasn't what I wanted at all.

3

I am standing looking at the exhibits and for a fuck and seeing on the lawn running alongside the house beyond the patio people sitting and walking. So I'm thinking of sauntering over when the girl who is my host's wife says, have you looked at those other things? Paintings curling in the cold sun. So we go over together which is much better as I don't have to prowl alone. And yes, now I remember it, I am being drawn where you want me to be drawn, where later you tell me you were telepathing me to be drawn, for we look at the paintings at the bottom of the slope of the lawn and you are half way up the slope and I want us to walk up near where you are, to some exhibit propped on an easel in that clear cold sunny garden, and we do and when we stand there I'm introduced to you and to the man with you, but I don't even catch your name then, as you know. Routine questions ensue and I'm sitting down next to you, but why am I sitting and why next to you rather than between you and the man, or than next to him? Perhaps because it's in the sun. Yet I might have sat before you and talked to you both. But I don't. And sitting there we talk, you and I, in the cool sun, desultorily, and he gets up and comes back to say he's going and you're not and I'm anxious to assure you we can give you a lift afterwards for I want you to stay. What would I do if I caught a unicorn, I'd try and hold on to it. Which sounds a bit mean and acquisitive and grabbing and all those things. It's wrong to be writing about this so soon, I know that I shouldn't try to use events so quickly. But here in Mexico City I am lonely and there is nothing I want to do but lie here on the bed, the noise from what seems to be a school playground outside coming through the already dark evening, and try to recreate our being together eight days ago. And if I had been with you longer it would only have been more miserable to leave. But I must remember that this is not a letter to you, in which to ask impossibilities of our meeting again (that's a bit that got rewritten), but the flexing exercises of my writing, though in this case not my fiction, and my impulse is not the autonomy of creation, but the obsessive accuracy of recollection. I want to be writing about you: but am about my writing, so introvertedly.

4

We got more beer that was chilled and in the paper cups freezing to hold and we tried to find sunnier places, sitting on different lawns in the comfortable garden, and then going indoors, looking through the large picture window across the valley of scrub below, trees stretching in the sun to the city, and on the walls elegant paintings, reasonably abstract, and as far as I can remember probably some small sculpted things around, and bent open for ocular evidence of being read a paperback Eldridge Cleaver, who else, and other similarly relevant books and journals (*Ramparts*; *New York Review of Books*; but not the *Monthly Review* or the *Guardian*) on a round table for relevant books and journals. So polished, so clean, so orderly; so calm, so cool. The earth shall weep thy fall tonight, for thou must die. You did not like the house, felt unable to talk in it, and its comfortableness was annoying, the house of readers of books and decent dissidence. So we walked

6

out and out from the garden to the road and out up a winding dusty private track where new houses were being tastefully sited amongst the uncleared trees, and we climbed this small horseshoe rise and looked down at the dusty trees in the valleys and a way off was the long hooting of a train, and the barking of dogs and the cries of children. Golden lads and girls all must like chimney sweepers come to dust. And we were above it all there on the horseshoe rise, not saying much nor needing to, my arm round your shoulder and you unresponsive to that. And we trespassed through a concrete dome that eventually would be a house, only the rough frame of the echoing vault there yet, and a tree growing within the lines of the house and reaching up through a porthole to the air, crazy, and when the owner or builder drew up in his car we scuttled away and scuffled down the cliff of the horseshoe's round end, twelve or fifteen feet down, to drop us on to a road encircling the rise, and then we walked on, past the crumbling edge of the rise with tree roots protruding dry into the air, past a spring that fell singingly down from the horseshoe and across the road and down the steeper cliff beyond, and it was hand in hand that we walked back to the fund raising for the political dissidents. There had been no hawks, no butterflies, no birds. Nothing but a stillness stretching over that dusty scrub land of spanish oaks and occasional cactus to the horizon. Johnson territory, they call it, you told me, since he owned most of it, all foliated.

5

Oh what can ail thee knight at arms alone and palely loitering the sedge has withered from the lake and no birds sing.

6

The auction ended we went to a party, over the road, in a similar house of more supporters of political dissidence, though Ghengis Khan my professorial host and his wife said this second householder was a phoney liberal and perhaps that is why the drunken guitar teacher from Dallas seized me and said stuff it there's beer here somewhere, he's got some beer and that's all I want; and another liberal senator wearing an artistic version of a CND badge hung round his neck told a story, sitting by a log fire in a huge fireplace, his decorative blonde wife at his feet before him, and he in slim trousers and a white turtle necked vest and an artistic version of a CND badge welcoming us all into his circled audience. A car of senators had been in an accident on a highway, blocking two of the lanes. And one senator, anxious about his political reputation, had rushed out to the passing traffic crying: I'm not drunk, I'm not drunk, I'm a Senator (giving his name as corroboration) and we haven't been drinking. And the traffic congested behind the accident, and he addressed the drivers to assure them the accident was not a result of his intoxication. And when at last a tow truck arrived, well in advance of any ambulance, the anxious senator tore open its passenger door and flinging himself prostrate on the cabin floor to avoid being seen, persuaded the driver he must for his senatorial reputation be driven away at once. And a second senator anxious, too, either about his own reputation or about the state of the other, flung himself prostrate on top of that other senator, on the tow truck cabin floor, to avoid being seen, and the tow truck sped away. Leaving the wrecked car and two congested lines of traffic stretching eight miles, and the narrator, amidst the shattered glass and blood, awaiting a second tow truck to arrive and open up the highway.

7

Brightness falls from the air, queens have died young and fair, dust hath closed Helen's eye. I am sick, I must die. Lord have mercy on us.

8

You did not find it easy to talk. You could talk to me because we had known each other ten thousand years. You could talk to me because you had met me before. Perhaps we had met. I wrote a story about two American hitchhikers we met—me and a girlfriend and a boyfriend of a friend of hers, and he was driving a car to Geneva for someone—and gave a lift to from Calais to Paris, and I wrote a story speculating about these two, the American boy and girl, voyeuristically speculating about the relationship or lack of it (when with the girl and me it was sexually, the lack of it driving me to such speculations). Might you, anyway, have been one of those hitchhikers? I thought of it only now, writing this. Travelling, there are these glancing acquaintances that have no names. It would be nice, I wrote, if we really had met: and trying to delete nice in this draft I can think of no replacement. What would it have been if we really had met? But our ten thousand years was a closeness that makes particular meetings irrelevant. And from talking to me, something so rare you said, you went at our day's next household (delivering an auctioned painting and drinking martinis as a reward for the carriage) to relating how in Turkey you had eaten sheep's eye—singular or plural?—and you talked slowly, softly, even lengthily about sheeps eyes and vodka martinis and Turkey and were happy.

9

But you were not going to stay. You caught my arm as we entered Ghengis Khan's professorial palace and said, I'm not staying. Don't go now, I told you, and you said, No, but I'm not staying. But that could wait till afterwards and I wanted you to be here now. And you agreed to that, to be here now. And eat with us, I said, offering my hosts' hospitality. Treat this life but as an inn. You helped in the kitchen and while you did that, our drinks fixed, and you having now become content and drunk and easy enough to demand your favourite, vodka martinis, I sat back and Ghengis Khan said what was I doing tomorrow and I didn't have to go straight away did I and what was the last date the positively last date I had to leave by and since I hadn't made a reservation what was the problem anyway, and when you looked round the corner from the kitchen he said, well, news, he's staying with us the week, and he laughed his satyr's laugh at you. I'm not staying, you came and whispered to me and I said it doesn't matter and why not and I'm not going tomorrow after all, for perhaps my not departing immediately might have made the possibility of a fuck more acceptable to you. While in the kitchen Ghengis Khan listened to his wife saying how you'd thanked her for introducing someone so sympathetic to her whom she could talk to which was so rare, but she says she's not staying, to which he declaimed, satyrically, Ha, we'll see about THAT, and fixed another vodka martini. And they expressed concern in the kitchen for me for the party the night before had been a disaster, the one girl he brought up to me one he couldn't possibly endorse, and the only possibility a girl her husband wanted to watch somebody screw, and the somebody wasn't me anyway. So there was a lot of ectoplasmic pressure on you that you should stay, and after we'd eaten and drunk more and smoked some grass they suddenly withdrew and left us and I said why don't you stay anyway, if you don't want it I don't mind, but just stay, please I do want you to stay.

10.

The room was dark and the air-conditioning unit next to it roared and crashed and thumped all night, switching itself off and on with loud hard sound as if a door were being broken in. The heated air for all the house was pumped through that room. You did not want to stay, you had said that, but how could you leave now

8

they had gone to bed and could not drive you home, now that it was late and we were all very tired and you had drunk all afternoon and evening and smoked a small amount of grass and why should you want to leave anyway, a girl with long black hair and wearing a poncho whom I'd met amongst the supporters of the political dissidents in Johnson country. You didn't even want to go into that room till I argued that if we sat talking downstairs the noise of our voices would rise up the stairwell and keep them awake and that would be impolite. So we went to my room, beside the air conditioning unit, and I got undressed then because I was tired and I said, look, just stay here, we won't make love if you don't want to. I'm not going to, you said. But the least you could do was stay since I had spent all afternoon with you and why else would I have expected you to have spent all afternoon with me, excluding me necessarily from those numerous girls who came with the acid head novelist I had met the night before, and whom you would hardly speak to when I stopped to talk to him beside his crumpled, much rolled VW; and when I asked you about him stoned there below on the dusty track, as we climbed the rise to the horseshoe shaped escarpment, you didn't answer. At which I assumed some sexual involvement. So why weren't you going to stay with me now? And since you were going to stay I began to undress you and suddenly you just accepted that, no longer talking to me. And as I'd already said to you I would accept your peculiar taboos, and perhaps it was your period which might have been why you kept your pantihose on, I don't know. So we lay together, in the heat and noise of the air-conditioning unit, and I held your body, touching your back, your breasts, your neck. You were a long way off and it was dark and you began to talk in a language I didn't know, the language of Turks or unicorns, and you wouldn't reply to me when I tried to talk back in my own language, when I tried to get you to speak to me. So what are you so screwed up about? I asked and I insisted on that but you wouldn't answer it then, neither to me caressing and my tones of comforting, nor to my anger at another fruitless day. And your face had changed and in the dark room the outlines of the face were the outlines of someone I had never seen before, I tried to look at you and could not recognise you, it was a face I didn't know; and I couldn't remember your face, I found I couldn't at all remember what you looked like and if I saw you again I would walk past you for I wouldn't know it was you and I had no sense of your face at all to superimpose your features on to the face beside me. We had supported the political dissidents but we didn't know our faces, we would not recognise each other another afternoon, and if you left early in the morning before I was awake, I would not be able to find you again because I couldn't remember your appearance and the features of the girl beside me were not of anyone I knew, nor was her language a language I knew. Nor was her behaviour, her refusal to make love. You're crazy, why weren't you at a church instead of an auction, that's where you ought to have been. But not said aloud, and anyway, you were listening only for the language of Turks or unicorns, and I was frightened that I didn't know the face beside me. Frightened and also angry. I think you were angry too, at staying there, at being half undressed. But we held on to each other, close, so that our eyes didn't focus on the faces we didn't know, and our ears couldn't hear the languages we didn't understand. Timor mortis conturbat me.

11

When I got to Mexico City I was very unhappy and wrote to you and then began to write about you; but I didn't finish writing this because I persuaded Arthur I was so unhappy I had to meet the American girl he'd mentioned who lived on the floor below. And we all went out to dinner and had a few beers and came back for some whisky I'd bought duty free and she emptied the tobacco out of a dried

up Fiesta and filled it with grass for me which she wouldn't smoke. But she stayed the night, after some protesting, but she stayed. She was a political dissident, too, but she wasn't a sexual dissident and the only reason we didn't was she had a period and a vaginal infection. But for the next few days we smoked grass and climbed the pyramids and drank a bit and she was pleasant and eventually I had to ask her for her surname too. So I didn't finish writing about you. And back in Sydney there was the inevitable and expected sexual disorder and for a while I didn't get anything written. I'm not sure why it should have been Good Friday when I finally did finish this first draft. That, like so many of the things you told me later, are so symbolic, so huge, so large, they can't be used in fiction. We can only write about the slight and glancing now. I can't put all the things in that you told me that week, that established a personality and a character and a history and a face for you; maybe some time later. In literature we have our firm sense of what is allowable, and what are our limits; it's a decorum of manner, of language, but it's also a decorum of materials. Some human behaviour is allowable in literature and other is not; ours is not a tragic age. Sex is pain, you said: we can allow that, but the biographical reasons are not suitable for our literature of the moment, and I cannot dissent from our proper decorum.

DIANA KAN

## Winter, for my Mother

### I

I was born into that song  
quietly without shock of being  
you singing the blue kingfisher

marking my golden/blue days  
lightly & your delicate fingers  
in winter shaping the keyboard  
to Schumann's Dedication

### II

Days I will carry your vibration  
under my feet & pluck your songs  
on the taut winter air  
burnished lights against  
the fading outlines of memory

# TOY DORGAN

## Migrant's Anniversary Dream

seasonless place  
changeless  
only moons & tides / so ordinary  
is that what they mean by  
the timeless land

no snow  
or spring  
only a shifting  
around man drawn red coloured calendar days

the 1st day of  
the wettest since  
the highest  
the driest

for 5 years  
I have measured out my time  
(no cutlery for me thanks)  
in my talent  
to remember time.  
your vagueness presses me.

I shall never come to 6.

# TOY DORGAN

## Repeat

I only ever wrote  
1 poem.  
over & over / it turned  
& jumped & slunk & sprang  
from under various greatcoats.

and then love cured it  
wiped & bathed  
& swaddled it in those long white  
(not gay but sober) streamers.  
over & over / it turned  
the poem,  
rolling it gently  
(for love is *only* gentle)  
covering & masking, even padding  
(such an excess there was) the poem;  
fattening it out, disguising it from what  
it was.

a job well done I thought  
that long poem,  
quelled, trussed up  
by love.  
but now  
when all is supposed to be complete,  
a faint smell of ripeness.  
over & over / it turns.

## Beach Comedian

the body  
(no person's that shiny)  
grabbed up pieces & patches & long ridges  
of sun.  
hip bones poked at the material;  $\frac{1}{2}$  of them  
were out.  
they shifted as if thinking.  
she belched  
but caught the taste  
sweetly behind her teeth.

the Chicko Ross is a *faux pas*  
in itself she thought  
fox parts  
that's probably what it's made of.

*those old gull queens*  
*pranced and chose*  
*their way with faked delicacy*  
she paused over her own cleverness  
(get it it's a joke son)  
or rather @ its speed.  
something seemed to be returning  
handed back.  
used  
but not ruined.

# STEPHEN GILFEDDER

## Tabernacle, Changi, 1943

I am dreaming of the sun's slow revolution  
the wild moon turning tides  
a blackout of connection, and the last  
silt clinging to a dredge's last rib.

I notice only the advent of days  
severing me from my bed of pleasure.  
The rouged eye of the sun  
ransacks me for bits of shell.

I suspect the bland mouth  
pinpointed by a tourniquet  
straining against the red.  
I can see out of the corner of my eye

the bright world of cause and effect.  
From there countless thin hands emerge to tap  
softly against my head  
fearful of making a noise,

wishing to inquire, to document.  
I ask only for a pause, a minute's silence  
from the clattering and chattering  
of make-do surgical saws of scalpels and hands.

Inside my bell I do not exist.  
I am preserved only in symbol  
like some configuration of the weather.  
I am a watertight case-history

a mesh of temperatures encased in my gauze  
-covered lean-to. A ready-made  
newborn my furnished markings  
radiate warming touching hands.

GRAHAM SHEIL

## The Suppliant

For a one-time believer become estranged, the Church prescribes he kneel—then believe. A rational man, surely, would reverse the prescription, requiring decision first, then the deed; and insist the prescribed order reveals merely the suppliant's will. Yet by this illogic might an unsure painter draw his first charcoal strokes, by this tenet might a writer start a story.

For Rodney Hallens; driving, now, the needle towards eighty and the bitumen ahead straight between scattered gums; rationality had been his polestar. Yet since his return to people and places that chafed with their familiarity, the decision whether or not to again leave the familiar had increasingly become a search for a symbol or sign that would present the decision ready-made, whole, and unequivocal to him.

*We would see a sign* a poet had lamented, and he sought one. Specifically, at the moment, a road sign. But the pointed direction assumed in his mind transatlantic proportions; for the red-dust track and the knobble of rock with its rock-paintings at the track's end might yet provide a sign to direction his whole life.

A sign-post ahead, and he eased his foot on the accelerator. But it was miles yet to his sign. His last customer of the day, a dentist in a neon-and-cut-price-petrol country town had confirmed the distance. So he sped on. To his left a gum-strewn plain; but on his right there increasingly rose above the red sandy ground and the gums, a range of craggy shoulders and hips of naked rock.

A different range, this, to the one he had gone walking in half a year before. Where, each day, he had followed a road that climbed and elbow-turned beside a tumble-and-swirl stream, past houses with antlers over doorways and the high cow pastures called *Blaa alm* in the mountain dialect; then leaving the road to climb the stony track that brought him above the tree-line, to see, above, the glacier on the Dachstein suspended in the sky, below the village blocked and dotted beside the perfect pear-shape of the lake, and ahead the track lost beneath the uniformity of snow that filled the whole, high distance.

His memories of Europe were all like that: chocolate box tableaus of fir and deer-antler and snow, or of an *Openhaus* with marble steps and statues, or of artists painting at easels among the sidewalk throng. And if, as an enforced discipline, he recalled a fourteen-year-old prostitute offering herself in an arched doorway or on a crowded footpath stepping across a beggar's outstretched legs to see the trousers rolled to display yellowing and chipped porcelain limbs, still the gloss remained.

His stay in Europe had been a dream exceeded.

This European dream had grown out of his awakening from another. This first had been of his own country rising at last out of its cat-o'-nine-tails and English-overlord past to become uniquely itself. His reading, his visits to one-time convict cells, mine sites and boom towns, his notebook in which he recorded the accents and phrases with which old people told of the past, had made the past vivid and sharp-edged to him; and had brought him a small fame for his stories and plays culled from his country's past.

The present was less clear to him. *Its* shape seemed indefinite, its colours and themes obscure; and in attempt after attempt eluded his efforts to apprehend it in words. His tales of the past had been celebrations of the heroic; but what could rise heroically out of the clipped lawns and pruned roses of suburban streets, the macadam, carbon-monoxide and chrome of the highways?

That something of clear hard lines and vivid colours not only could rise, but would, he had had no doubt. And had counted himself a volunteer hand among those who worked to make it happen.

Much had gone into his awakening from that dream, but chiefly it had been the sound of police boots kicking into a felled demonstrator during the Johnson visit. That and in hearing—after speeches where he stood behind an elderly tweed-and-brogue couple who took from a basket a thermos and cups for tea and precise quarters of cucumber sandwich—hearing government members braying hoarse with statements of this as lawlessness on our streets.

The war had been one part of his awakening; the disintegration of his marriage had been the other.

His marriage to Victoria had commenced with a honeymoon on the Queensland coast. Then year following year they had returned to walk far out on the mud-flats at low tide, laughing at cutting their hands in prizing and their lips in eating the sweet and gritty oysters from the rocks. Days were spent in pumping yabbies for bait and fishing from the beach; nights, in playing cards with people from the caravan park or holiday flats, and, later, in clinging and panting together in the warm night.

The life of shared hedonism they constructed for themselves came in time to be blown away by the smallest of puffs: squabbles over the T.V. programmes she watched, resentment that he would again be writing for hours or at yet another meeting or march or rally. In the end they sold the house and split the surprisingly little they had to show for their eight years together.

He had come to blame what had happened to himself and his marriage on what he increasingly called the country's cultural and intellectual shallowness, and would spend his share in escaping to what he now extolled as the cultural richness of Europe. Victoria was going north to the coastal town of their holidays. She had arranged lease of a shop there and was confident she could make a living selling groceries, fishing gear and curios made from shells, to tourists and people from the caravan park opposite.

Victoria delayed her own drive north until the day he left for Europe. In what had previously been his car, she drove him to the airport. They sat in the car park. Each, at first, made attempts at conversation, then they sat without speaking. They shook hands. Neither attempted a kiss.

His disenchantment with his marriage and his country had become linked in his mind as the public and private faces of the same thing. So, as the plane took to the air after its stop at Darwin and he saw the coastline slip behind and then only jig-saw shaped islands below, it seemed symbolic to him that he left both on the same day.

After his slow awakening from one dream, he dived from the sky into another. He prowled London streets with a satchel of plays under arm and addresses

and street guide in hand, searching out the back-street playhouses where he left copies of his plays. He left manuscripts on editors' desks, being able to remind one editor of a story previously published by his magazine. At night he returned to the playhouses, wrote notes during intervals, and tried to inveigle invitations to be present during rehearsals.

On his second morning in London, he rang Michael Bruthern.

Once the Great-wright-hope of Australian drama, Bruthern's play, *The Lay-off*, had been ecstatically pronounced by critics to be the *avant propos* of a new era of Australian playwriting. Upon the success of that one play, Bruthern left for London and the 'new era' languished. He now converted novels into T.V. scripts for British television.

The pub in which they met was crowded with Australians, and Bruthern pronounced this to be the only one in London where you could be sure of a Carlton-and-United icy cold. Not the place, Hallens saw, to plead cold beer gave him bladder trouble.

His bladder was still painful next day when Bruthern introduced him to a television producer. The producer scanned an offered script, pronouncing it competent, though too, too, Australian. He stated that later in the year they would be embarking on a series of European Classics. They had previously done *Madame Bovary* and *The Idiot* with success, and wanted more in that vein. The producer suggested Bruthern make his own selection, do a precis of, say, ten episodes, and a pilot script of the first of these. Nothing promised, the producer said, but, wel-l-l-l, we'll see . . .

Elated at not having to immediately set to work, Hallens stayed another week, endured another bladder-aching session of the amber fluid of home, told Bruthern he would return in three months when his money ran out, then boarded a plane to Hanover.

If, to him, London had been an expanded and up-tempo version of a world he already knew, Hanover was his introduction to what might well have been another planet.

His first, still airborne, glimpse, was of ancient three-tiered barns and triple-storied farm buildings squatting among flat green fields. Then, feet-on-the-ground, he stared at men in peaked caps and overcoats, riding bicycles beneath bare branches of linden and birch under soft grey skies. In this mystic world the theatres he attended were not the cramped back street playhouses of London, but giant *Openhouse* where doormen in tails ushered you to even the cheapest seats. Here, too, was an open-air stage in palace gardens where a row of gilt statues formed the backdrop. There the season of open air theatre did not begin until June, so he pencil-marked the programme and altered his plans so as to return for performances of Moliere and Brecht and Shakespeare. His planned journey included a return through East Berlin, for the season of epic theatre there; and where he hoped the letter of introduction to the Ministry of Culture that he carried would open doors to backstage, to rehearsals, to the acquaintance of producers.

Then from train windows he glimpsed castles veiled in rain and deer seen in the early-morning half-light; he walked beneath linden trees in northern deer-parks and in Austria climbed among rocks and snow and the mountain lying-fir; at cheap sidewalk stalls he ate herring-in-rolls, smoked-salmon-in-rolls, and drank *bier* that was warm, frothy, and kind to his bladder. On railway platforms and in carriages and *pension* room he read novels by Tolstoy and Turgenyev and Flaubert, and made tentative divisions of each into episodes.

By then the shape of his own future had presented itself sharp-edged and primary-coloured to him. He would live and work, say, nine months of each year in London where his stories, plays and television scripts would establish and in time support him; then three months of each year in Europe. In future years he

would go to Austria first, in April, so as to allow five weeks for walking while there was still snow on the mountains, then to Italy or possibly France, before travelling to northern Germany for the theatre seasons there.

Any likelihood of returning to Australia did not appear in this possible future at all.

He was in Milan, visiting prescribed galleries, and had returned to his box-sized *pension* room after a morning that included Leonardo's *Last Supper*, when the *pension* proprietor handed him a bulky letter. In his room he sat on the bed and opened it to find both a letter from Bruthern inside, and a sealed envelope with an Australian postmark addressed to him care of Bruthern.

Though the second letter intrigued him the more, he read the first. Bruthern wrote that while none of the London playhouses expressed interest in his plays, a theatre in Leeds was impressed to the point of almost certainly putting on one of them in July or August. Would he be able to be present during rehearsals? On your previous calculations, Bruthern wrote, the old hip pocket should be in a state of acute malnutrition before then, so I told 'em you'd be there. Awright, aul' Cock?

The second letter was typewritten and as terse as a telegram:—

Vicki's stacked your car and in hospital. The Holden's a write-off and Vicki damn-near. On intensive care list. If she gets over concussion etc she'll be in traction for months. Shop's shut. Rent and wholesalers' bills still to be paid and bank low.

Don't let a little thing like this spoil your gadding about.

No love

Val.

His youngest sister had never accepted his marriage to Victoria (how long since *he'd* called her Vicki?) was finished. On re-reading the letter, he felt the barb go in. He left the *pension* and walked the crowded footpaths, apologizing to people he kept bumping and finding himself at corners without any idea of which way to turn; once he looked up to find he was standing mid-road confronted by stampeding and hideously revving Fiats; he became hungry and brought cassata but later found it melted in pink and green dribbles over his wrist and down his trouser front.

When, late, he returned to his room, the barb was still there. He took out the pencil-marked programme for open air theatre and the letter of introduction to the Ministry of Culture, and tore them and tore again. He slammed the lid down on the pieces in the *pension's* rubbish bin; and was at first sarcastic, then bullying, to the man who answered the phone at the airport terminal.

Along the Queensland coast Summer had continued through the months of Autumn without a glimpse of the sun-routed season. Holiday flats bordering the esplanade and the foreshore caravan park continued full in May. Though mackerel began their run up the coast on-calendar, the winter whiting refused to appear.

Rodney Hallens, after abandoning his tie as he left the hospital, twice put his cases down and tried to arrange his coat on top of one of them as he walked the esplanade footpath. The second time was outside Victoria's shop. He stood sweating, as he peered through the locked glass doors at the rows of groceries behind counters, the deep freeze, card racks, fishing rods, reels and lines arranged in a corner. Though he held the key, he again pushed arms into coat sleeves and carried the cases around the corner at the restaurant next door; then two blocks along and up stairs to Victoria's second storey flat.

Plane, train, bus and taxi had finally discharged him at the Harcourt Bay Hospital an hour and a half previously. Mrs Hallens, he had been told, was now

out of Intensive Care. She was in Ward Three. He could go up. First stairs on right, then left and left again at the first floor landing.

Ward Three was really a balcony enclosed by high, vertical, aluminium louvres that could be opened, angled and shut. Past three beds occupied by very old women watching a television set, Victoria lay with one leg bare from the knee raised in traction. He saw her eyes open wide on seeing him, then she closed them. She said he might at least have warned her.

For an hour he sat beside the bed, trying not to stare at the stainless steel pin to which the weights were attached that protruded each side of her shin. He made the bantering remarks he had prepared during the thirty hour plane flight; then they sat, not so much conversing as each offering phrases then waiting and watching to see if the other accepted.

On subsequent visits that tentative note remained. Only when discussing pricing or ordering or the takings for the day did they regard themselves on neutral ground.

Each day he opened the shop at eight, took delivery of bread and milk, then swept the floor and the footpath outside. At first he had taken an exercise book, pencils and thesaurus, for he had definitely decided upon Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* as the European Classic to be adapted for television. However, when the trickle of customers ceased for a time, the memory of the last figure in the shop's bank balance goaded him into cleaning and rearranging showcards and packets of cereal on the shelves, or showcards and rods and reels in the window. After a fortnight he took to setting the alarm at five each morning, then working until precisely seven-fifteen, before breakfasting and walking to the shop.

On his first full day there, he closed the shop at six, crossed the esplanade, then between caravans and high eucalypts to the beach. The tide was far out, the sand dipping sharply then levelling as it changed to flats of exposed mud. A woman of middle age with elaborate tinted coiffure, and a dress that was backless, built-in-bra and frangipatterned, passed him with a bucket and yabby pump to stand knee-deep in black mud pumping yabbies. He described her in his notebook, adding she seemed a very symbol of . . . But left the sentence suspended in a line of dots. Already he perceived a decision would in time become necessary and, unwilling to make it, searched for a symbol to make it for him.

Some weeks later a symbol he could clearly label presented itself to him. She was, perhaps, seventeen, standing thigh-deep in the foam and green of the full tide, fishing. She wore a maroon tee-shirt above her bikini bottom; her face and limbs were deeply tanned and her hair hung black and free to between her shoulders; her bosom was slight but her thighs and hips were firm and full. In his notebook he wrote she had nothing of prettiness about her—rather a handsome, sun-tinged beauty, waiting to blossom into youthful fertility. Then he added: *Idealized symbol of this country.*

Symbolic or not, it was himself that increasingly idealized her. Some Sunday afternoons, himself fishing with a rod and reel taken from stock, he spoke to her. Once he lay sprawled on the warm sand, and she came and knelt beside him. She asked, what was he reading? He showed it was an anthology of new Australian poets, and read two poems to her. She said she liked them, though she didn't read much. But her sister had. Her sister once won a prize for an essay, and she'd written poems too. Of course, that was all before she'd got married.

His conversations with Victoria on his nightly visits remained on the safe subjects of the shop, the coming and going of boats from the jetty, the catches of fish by people who came to the shop. Once, though, she asked what he intended doing after she left hospital. Then it all came spilling out in an unordered rush as he told of Bruthern and the theatre at Leeds and the television producer, of theatres in Hamburg and Hanover and Passau, of his hiking in the mountains, of chance

meetings with people on trains, of a couple met while sheltering from rain beneath a linden tree in a palace garden. Amazed at his own hunger to tell, he kept telling until he ran himself out. Then out of the silence between them, she asked what had happened to his earlier ambition to be among those who built a uniquely Australian culture. That dream of a gum-tree culture, he said, had been pathetic. Pathetic and hopeless.—Not quite hopeless, she said, there was that anthology of poems he'd loaned her, for instance.

Just then the visitors bell rang and he escaped by retreating past the three old women ecstatically watching a spangle-suited compere give away television sets.

That conversation, however, continued in his mind. He read local poets and story-writers, and some mornings put aside his work on Flaubert to write down scraps of conversations from people who came to the shop, descriptions of the beach and the boats and fishing, of his girl from the beach.

Intruding among these notebook entries were others that read: June 2, *Antonius und Cleopatra* opens at the Gartentheatre, Hanover; June 10, *Marat/Sade* at Berliner Ensemble; June 20, they're playing *Mutter Courage* at the Herrenhausen.

One day he told Victoria he had written to his former boss in Melbourne, asking if his old job was available. He had just over two hundred left. She said he should take wages for his work at the shop, but he reminded her of the state of her own bank balance.

Soon after that he closed the shop at eleven one morning, took a taxi to the hospital and returned with Victoria to the flat. He supported her up stairs with one hand, carrying her case and crutch in the other. He opened the door on a table already set with a vase of poinsettias, cutlery, a bowl of salad; and he set to grilling steaks of mackerel and produced from the fridge a bottle of moselle. That night he slept on a canvas stretcher in a storeroom back of the shop.

Some days later a neighbour drove her through rain to him at the shop, and she limped in through the doorway on her crutch. Half an hour later she asked why had he replaced all the plastic reels with wooden ones?—You can see the grain, he said, there's craftsmanship there.—But they cost more, she said, you'd've sold four times as many in plastic ones. And whatabout the bios with dames that come starkers when you hold 'em up? Where're they?—Sold 'em, he said, and didn't replace.—But they sell!—They're crap, he said. Bloody crap.

Then they were quarrelling, their voices stridently rising as they tried to shout out each other and the sound of rain tramping on the iron roof of the shop. Abruptly, they stopped. Each sat sullenly at a distance from the other, each behind a different counter. After a time Victoria hopped on one leg to the deep freeze. She took out two *Fruitos*, peeled the paper back from the ice of one, supported herself on counter tops as she carried it to him. Then they sat behind the one counter, each sucking *Fruitos* and staring out at the rain.

That rain was driven in by a northerly that wrenched limbs from trees in the caravan park and along by the jetty flung the high-tide spume high over the concrete wall and across the esplanade bitumen. It also brought to an end the hot weather that had burned right through Autumn and even the first month of Winter.

Next morning men were shouting to each other in the caravan park as they looked over their shoulders at the sky while stooping to couple caravans to toe-bars, or knelt to roll canvas heavy with rain.

Rodney Hallens did not write, that morning; instead he passed between the evacuating campers, to the beach. The sea was at half-ebb, lying flat and innocently smooth; but high on the beach in a ragged line that margined the whole curving bay, the sea had thrown back, it seemed, all the wrack and rubbish of the bayside town. He walked beneath the threat of an indigo sky, kicking over bottles, dead bream, sodden newspapers, whiting heads-backbones-tails from which the filets had

been cut, mackerel heads, red plastic buckets, green plastic ice-cream cans, tangled line, a dunny can encrusted with oysters. Gulls flashed white against the dark sky as they swooped to quarrel over dead fish.

—Gulls picking among the rubbish of the town for what sustains them, he thought,—symbol of the artist?

Victoria thought so when he told her. She was reading the morning paper. They're bringing all the troops home, she said, to drum up votes for the next popularity poll. He said she was becoming as big a cynic as himself.—You ought t' be pleased, she said. And there's rubbish here for you to pick among—that's your meat.

It was not the gulls, though; it was the girl that became truly symbolic to him. On his last Saturday at the Bay, Victoria and he ate at the restaurant next to the shop and he took her home, then walked alone to the pub. There, under a canvas awning, a girl in a plastic sombrero twanged and yodelled into a microphone with amplification turned to LOUD. Above bodies that swayed when they stood, tables littered with glasses, bottles, cigarette butts and potato crisp packets, he saw his girl from the beach. Across laughter raucous at the compere's ribaldry, he mimed offer of a drink. She shook her head, but crossed to him to explain she was waiting for her sister. There at the table to which she returned was the sister. But it was the man who without doubt was the sister's husband who first took his attention. In a bright shirt and shorts he was sitting on one chair with his fat legs propped on another. His stomach formed a mound from thigh to chest above which his face sat within a rolled collar of fat. He could not have been more than thirty; and he called to an asphalt-skinned islander and handed him a bottle of Coca-cola. He laughed loudly as the islander prized the cap off with his teeth. Still laughing he poured Coca-cola, then rum, first into his glass, then his wife's. She passively accepted as she tore at another packet of potato crisps with her teeth then moved empty bottles to make room for her glass.

—So this was what had become of the girl who once won a prize for an essay and who wrote poems before she was married. . . . Her face and dark hair still showed remnants of a once strong-featured beauty; but below the face her body spread down like a bloated pear propped on sausage legs. She crunched potato crisps and drank. Her youth, curiosity, and whatever had once stirred her to write essays and poems, was quite drowned in rum-and-Coke, rum-and-dry, rum-and-Fanta.

It was a tableau formed from that scene,—with his girl from the beach waiting, it seemed to him, to become like her sister—that occupied his mind through the two nights and a day of trains speeding south.

That image stayed with him through the southern Winter, through his driving to country towns, through conversations over catalogues and order books and cups of coffee with customers he had farewelled almost a year before. That so much youthful beauty and verve might be traded for such obscene security, seemed to him a tragedy greater than Oedipus.

He shared a flat with his own younger sister, who railed at him for his detachment from politics since his return. Her life was very much as his own had been when he still counted himself among the faithful. Only occasionally did he accompany her to a meeting or walked with her on frost-tingling nights pushing pamphlets into letter boxes.

He finished his precis of episodes and completed first episode of *Sentimental Education*. This he took to one local producer who smiled indulgently at his statement his channel might be interested; and another who pushed back his chair, thumbed through the script, then offered a salary for writing a never-ending cops-'n'-robbers series.

That same day he posted the script to Bruthern, enclosing a letter to the English producer.

His own mail box brought him newspaper clippings of reviews of his play which was produced at Leeds without his presence at rehearsals. The play was accounted an artistic, though not commercial, success. And included note informed him a statement of royalties and payment of them would follow.

It was some ten weeks before that money order arrived. When it did, and he added it to what he had been able to save, he had more than sufficient for an economy class fare to London. Still, he lingered. He told his sister there would soon be a commission cheque due to him. Then there was one of his plays being produced by an amateur group. From this he received no payment, though some acclaim. His sister was loud in her praise. Together with her bearded-boyfriend-of-the-moment, she threw a party for him from which his bladder ached for days.

He worked at further episodes of *Sentimental Education* though, increasingly, he found himself distracted by the work of young local poets. None of them individually great, but reaching an increasing audience with a collective voice of reassessment.

Taking their standpoint for his own, he again attempted what had always failed him: to capture in story a part of the mood and colour of the present time. The details were ready at hand, for they were to be taken from his own life; but the shape eluded him. Shape, he saw, was a matter of drawing limits; above all, the points of departure and resolution. Yet endings must be already present in beginnings. So he was frustrated from even beginning, for in this story of himself what could contain the resolution of the story's problem while his own remained unresolved?

The English producer wrote they could well be interested in his proposed series, but a great deal of consultation would be necessary before a final decision. When could they expect to see him?

Some weeks later, Bruthern wrote:—

Aul Cock,

You might get away with the stay-at-a-distance bit with stage plays, but that'll never work with T.V. True, television producers think they're J.C.—but it's you that's gotta produce on-the-spot miracles.

Are y' bloody comin' or aren't y'?

Cheers and beers

Michael B.

As he had with the producer's letter, from day to day he put off answering Bruthern's. Four days later another letter arrived, this one bearing a Queensland postmark:—

Rod

Val wrote you've kept putting off making the decision whether or not to return to London. Now that at last I have two good legs to stand on, I also have decisions to make. For months, now, the weather has been foul, resulting in the caravan park, the esplanade flats, and my till, all being quite empty.

One choice is to go begging to the bank manager for a loan. If he fills my begging bowl I might last until the campers return at Xmas—and make a go of it yet.

My other choice is presented by Mr Restaurant next door who wants more room and has been badgering me to sell.

Should I have a bargain sale sell-up and return south?

If I am able, I'll put off making my decision until I hear yours.

Love

Vicki.

The implication in the last lines of that letter shouted to him as loudly as the demand for a decision from Bruthern's. He was carrying both letters with him as he hustled his last customer of the day, then sped at eighty over bitumen, scanning the roadside ahead for a sign.

He knew this to be his sign even before he read the words and the distance. He slowed, then turned along the indicated stony track towards high scattered gums. As the miles brought him nearer the hips and shoulders of rock ahead, the track became sandy, the gums low and crowded by banksia and with the white and pink of heath dotted among the browns and khaki.

Ahead was a shallow ford and he took it at a run, but soon slipped into low gear when the track rose abruptly in red and deep wheeltracks ahead. For a time he skidded in sand and climbed, then the wheels slewed sideways and he could go no farther.

He climbed the red sand track on foot, towards the buttress of rock that rose like a huge fist above the pink heath and the banksias and stringy-bark gums. Sweating and with cold air burning in his throat, he arrived at the rock. Beneath the 'knuckles' of the fist of rock was a long sheltering wall, its length of fourteen or more feet covered to head-height with rock-paintings.

In daubs of rust-red ochre were life-sized drawings of hands and hands stencilled in ochre, then smaller and simpler finger-daubed figures hunting, climbing trees, throwing spears, there were lizard designs and figurative trees with down-sloping branches, central were two figures standing together with hands touching.

A board placed by a country town historical society stated little was known of the people who made the paintings, but this was presumed to be a place of religious significance.

The day he had left Europe he had come from a place of another religion, the chapel where Leonardo had spread *The Last Supper* across an entire wall. Yet this one he stood before was plainly not of the creation of a single towering giant, but the work of many now unknown hands recording their life and place and times.

Yet if this was the sign he had to take as his own, another came with a wry laugh chasing at its heels. For here he stood in the red sand in shoes branded Salamander—Germany, in a suit marked Erdman—Hanover, a shirt and singlet bought somewhere in London, a tie from Milan. His socks and underpants at least bore *Made in Australia*, even if the tabs were frayed and almost worn off. There was a wry allegory in that, if only he chose to make it.

*We would see a sign*—but signs, he now saw, were there wherever he chose to see them, and he could take his pick.

It was dark when he drove past the wheat silos, the saleyards, the hotels, to the one hotel where he was booked for the night. Renovations had recently commenced for above the door were pipes and planks of scaffolding. The licensee proudly announced he'd air-conditioned the place since he last stayed, then lowered his voice to say, actually, they were having a spot of trouble with the bloody thing.

He was too late for dinner at the hotel, so he ate at a nearby steak-and-chips cafe, before going to his room. There was only a bed, chair, wardrobe and chest of drawers; and the room seemed hot and airless. Plainly the air-conditioner was turned to UP and could not be turned down. He strained to raise the window, until he saw the screw-heads that now held it sealed shut. He began taking off his clothes, emptying his pockets as he did. He took out Bruthren's letter and again read it, then he reread Victoria's, and placed both on top of the chest of drawers.

From his satchel he took out an exercise book and pencils; and he tried to write by sitting on the chair with the exercise book on the drawers. But neither the writing nor the sitting worked: his knees against the drawer handles forced him to

lean forward and up at a back-kinking angle. Then he tried crouching on the seat. Then standing and stooping.

In the end, he placed the exercise book on the seat of the chair and knelt on the carpet's faded pattern. And he, kneeling, a ridiculous suppliant in socks and under-pants, wrote:—

*For a one-time believer become estranged, the Church prescribes he kneel—then believe. A rational man, surely, would reverse the prescription, requiring decision first, then the deed; and insist the prescribed order reveals merely the suppliant's will. Yet by this illogic might an unsure painter draw his first charcoal strokes; by this tenet might a writer start a story. . . .*

## LEE KNOWLES

### Spring Clean

Sorry seemed the least she could say  
to the man falling apart outside her door,  
his tallow hair softening down the light, eyes broken blue.

She had never learnt the words,  
the silver stroking ways as old as womankind.  
So she shut the door on their separate miseries,  
though hers, better fortified, were also stronger.

No sound, no crumbling sound  
above the savage lungeing of her broom.

# JENNIFER STRAUSS

## The Seasons of Incomprehension

for R. D. Laing

“The face I wear you do not choose to see”  
She sang in Spring beneath the flowering tree  
“So they veil brides for nuptial mystery  
Lest eyes too-bright make mock of modesty.”

“The face I wear you do not wish to see”  
She sighed beneath the summer-fruited tree  
“My motherhood’s flesh-red, Eve-wild:  
Your mask Madonna-blue, meek, mild.”

“The face I wear you do not dare to see”  
She wept by Autumn’s fading, failing tree  
“Matrons in charity and corsets should draw breath  
But snared I squander raging towards my death.”

“The face I wear is not for you to see”  
She mocked from under winter’s stoney tree  
“You preach of peaceful rest but I rot there  
Where only death decides what face I’ll wear.”

# LEE KNOWLES

## Going Back

Grandfather was a stout Glaswegian, older than anyone in our street.  
We lived in the long shadows of his house and tried to please him,  
tiptoeing past his door, sitting straight backed at meals  
while Grandfather roared ideas across the table.  
our mother taught us to be fearful, silent.

Strangely enough, it wasn't necessary and we knew it.  
Days he took us for walks along the beach,  
the pines dripping coldness of another land.  
Once he danced to Highland music on the verandah  
till the cats beneath set up some defence.

Deserted ship in Sydney.  
Went mining, kept a wild saloon, trained horses till the feed ran out,  
married at forty someone malleable, produced four children,  
barefoot, sometimes hungry, who fetched firewood in carts  
and slept in old shirts in one room.

His stories were of the Highlands, the Stuarts—  
the wrong people still on the throne—,  
the Campbells who must always be opposed.  
He died of ulcers, furious at not quite reaching ninety,  
having sent the nurse away.

Then my father bought the house Grandfather had never wished to own,  
my aunt cut her hair, smothered his grave with flowers he'd never liked.  
No one had understood his pride, his anger, his glorious lies, his wish to  
own nothing  
and hold freedom as a stick against the wind.

In Scotland I went cautiously. Years ago,  
hating his stepmother, Grandfather joined the marines, for the uniform,  
but that was changed before the ship sailed.  
His sister wrote "We waved and waved, but you wouldn't look up, John. Why  
were you ashamed?"  
She reached a hundred but held only rain dimmed memories of him.

The place near Glasgow where Grandfather lived is now a park with old trees,  
playing fields, a summer fun fair and long walks of green.  
The entrance steps, once part of a school, remain,  
some writer's dazzled dream of Greece. And all the house's stones,  
block upon block, are overrun with flowers.

Within buttressed walls, I found an old cemented sundial and a gardener's house.  
The walls were high as in Grandfather's stories,  
the walls the prison from which on Sunday there was no escape except to church.  
The children filed with bibles and the coachman, relieved of week-day duties,  
walked with them.

Great Grandfather, his beard heavy on his waist,  
found mathematics unprofitable, went into business,  
bought this house and disciplined his sons who, at twelve,  
brewed their own whisky, discovered sin outside the walls  
and planned another life.

I stole a small stone for my father and caught a bus back to reality,  
sure I had touched a hand across the sundial  
that did not find me strange.

# PAMELA TAYLOR

## Archaeological Speculations

Female idol with bell-shaped dress and movable legs  
broods over the vast abyss—  
pupils of the eyes are set in resin.

Archaic earthenware from Boeotia—  
a plain,  
wide-mouthed,  
tulip-shaped beaker.

A female figure  
lifting a sacrificial vessel,  
surrounded by four riders—  
with spear and shield.  
(Probably made in a Central Italian workshop,  
after a Cyprian model.).

The third millennium reached Cyprus by way of  
Troy,  
Cyprus,  
the Danube valley—

and winked at a female figure lifting a sacrificial vessel,  
distracted she fell over a spear  
held by one of the four riders—

cracking the tulip-mouth  
of the Boeotian earthenware,  
becoming one with  
the bell-shaped idol—  
incorporating movable legs.

## The House

Hello  
house.  
I am going to drag you  
by the door,  
stumbling  
over  
your  
foundations,  
into  
such  
ecstasies  
of  
freedom,  
as will make your windows  
open  
with  
delight,  
and your chimneys  
dilate.  
What if it turns your insides out!  
and the fridge  
careers  
into the lounge  
or bedroom,  
confusing  
the  
forks  
in the kitchen.  
No longer will you yawn your  
empty  
fire-place  
at me,  
and distract my purpose  
with  
cracks  
in  
the  
ceiling,  
which  
lead  
nowhere.

# JENNY BINNING

## Healing

I am blind.  
Shafts of light  
Spike like leaves,  
Green in black  
Muteness.

I am deaf,  
Colours of sound  
Awaken like questions,  
Soft in green  
Silence.

I am lame.  
Tremors of music  
Lead me to dance,  
Glow in still  
Speechlessness.

I am whole.  
I lighten  
To the blue  
Cascade.

You have called  
The movement  
Of my mouth  
A dance.

## The Consent

Joe wanted to be legitimate today.

His first view round the kitchen scraped the superficial from his eyes—the spill of tea leaves on the bench, sprung from a careless hand, troubled, addicted more to valium than tea. A frypan with the egg curdle crusted. A bacon-and-eggs morning. Unwashed mugs, like potsherds from yesterday's era.

His unsolicited appearance here at this backdoor was compatible with his dissolute morning.

A noise of hard rock, distant evidence of the living here, was added to his senses. He coiled a little, hesitating to call out. But he called.

She came from a room along the hallway hidden from his position at the door and her sudden appearance was a strange entry. Eyes met, that exacerbating trauma of new meetings, that shimmer, that wave, that nexus swirled around, and the flash which closes the gap in a new common presence of two strangers awkwardly aware of each other. And nothing much was sayable but “Hi”.

It wasn't that Joe spoke first. She had begun it. She saw at a glance he was not official. His clothes were shabby, dark jacket, grubby cream pullover, and his pants were amco. She felt an interest rather than apprehension.

She stopped. Joe came in a few steps and she felt positive about it, and relaxed, her arm raised from her hip to her hair, which she farmed nonchalantly.

“I've been along this street going to work for the last month and wondered, guessed who lived here. I don't know how but a sudden impulse. I turned into your pathway. An open gate, and a kid's bike. I don't have any reason much. I'm an intruder.” He spoke quietly, excusingly.

She was young, dishevelled, small firm breasts, soft pretty face and a definite woman. She had an immediate presence, an awareness, and there was no doubt she could handle any novel situation with people.

“Don't sit down till I get you”, she said solidly. “You're a young punk from around these parts, a creep, a head, or you're some kind of legit, a seeker, a love joy-boy on a losing caper with daily life. Or something simpler. So I believe”, she said.

Joe's tautness loosened. Her quick confrontation of him diminished his initiative and he wanted to get away. But he contrived to restart his reasons. He was a shy relater, had often been a defeatist within himself with pretty women. He wanted them close to him badly all his late adolescence and now at twenty-four he still became captured by the extremity of his want. Not that he knew what the words were in these situations, the words which would smooth the way to some fulfilment.

What bugged him he didn't really know, had never worked it out to any satisfying conclusion. Sex or love or ego-enrichment or other-sex acceptance, or some unknown better side of himself. His self was always a compelling void.

Before he could begin, as he looked at her fulness, for the first time, concentrating, she took up the option of the hiatus of their edginess.

"I'm a housewife, what's your style?" she broke in encouragingly now it was better. They were both at a beginning, the news could be given. "And I'm trying to be busy just now; the kid has got to be got ready for kinder so what can I quickly do for you?"

He began to find his way smoothing out in his mind an opening gambit to her, an approach. Towards another being, as chance would have it, a feminine being.

He urged himself gently a few steps within the room from the door, freer and quietening himself. Getting closer. "I felt something of a compulsion to reach out and came round the back to meet anyone who was here. It's not definable. I'm just here and with you, and it's you. It's just like that. I don't know, I don't know how to talk to you. I'm here and I really like it and you. I'm very fed up."

She gathered her thin robe around her breasts as she sat opposite his standing. He glazily perceived her sex but he was in a more complete mind even if it were confused and drugged with the irrational motivation of his being there. Her body came through as lovely, what was her personality? He dismissed thought about flesh as suddenly as it appeared. What *was* she now dominating. And what need is in me. He tensed a little, stomach and throat. "Why" was a ghost in his head.

"Today's Friday isn't it?" she mused, "Another bloody day, another one. That's your point too, isn't it?" she added more strongly.

Joe looked at her properly for the first time and he had feeling. There was rapport of some kind and he, perhaps, had been directed, yeah, directed to this circumstance. He was surer about it.

"You struggling with the set-up you're in here?" he queried.

"I'm average", she replied.

"I'm not intruding so much I think, so either I say something about me, or get you to say something about you", Joe explained. "Can you free up; or just bugged up like I am?"

She hesitated. Her hair fell aside and down to shroud her soft shoulders and forward over her prettiness. She liked him, his face and his wide eyes, his form and his quiet manner, and his lack of mannerism.

She couldn't quite get what he was about but realized as she stared at him, that his presence felt legitimate. She *could* talk with him. He was a strong person, no freak, not an obstruction any more to her routine, not a nuisance character—but a likeable someone and manfully impressionable to her, and self possessed. But confused, a loner, a non-culty semi-professional work type, with no clean attachment to persons or things. Not a drifter nor a love-sick moocher, but a questor who could have been one of her welcome long-ago set of acquaintances, and more than that. She knew his state of non-cognisance. She was there herself. So long ago yet not in time she had been there.

"What would you tell me about yourself", she managed eventually. "Want to talk it out."

This was really it for Joe now. "I came to this house because I *felt*. There was part of my life here. I feel it and I felt it. And your proving it. A childish whim, a stupidity, but I'm here with you."

She was just that bit more intrigued, and pleased. "Do you think you could want me", she struck out with, surprised at herself. Off her balance. No sooner said, she bit her lip, a quick arrest of herself, but she had said it.

Joe stopped his vacuous trend and looked closely at her. He saw a vital person, but now saw her perturbed. He saw a direct but fractured woman.

"Probably yes, in what way, how? You jolt me", he managed.

She accepted that without moving her gaze from him. She had withstood her first impulse to retract and change tack. He added, "Closer feeling, an understanding, a mutual trust. And goddamit, a cup of coffee". Increasing his assurance as he said it.

She rose to go to the stove and her body delighted. Joe was vaguely aroused but his peculiar mission was not that kind of thing to his best belief. He was tortuously emptying one thought after another from his innerness, thoughts about abundant liaison and seepage of love throughout everything. Reaching out. That's what it was. A compulsion to find out what people felt and thought and how they loved and what they loved and why they needed like they did. If they did.

The sex of her body was art but it had to remain on the fringe of his mind.

She fired the gas burner and turned to face him.

"Come right in, take your coat off, sit down, relax", she said. "You are nice to have this morning. I'm really pissed off. I've seen no one for, what is it, three days. You're very welcome. I'm on my own here with my baby. It's not my cup of tea. That's my story", she said.

Joe took another look at the things he had precipitated. He had wandered unwittingly. Into an enclave fraught with the passion involved with loneliness he had experienced always. This woman was one of his kind.

A desirable acceptance of her whole body filled his head and he felt the sense of compatibility with her spirit. Two outlooks merging and a joy. Two creatures above the creation of mere bodies. Wholesomeness, joy. Joe was warm, no longer abashed or lost, tentative. He was with friends.

"Sugar?" she asked. He shook his head.

"What's your work?"

"Printer."

"And what will be the matter at your workplace today?"

"I'm expendable. Others will take up the slack."

"Want to eat?"

"No, just stay."

"Let's go to the front room", she decided.

The baby was playing with his breakfast bowl in the sunny alcove of the room. The furniture was far from fastidious. Second hand pieces, a ruffled rug, a mess of newspapers, books, magazines, an old T.V., a new transistor—which she switched low. A lived-in abandonment. Rather wild room, non-deliberately disarranged. Mod cons in frantic use. Comfort of a sort, trying to assuage.

"Are you pretty upset", Joe asked, and was concerned.

"Very", she said depressingly.

"No husband now?"

"No. He's in the jug. Confidence rap. Deserved."

"How do you cope?"

"I work. Part time. At the pub you sometimes go to."

Joe tried to recall. Nothing remembered.

"I'm the dining room slave", she added. "It's a one-way mirror from there."

"Are you trained in anything else?"

"Yes, a physiotherapist—not overkeen. I've been unhappy for as long as I remember. My father I didn't know and mum is dead. I married quickly, he's where I want him. And I'm on the jolly beans because kicks I need. I despair of loving and being loved. My kid is a lot but not anyways enough. I want love or I'm out. That's it. Sometimes my body and mind scream for tenderness and living

and loving and the happiness to burst into life. My desire is beautiful and bursting. I hope strongly; that keeps me going—at present.”

So full was her feeling that Joe became very quiet and tender for her whole being. There had to be a silence and the baby accentuated it.

“Have you begun to see through to your fulfilment, say a bit precisely”, Joe clambered around and asked as softly as he meant it to be.

“Not that I recognise clear. It is as a vision for my life moulding around a tender strong-minded joe who drinks in my body liquids, takes me to his heart and mind and converts this shitful world to a haven vibrating with the sounds and smells and tastes of simple glowing pleasures. And beautiful sex. And me. I return all of it, the same and more, to him.”

The room was a warmer, fulsome lovely enclosure and just a while the pause, and a pregnant high permeated everything. Then the scene lowered, as it had to, from such a height. The baby babbled his way from them trailing his toy as if submitting the sacred moment to them alone. They were sitting turned in some anguish, now toward each other, spent forces but feelingly deeply for each other, the one supplicant, the other tender, minds racing, slowing, doing odd tricks, their eyes closing on each other maturely, sanely, understandingly, receiving. A melting. Not speaking.

He strolled to the window, looked out vaguely on a garden expanse suggesting a sense of home if only it were so. He turned then to face her. Their hearts tossed, unavoidably. It was a pure moment. They were far away from the strangers they had been so little a time ago.

“My name is Joe”, he said gently.

## NEIL McDONALD

### Odd (Mixed) Thongs

I've seen the surfies attempt it well  
random colours so as to impress  
the nymphet surfiette  
But mine are more subtle—“almost pragmatic”.

Black with black with brand differentiated  
patterned uppers.  
I reckon you'd have to be a pretty experienced observer of such  
things to detect a Woolies upper from a Coles upper. No one has  
yet.

# BRUCE DAWE

## The Ecology of the Dirty Story

What will happen now to the dirty story?  
Wombat-wide it wanders the upper air . . .  
Will it ever find a home again  
In the dark it was born in, underground?  
Can it survive up here, in the public light?  
On the huge screens, as on a vet's blank table?  
On the afternoon housewives' endless programmes,  
Picked, pulled, prodded at, exposed to view?  
How will it ever be itself again,  
Now that it lacks a natural habitat?  
It needs moist night for its rich fur,  
It needs the quiet soil of lives to delve in with deep claws,  
It needs the juicy roots of our waking hours,  
It needs the twilight-flying insects of the imagination,  
It needs the unconditional love of children,  
The secret but more lasting affection of adults . . .

Now, tumbled out of its burrow, bulldozed up,  
Blinking, dazed, caged in a thousand scripts,  
Tethered by one hind-leg to a skyline of hoardings  
—Must it suffer its days away like a service-station wallaby?  
Where is the fauna protection league for the vanishing Id?  
Is this the end of the dirty story, then: fur . . . meat . . . *snickers* . . . ?

# GARY HOCKING

## Dream after S

Last night i saw you again  
you seemed much older yet  
no less tender and soft and warm

In maturity now you've blossomed  
round and delicate, no angular youth  
lingers in your maternal pose

My heart was taken to see you lay  
in that electric void with your face  
just looking through me, through all  
of us and even through time

On that bed you lay dressed in milk  
or traditional white of terri-towel cloth  
and in your eyes a blue ray sparkled life  
as it always did

Tears of clear yellow flowed from  
your solitude and melted into that  
honey-blond and it too, turned yellow  
but i don't know why

perhaps it's the time and the years  
or the love and the days or  
even the flowers and the children

yes i think that's it.

# Into White

78 seconds to the "Not so Good Earth"  
and i slip from the plane with action  
rapid like the locks of an undone zip  
silent with sounds all of its own the  
air rushes past me here i go again

Canopy of white purity with a  
vicious dark red streak  
Free fall not for me i'm in no hurry  
to reach the land spread-eagled before me

the mother has left droned away and i  
fall down in my harness of sudden  
insecurity or so it seems

You must be mad, that's what they said  
my face feels like talcum powder but  
i can still feel my cynic smile Yes i  
know who is mad and who is not

like suspended animation they ask when i  
fall i look them in the eye and say with  
a giggle i'm not suspended but free and  
i'm not falling but climbing and not  
down but up

You must be mad

getting closer the big brown corpse  
there it is raped and murdered and tortured  
and kicked and spat on  
there're the killers they're getting  
more clear and i can see more of them and i  
can see them much more clearly LEAVE  
MY BLOODY EARTH ALONE i think

in spheroid madness globular frenzy i don't  
know what it is but it can't be FAIR  
wisdom of the ancients yet how true  
ahh! but if they could only see it now  
and see it from here

if

they

could

only

see

it

from

HERE.

## COLLEEN BURKE

### Poem from the Aran Islands

Currags,  
small black beetles,  
hang  
upside down  
on the ocean,  
as it slides  
gently  
off the world,  
into the setting sun.

2

The curragh  
sliding  
off the sea,  
rises easy  
then lies  
still &  
black  
caught  
in the grey  
silence of sand.

3

Currags  
burrow  
into the sand  
to sleep  
head down,  
arse up  
hunched  
against  
the long  
black winds  
of night.

4

And they  
dream the  
dark dream  
of whales  
before  
uncurling  
onto  
the newly  
swept  
sands  
of day.

Curragh—small fishing boat used off West  
Coast of Ireland manned by 2 to 3 men.

NATSUME SOSEKI

## Ten Nights of Dream

Translated by Ito Aiko and Graeme Wilson

### THE FIRST NIGHT

I dreamt.

I was sitting by the bedside, with my arms folded, when the woman lying there on her back quietly remarked that she would die now. She lay with her soft-profiled oval face framed by her long hair spread out upon the pillow. The depth of her white cheeks were moderately tinged with the warm hue of blood; and the lips, of course, were red. No sign whatever of a dying person. Yet, in so calm a voice, the woman had distinctly said that she was dying. I, too, felt that perhaps she might indeed die. So, bending over and looking directly into her face, I asked "Really? You're dying?" The woman opened her eyes wide as she answered that of course she was dying. They were large moistened eyes and their centers, surrounded by long eyelashes, were an entire jet-black. Vividly, at the bottom of those jet-black pupils, an image of myself appeared.

Noting the utter luster of those black eyes, eyes so deep as to be almost transparent, I wondered how she could possibly be dying. So, carefully lowering my mouth beside the pillow, I said again "You aren't dying, surely, are you?" To this the woman, with her voice still quiet and her black eyes held half-sleepily wide open, told me again that she was dying; that it couldn't be helped.

I asked her then if she could see my face. "Can I see it? Surely, it's reflected there." So, saying, she smiled at me. I answered nothing but withdrew my face from the pillow. Sitting there, with my arms folded, I continued to wonder whether, really, she were about to die.

After a little while the woman spoke again.

"When I am dead, please bury me. Dig a hole with a large shell, a shining shell of mother-of-pearl. Mark my grave with a fragment of star, with something broken that fell from heaven. Then, by the graveside, wait for me. I'll come to you again."

I asked her when she would come and see me.

"You know, the sun rises. And it sinks. Then it rises again, and sinks again. While the red sun travels, east to west and from east to west again, will you wait for me?"

I nodded in silence. The woman raised the tone of her quiet voice and said with resolution "Wait for me a hundred years. For a hundred years, sit waiting at my graveside. For, without fail, I'll come again to see you."

I answered simply that I would be waiting. At that moment my image, so vividly reflected in her jet-black pupils, began to dim and crumble; to crumble as reflections in still water crumble with the wet's disturbance. The woman's eyes

began to flow and, the next instant, closed with a snap. Tears, oozed through the long shut lashes, fell onto her cheeks. She was already dead.

I went down to the garden and dug a hole with a shell, with shining mother-of-pearl. The shell was large, a glassy one with its whole edge sharp and shining. Each time I scooped the earth, the back of the shell shone brilliantly in the moonlight falling on it. I remember, too, the smell of the damp of earth. After a little while the hole was dug, and I put the woman in it. Then, over her, gently, I scooped the soft earth back. Every time I poured the earth, the moonlight glittered on the back of the shell.

Then I came back with a fragment broken from a fallen star which I had picked up somewhere. I placed it lightly on the earth. The piece of star was round. I suppose it had worn smooth and lost its edges in its long fall from the sky. From the effort of lifting the star and of setting it up on the earth, my chest and hands had grown a little warm.

I sat down on a patch of moss. Thinking that I would be waiting thus for a hundred years, I sat there watching the round stone on the grave; sat with my arms folded. By and by the sun came up from the east as the woman had foretold. It was a big red sun. And, eventually, just as the woman had said, that big red sun went down into the west. It fell straight down, red to its last slim slice. I counted "One".

After a while a bright scarlet sun came slowly up again. And silently it sank away. And I counted "Two".

I don't know how many red suns I have thus watched and counted. Red suns beyond all counting, big red suns that no account could ever finish counting, have passed above my head. But still the hundredth year has not yet come. In the end, watching the mosses crawling over the star's round stone, I came to think the woman must have fooled me.

Then, from under the stone a blue stem, slantwise, grew toward me. As I watched, it grew, longer and longer, till it reached my sitting chest-height. The next moment a slender bud, whose head bent slightly from the tip of that gracefully swaying stalk, opened its petals soft and full. Right in front of my nose the pure white lily poured its scent to drench my very bones. Then, as dew dropped from far high distances, the flower gentled to and fro, swayed by its own white weight. I thrust my neck forward and kissed those pallid petals from which a cold dew dripped. As I drew my face back from the lily, I happened to glance up at the far-off sky; where a single star was twinkling.

And only then, then for the first time, did I realize that the hundredth year had come.

## THE SECOND NIGHT

I dreamt.

Leaving the Priest's room, I came back along the corridor to my own room where I found a lamp in its paper cover already dimly lit. As on one knee I knelt down on a cushion to take out a new wick, its flower-like tip fell with a light thump on to the stool's vermilion lacquer. In a flash the room brightened.

The painting on the sliding-doors was one by Buson. Black willow trees were there: some dark, some light, some near, some far away; and, looking extremely cold, a fisherman walking over a causeway, tilting his bamboo hat. In the alcove hung a scroll depicting Mansuri's appearance in the sea, while incense-sticks left standing somewhere shed their smell into a gloomy corner. Because the temple is so vast, there is deep silence and no sign of life. As I looked up, the round shadow thrown on the black ceiling by the round lamp made from paper looked like a living thing.

Still kneeling on one knee, I let my left hand lift one corner of the cushion and slid my right hand underneath. It was still there, just as I had expected. Reassured, I let the cushion fall back to its original position and sat down squarely on it.

“You are a *samurai*”, the Priest had said, “and a *samurai* ought to be able to attain enlightenment. Since for so long a time you have proved unable to attain it, you cannot be a *samurai*; but are instead something from the dregs of human-kind. Ah, does my logic vex you?” And he laughed. Laughed. “If my words displease you, bring me proof of your attained enlightenment.” And he had brusquely turned away. Insolent lout.

I am determined to attain enlightenment by the time that the clock in the alcove of the large room next to mine strikes the hour again. Having attained enlightenment, I will return to his room tonight and exchange my enlightenment for that pert Priest’s head. Unless I attain enlightenment, I cannot kill the Priest. Whatever else may happen, I *must* attain enlightenment. For I am a *samurai*.

If I cannot attain enlightenment, I will kill myself. It is not proper that a *samurai* should live beyond humiliation. I will put an end to myself.

As so my thoughts proceeded, my hand, sliding of its own will under the cushion, drew forth the dagger and its scarlet-lacquered sheath. Gripping the weapon’s hilt, I flung away the scarlet sheath; and the cold blade shone in the darkness of the room. Things terrible, it seemed, one after another, whistling, ran down through my clenched right hand to meld at the blade-tip, to concentrate blood-thirstiness in that one point. When I saw the full nine and a half inches of my perfect blade so regrettably shrunk to a mere needle-point, I felt like stabbing someone: the need for stabbing someone. The blood of all my body has flowed into my right wrist, and the hard-gripped hilt feels sticky. My lips quivered.

I slid the dagger back into its sheath and placed it close to my right side. Then I sat squarely in the full Zen posture. Chao Chou, that Chinese sage, recommended Nothingness. But what is Nothingness? Cursing that damned Priest down the corridor, I ground my teeth. I bit so hard on my own back-teeth that hot breath snorted out of my nostrils and my temples ached with cramp. Upon some strange compulsion, I opened my eyes to twice their natural size. I can see the scroll. I can see the lamp and its paper cover. I can see the matting, and a vivid image of that Priest’s bald pate. I can even hear the scornful laugh emerging from his crocodile mouth. That impudent Priest. Come what may, I swear I’ll lop that saucy skull. I *will* attain enlightenment.

I began to pray, repeating the word Nothingness at the root of my tongue. It has to be Nothingness. Nothingness it shall be. Yet still the scent of incense-sticks persists. The insolence of incense.

Suddenly, clenching my fists, I struck my head a terrible blow and I ground my teeth as hard as my jaws could grip. Perspiration ran from my armpits. My back became like a stick. The knee-joints grew abruptly painful, and I thought to myself that I wouldn’t care if both damned knees cracked open. Ah, it was painful. And I suffered. But, even then, that Nothingness eluded me. Just when it seemed to be coming closer, that was the moment I felt pain. Rage consumed me. Resentment swarmed. I was beyond endurance mortified. Tears came rolling down. I yearned to be smashed in smithereens, to pulverize every bone in my body, to pulp each shred of flesh, by flinging myself against a gigantic rock.

Yet still I persevered and sat and sat and sat. Holding within my chest something unbearably heart-rending, still I endured. This thing that rends the heart, tautening every muscle of the body from below, strained to break loose, to erupt from the pores of my skin; but my entire self was sealed, all exits blocked. So hideous was my case.

Now at last my head's gone queer. Everything, the paper lamp and Buson's painting, the matting on the floor, the very alcove, seem not to exist although they do exist; seem to exist when they don't. But still there was no Nothingness, no Nothingness at all. So it was that I was just sitting there disheartened and dispirited when, all of a sudden, the clock in the next room began to chime the hour.

I came to myself with a jerk. My right hand leapt to the dagger. And the clock struck twice.

### THE THIRD NIGHT

I dreamt.

There's a six-year-old on my back. And it's certainly my child. But, oddly enough, without my knowing how or why I know it, I know that the child is blind and that his head is blue; clean-shaven blue.

I asked him when he became blind, and he answered "Oh, from time immemorial". The voice was that of a child all right but the diction seemed adult; the words, as it were, spoken between equals.

To left and right the paddy-fields lie blue. The path is narrow. Every now and again the shape of a heron lightens the growing darkness.

"I see we've come to the paddies", said the creature on my back.

"How can you tell?" I asked him turning my head to speak back over my shoulder.

"Because of the creaking of the herons" came the reply. And indeed, just then, the herons cried twice.

Though the child is my own, I feel a trifle awed. One cannot tell, carrying such an object on one's back, what will happen next. As I peered ahead, wondering where perhaps I might off-load my burden, I saw an enormous forest looming up through the dark. And in the very second when I began to wonder how I might dump my burden there, I heard a jeer from my back.

"Why do you laugh like that?"

The child made no reply, but asked me simply "Father, am I heavy?"

"No, not heavy."

"Wait. I'll be heavy soon."

I said nothing but kept on trudging toward the forest. It was hard going, for the pathway between the paddies twisted irregularly. After a while I came to a point where the pathway split; and, briefly, I rested there.

"There ought to be a signpost somewhere here", the brat remarked. Sure enough, a stone roughly eight inches square and up to the height of my hip was standing there. On the stone was written "To the left, Higakubo: to the right, Hottawara". Though it was dark as dark, the characters, written in red, could be clearly seen. Their red was the red of a newt's belly.

"Fork to the left", my incubus ordered. Away to the left the forest seemed to be casting down upon our heads dark shadows fallen from high above the sky. So I hesitated. "Needn't be shy", the brat remarked. Resigned, I started off again toward the forest. As I plodded along the path and came closer to the forest, wondering how this thing, this mere blind brat, could know so much, the voice on my back observed "Being blind is certainly inconvenient".

"That's why I'm carrying you on my back; so that you'll be all right."

"I ought, I know, to be grateful that you carry me; but people tend to slight me. Which is bad. Even my parent slights me. Which is very bad."

I felt I'd had about enough. So I hurried on thinking I would get to the forest quickly and throw my hump away.

"Go on a little more, and then you'll see. It was just such an evening", said the voice as though to itself.

"What was?" I asked in tones that betrayed the feeling that something had only just failed to strike home.

"What was? But you know well enough", the child answered scornfully. And then I began to feel that I had some idea of what it was all about. I was still quite clear-headed; but I did begin to have a vague feeling that, yes, it was just such an evening. And I felt, as the child had said, that if I trudged a little further I would indeed understand yet more. I felt that I simply must ease my mind by getting rid of this burden on my back before I discovered what the whole thing was about. For to understand would be disastrous. I quickened my pace, and hurried along faster and yet faster.

Rain had started some time back. The path grew darker and darker. I moved as though delirious. The only thing of which I felt quite certain was that a small brat clung to my back and that the brat was shining like a mirror; like a mirror that revealed my past, my present and my future, no smallest fact unblazoned. Besides, the brat was my very own child. And blind. I couldn't stand it any longer.

"Here it is, here it is. Just at the root of that cedar tree."

The brat's voice rang distinctly through the rain. I stopped before I knew what I was doing. I was deep in the forest and had not known it. A black object perhaps two yards beyond me seemed indeed to be a cedar tree. Just as the brat had said.

"Father, it was at the cedar's root, wasn't it?"

"Yes", I replied in spite of myself, "it was."

"I think in the fifth year of Bunka?"

Now that he mentioned it, it seemed to me that it had indeed been in the fifth year of Bunka.

"It was exactly one hundred years ago that you murdered me."

As soon as I heard these words, the realization burst upon me that I had killed a blind man, at the root of this cedar tree, on just so dark a night, in the fifth year of Bunka, one hundred years ago. And at that moment, when I knew that I had murdered, the child on my back became as heavy as a god of stone.

#### THE FOURTH NIGHT

A kind of bench-like stand stood on the bare earth in the middle of a large roofed forecourt with small stools placed around it. The stand was a shining black. Away in one corner an old man sat alone at a low square table set before him, drinking *saké*. The food that he was eating with it seemed to be some sort of vegetable stew.

The old man's face had already grown red from his drinking; but he had in any case that kind of bright complexion where scarcely a wrinkle shows. One guessed him old only because of the thick white beard which he had left unbarbered. Though I was only a small child myself, I wondered just how old this old man was. But at that moment the inn-keeper's wife, who had gone out to draw water from the bamboo-pipe in the backyard, came back with a pailful and, wiping her hand on her apron, said to the old man "How old are you?"

The old man swallowed a mouthful of the stew and answered carelessly "I have forgotten my age".

The woman stuck her wiped hands into the stringy band of her narrow *obi* and stood watching the old man's face. He gulped down *saké* from a bowl as big as a rice-bowl and blew out a long heavy breath through his thick white beard. The woman asked him "Where is your home?"

The old man, cutting short his long-blown breath, replied "Right inside my navel".

The woman asked again, her hand still stuck in her *obi*, "Where are you going?"

The old man gulped hot *saké* from the bowl as big as a rice-bowl and blew out breath, heavily, as he had done before. "I'm going there", he said.

While the woman was still asking "Do you mean straight on?" the breath the old man blew passed through the paper window, underneath the willow tree and vanished at the riverbed.

The old man went out into the street, and I followed him. A small gourd dangled at his waist. A square box, slung from his shoulder, nestled under his arm. He wore light-blue pants and a light-blue sleeveless vest. Only his shoes were yellow. They seemed to be made of some queer kind of leather. The old man walked straight to the willow tree, under whose shade some three or four children were playing. Laughing, he drew from around his hip a light-blue handkerchief and, twisting the cloth to a narrow string, placed it on the ground. Then on the ground around it he traced a large circle. Finally, he took out from the square box slung from his shoulder one of those brass flutes used by candy-sellers.

"Soon that handkerchief will turn into a snake. So keep an eye on it", he repeated, "keep an eye on it", over and over. The children watched it hard. I watched it too.

"Now watch it, watch it carefully." So saying, the old man began to go round and round the circle, blowing on his pipe. I stood and stared at the handkerchief. But it never moved. The old man piped hard, and went round the circle many times. Almost on tiptoe, almost stealthily, almost with a feeling of diffidence toward that handkerchief, round and round he went. Sometimes he looked frightened. Sometimes he seemed to be enjoying it.

After a while, he suddenly stopped his piping. He opened the box slung from his shoulder, picked the handkerchief up from the ground, gingerly, by its veriest edge, and threw it into the box. "Now, like this", he said, "there, in the box, it will soon turn into a snake. I will show it to you, by and by. Yes I will. I'll show it you." With these words the old man started to walk away. He passed under the willow tree and straight on down the narrow path. Because I wanted to see the snake, I followed him. The old man sauntered on, sometimes saying "Just you wait. It will be", sometimes saying "It turns into a snake". And in the end he came to the riverbed, singing

"Turns to a snake, you wait and see:  
What the pipe pipes has to be."

Since there was neither bridge nor boat, I thought he would rest by the river and would probably show me the snake. But the old man walked straight on, straight into the river. First it came up only to his knees, but gradually his hips and even his breast vanished under the water. Even then, the old man kept on walking straight ahead, singing all the time

"Deep it will be,  
Night it will be  
And it will be  
Straight as straight."

And finally his beard, his face, his head, his cap, all of them vanished under the water.

I thought the old man would show me the snake when he came up on the other side of the river, so I stood where the reeds were rustling and waited for him, there, alone, for a long long time. But the old man never came up out of the river.

## THE FIFTH NIGHT

I dreamt.

The time is so very ancient that it seems to be almost in some mythological age. Having fought in a battle, unfortunately on the losing side, I found myself made captive and so hauled before the general of the enemy.

In those days everyone was tall and all had flowing beards. They wore leather belts from which their swords hung down like sticks. Their bows seemed to be made from thick unseasoned vines of wisteria; they were not lacquered, not even polished; indeed most primitive objects.

The enemy general was sitting on a thing that looked like a large *saké*-jar turned upside down. In his right hand he grasped the middle of a bow whose tip was stuck in the grass. Looking at his face, I noticed that his right and left eyebrows linked thickly over his nose. In those far days there was, of course, no such thing as a razor.

Being a captive, naturally, I was not sitting on anything; just squatting on the grass. I was wearing large straw-shoes. Straw-shoes of that period were deep-fitting, like large boots, and when one stood up the tops reached to one's knees. At the boot-top a little bit of straw was left unwoven and this hanging tuft, an ornamental tassel, moved and pattered as one walked.

The general studied my face by the light of a bonfire, and then asked me whether I chose to die or to live. This question was then customary and was put to every prisoner. If one chose "to live", one surrendered on no other condition. To choose "to die" meant that one remained defiant, and would endure whatever came. I replied that I would die. The general, thrusting aside the bow stuck upright in the grass, began to draw the stick-like weapon hanging from his waist. The bonfire, blown by the wind, flowed sideways at the weapon. I opened my right hand like a maple-leaf and, with the palm held open towards the general, raised it above my eyes. This was then the gesture that meant "wait". The general slid the thick blade back into its sheath: it settled with a click.

Even in those days there was love. I told him that I wished to see my own beloved one last time before I died. The general said that he would wait until the first cock crowed at dawn. The woman must arrive before that first cock crowed. If she did not come in time, I would be killed without seeing her.

The general, sitting still, watches the bonfire. I, with my straw-shoes crossed on the grass, wait for the woman. And night moves on.

From time to time one heard the bonfire crumble. Every time it crumbled, a flurry of flame slid like a rockfall sideways at the general. Under his pitch-black brows his eyes glittered. Someone came to toss a bundle of branches on the fire; and, a brief while later, the flames came crackling through. It was a valiant noise, a noise that drove back darkness.

While so we sat, the woman was leading out a white horse that had been tethered to an oak-tree in a far backyard. Three times she stroked his mane, and then sprang nimbly onto the tall horse. She rode him bareback, no saddle and no stirrups. As her long white legs kicked at his belly, the horse galloped off at full speed.

Because someone has added yet more branches to the fire, the far-off sky seems faintly lit. The horse, aiming for that faintly lighted thing, comes flying through the dark. He flies toward us, two jets of fiery breath streaming from his nostrils. Relentlessly, the woman kicks and kicks at his belly, and the horse comes on so fast that the hoof-sounds clatter in the air. The woman's hair streams out behind like a comet in the dark. But even at this flying speed, she's not yet reached the bonfire.

Suddenly, from the edge of the dark path, came cock-a-doodle-do. With both her hands the woman pulled hard back upon the reins, throwing herself backwards

in the air. The horse, his fore hooves planted, gouged deeply into rock.

The cock crowed for a second time.

The woman gave a cry and, all at once, let go the tight-stretched reins. The horse's knees caved in; and, horse and rider both pitched forward over the rock. Below that rock a chasm yawned.

Even today the rock still bears the hoof-marks. She who mimiced the cockcrow was an evil woman. As long as the hoof-scars last, that woman is my enemy.

## THE SIXTH NIGHT

Unkei, that famous master from the thirteenth century, was sculpting guardian gods on the high two-storied gate of the Gokoku Temple. His work was the talk of the town, so on my walk I went to have a look at it. Already there were crowds of people gathered, all busy talking and offering irresponsible advice.

Several yards away in front of the temple gate there was a tall red pine tree. Its trunk, diagonally hiding the roof-tiles of the gate, stretched well up into the far blue sky. The green of pine and the scarlet gate, reflected in each other, really looked splendid. The pine, moreover, was quite perfectly positioned. It slanted across the gate's left corner without obstructing the view and then, widening at the top, stretched out as far as the gate-roof. The whole effect was charmingly old-fashioned, as though one were indeed back in the thirteenth century.

Yet, like myself, the lookers-on are all from the present age. Most of them are rickshawmen just standing there, no doubt, to while away the tedium of waiting for a fare.

"Big, aren't they?" someone said. "Much more difficult", offered another, "than carving human beings."

A third remarked "Well, well. So those are guardian gods. I didn't know that these days people still went in for sculpting guardian gods. Well I never! I'd always thought them relics of the past."

"They do look strong, now don't they? You know the old saying that there's nothing stronger than a guardian god. People say they're even stronger than the old god from Yamato." Thus someone spoke to me. The speaker wore no hat and the bottom of his kimono was tucked up at the back; plainly a most uneducated type.

Unkei was working away with mallet and chisel, taking absolutely no notice of the onlookers' remarks. He didn't even look at them. High up on the scaffolding, he was carving with great concentration what seemed to be some part of a guardian's face. He wore a small old-fashioned headgear and the big sleeves of his scruffy court-robe were tied and knotted at the back. His appearance was, indeed, so thoroughly antiquated that he seemed entirely out of place amongst that noisy mob. I myself wondered how Unkei could still today be living. I thought it most extraordinary, and yet I stood there watching him.

Unkei, however, seemed not to feel the least thing strange or odd about the situation. He simply kept on carving as hard as he could. A young man who had been standing with face upturned to watch Unkei at work, turned in my direction and exclaimed in admiration of the sculptor's attitude "What a splendid man. We count for nothing in his eyes. He seems to be saying that the world contains no heroes except the guardian gods and himself. It's a magnificent attitude!"

I thought the idea interesting so I half-turned toward the young man who, at once encouraged, added "Just look at the way he handles his mallet and chisel. He has reached that state where he can create divine art at will and without premeditation.

Unkei had just carved out an inch-high eyebrow clean across the forehead. Then, without a moment's hesitation, turning the blade straight down, he struck

it slantwise from above. As he gouged the hard wood off and the thick wood-shavings flew away like echoes of the mallet-blow, the side of an angry nose with flaring nostrils sprang into view. His style of carving was indeed unceremonious. but showed no least uncertainty.

"It's amazing how he can at will create eyebrows and a nose when he wields his chisel in such a casual manner", said I as though to myself; for I was most terribly impressed. The young man thereupon remarked "Ah, you just don't understand. He isn't making eyebrows and noses with his chisel. What he's really doing is excavating with the help of mallet and chisel those nose and eyebrow shapes that lie buried in the wood. He can't go wrong. It's just like digging stones up from the soil."

I had never before heard such an analysis of the sculptor's art. It made me begin to think that, if it were true, then anyone might be a sculptor. And I suddenly felt that I myself would like to carve a guardian god; so I left off watching Unkei and hurried home at once.

Taking a hammer and chisel from my toolbox, I went out to the backyard where I found a whole pile of wood-logs just suited to my purpose, all bits of oakwood from a tree uprooted in a recent storm which I had sawn up for firewood.

I chose the largest log and began to carve with great spirit. But unfortunately I found no god within it. From the next log also, by sheer ill-luck, I failed to dig a guardian free. Nor in the third log was a god concealed. I dug through every log in the woodpile, one after another, but nary a one contained a guardian god. And finally it dawned on me that guardian gods were not, after all, buried in trees of this present age; and thus I came to understand why Unkei is living to this day.

## THE SEVENTH NIGHT

It seems that I'm aboard some massive ship.

The ship plows forward, shearing the waves away, day after day, night after night, continuously emitting, without one second's break, a stream of inky smoke. The noise is tremendous: but the destination utterly unknown. All I know is that the sun, burning red like red-hot tongs, bulges up from the bottom of the sea. It rises, seems to hover briefly dead above the tall ship's mast, and then, before we realize what's happening, overtakes the shuddering ship and, plunging dead ahead, sinks back with a sizzling sound, the sound of red-hot tongs, down to the bottom of the sea. Each time it sinks, the blue waves far ahead seethe to a blackish red. The ship, making its tremendous noise, pursues the sinking sun. But it never catches up.

One day I buttonholed a sailor, and I asked him "Is this ship steering west?"

The sailor, a curiously uncertain expression on his face, studied me briefly and then answered "Why?"

"Because it seems concerned to chase the setting sun."

The sailor burst into a roar of laughter; and then left me.

I heard the sound of jolly voices chanting:

"Does the sun that travels west  
End up in the east?  
Is that really true?  
Has the sun that leaves the east  
Its real home in the west?  
Is that also true?  
We that on the ocean live,  
Rudders for a pillow,  
Sail and sail, on and on."

I went up into the bows where I found a watch of sailors hauling at the halyards.

I began to feel most terribly forlorn. There was no way of knowing when one might get ashore. And, worse, no way of knowing whither we were bound. The only certainties were the streaming of black smoke and the shearing of the sea. The waves stretched wide as wide, blue in their boundlessness. Sometimes they grew purple though, close to the sliding ship, they slavered and were white. I felt most terribly forlorn. I even thought it would be better to throw myself into the sea than to stick with such a ship.

There were many fellow-passengers, most, or so it seemed, foreigners though each had a different cast of feature. One day when the sky was clouded and the ship rolling, I saw a woman leaning on the rail, and crying bitterly. The handkerchief with which she wiped her eyes looked white, and her dress, a sort of calico, carried a printed pattern. Seeing her weep, I realized that I was not the only person sad.

One evening when I was alone on deck, watching the stars, a foreigner came up and asked if I knew anything about astronomy. Since I was already contemplating suicide as a means of escape from boredom, it scarcely seemed necessary for me to be acquainted with matters such as astronomy. So I made no answer. The foreigner then told me the story of the seven stars in the neck of the constellation of the Bull; and went on to inform me that the stars and the sea were all of God's creation. He finally asked me if I believed in God. I looked at the sky and said nothing.

Once as I was entering the saloon, I saw a gaily dressed young woman playing the piano, with her back toward me. At her side a tall most splendid-looking man stood singing. His mouth appeared inordinately large. They seemed completely indifferent to all things other than themselves. They seemed even to have forgotten their being on this ship.

I grew more bored than ever. Finally, I determined to put an end to myself and, one convenient evening when no one was about, I jumped with resolution over the side. However, in that moment when my feet left the deck and my link with the ship was severed, suddenly then life became peculiarly precious. From the bottom of my heart I regretted such rash action. But by then it was too late. Willy-nilly I was committed to the deep. But, possibly because of the ship's high freeboard, my feet for some long time failed to touch water although my body had abandoned ship. Nonetheless, since nothing could check my fall, I dropped closer and closer to the sea. However much I drew in my legs, nearer and still nearer came the sea. The colour of the sea was black.

Meanwhile the ship, still as usual streaming its black smoke, steamed steadily away. I would have been far better off aboard, even though that ship had no known destination. When I came to that realization, it was no longer possible to make use of my belated wisdom. And so I went down quietly, infinitely regretful, infinitely afraid, down to the black of waves.

## THE EIGHTH NIGHT

As I entered the Barber's, three or four men dressed in white greeted me in unison: "Good day, sir."

I stood in the middle of the room and noticed it was square. Two of its sides had windows, mirrors the other two. I made a count of the mirrors. There were six of them.

I placed myself in front of one of the mirrors, and sat down. The seat went "pop". It was a chair made extremely comfortable to sit on. My face in the mirror was splendidly reflected. Beyond my face I saw a window. Then, on the slant, a counter's wooden frame. There was no one in the frame. I could see most clearly the upper half of persons passing in the street outside the window.

Shotaro passed accompanied by a woman. I had not known that Shotaro owned a Panama hat. Anyway he was wearing it. For that matter, I could not say when he had found his woman either. The two seemed very pleased with themselves. While I was trying to get a good look at the woman's face, they passed from view.

A bean-curd vendor passed, blowing his mournful trumpet. Because the trumpet was pressed to his mouth, his cheeks were swollen as though bee-stung. Since his cheeks remained swollen as he passed and went away, it worried me no end. It struck me that he might be fated to spend his whole life bee-stung. A geisha next appeared. She had not yet done her make-up. The tied base of her hair-do had come loose, and her head looked slovenly. Her face, moreover, seemed still dazed with sleep. Her complexion was lamentably unhealthy. She bowed and began talking to someone, but that someone failed to appear in the mirror.

Then a big man dressed in white came up behind me and, holding comb and scissors in his hand, stood staring down at my head. I twisted my thin mustache and asked him if he could make something of it. The man in white, without saying a word, tapped gently on my head with his amber-colored comb.

"Well, of course I also need a haircut; but what", I asked him once again, "can be made of my mustache?" The man in white still made no answer. Instead he began to snip-snap with his scissors.

I kept my eyes wide open, intending to see every single reflection that came into my mirror; but every time the scissors went snip-snap, black hair came flying down. I grew eventually so frightened that I closed my eyes. At that moment the man in white enquired "Did you see the goldfish-vendor outside, sir?"

I answered that I hadn't. The man in white said nothing more but concentrated on snip-snapping with his scissors. Then, all of a sudden, someone loudly shouted "Hey, look out!" I opened my eyes with a jerk and, under the sleeve of the man in white, beheld the wheel of a bicycle. A rickshaw-shaft appeared. But at that very instant the man in white grasped my head in both his hands and yanked it sharply sideways. I could no longer see either the bicycle or the rickshaw. The scissors went snip-snap.

A little while later the man in white came round to the side and began cutting the hair above my ears. Since no more hair came flying down in front of me, I opened my eyes with a sense of relief. I heard a voice quite close to me: "Millet dumplings, millet dumplings." Someone to the rhythm of that chant was pounding a mortar with a small wooden pestle pounding millet to make dumplings. I had not seen a millet-dumpling vendor since my childhood, so naturally I wanted just a look. But the millet-dumpling vendor never appeared in the mirror.

Straining my powers of sight to their utmost, I sought to stare into the corner of the mirror and there saw a woman, who simply appeared without my knowing the moment of her coming, sitting in the counter's frame. She was a heavily-built dark-skinned woman with thick eyebrows. Her hair was dressed in the ginkgoleaf style, and her lined kimono had a black collar. She was squatting with one knee close drawn up, and was counting banknotes. They seemed to be ten-yen notes. The woman, with her long eyelashes cast down and her thin lips drawn tight, was busy counting the notes. She counted at terrific speed. And yet there seemed no end to the notes she counted. There were on her lap perhaps one hundred notes at the most; but, however much she counted, those hundred notes remained a stolid hundred.

I was staring at the woman's face and the ten-yen notes in blank amazement when the man in white said close to my ear "Let's have a shampoo". As was not inappropriate, I turned toward the counter's frame as soon as I got up from my chair; but neither the woman nor the notes were anywhere to be seen.

As, the due fee paid, I left the shop, I saw on the left-hand side of its entrance some five oblong pails. The pails were full of goldfish: red ones, spotted ones, thin ones, fat ones. And the goldfish vendor sat behind them. He sat unmoving with his chin on his hands, staring down at the goldfish pailed in front of him. He seemed oblivious to the noisy street's to-do. For a little while I stood and watched the goldfish vendor. But all the while I watched no goldfish ever moved.

## THE NINTH NIGHT

The times seem, somehow, troubled. A war, it seems, may start up any minute. The feel of the times is as though unsaddled horses, flying from burnt-out stables, were running, day and night, wildly round one's house with a rowdy jumble of low-ranked ostlers chasing after them. And yet deep silence reigns within the house.

The house contains a young mother and a child three years old. The father has gone away. It was at moonless midnight that the father left. He donned straw-sandals: then, wearing a hood of black, left by the backdoor. As he left, the light of a hand-lamp held by the mother cast a narrow beam along the darkness and glimmered on the ancient cypress standing in the hedge.

The father, since that night, has not returned. Every day the mother has asked her three-year-old "Where is your father?"; but the child says nothing. After some time the child began to answer "Over there". And when the mother asks "And when will he be back", the child still answers "Over there"; and laughs. So the mother laughs as well. She taught him, over and over again, to say "He'll soon be back". But the child learnt only to say "Soon". Sometimes when asked "Where is your father?", the child answers "Soon".

When night falls and everything is quiet, the mother reties her *obi* and slips her short-sword through it. Then she binds the child on her back and goes out through the side-gate. Always she wears sandals. Sometimes the child falls asleep on his mother's back while listening to the sound of sandals.

Going westwards down a gentle slope from the residential quarter where the long long walls of plaster stretch one beyond another, one finds oneself at the bottom of the slope in front of a lofty ginkgo tree. If, facing the ginkgo, you turn off sharp to the right, you come within one hundred and twenty yards to the stone gate of a Shinto shrine. The path to the shrine's stone gate is bordered on the one side by paddy-fields and on the other by a low-grown wilderness of striped bamboo. For forty yards beyond the gate you walk on paving-stones through a stand of cedars to the steps of an old shrine. Its wooden offertory-box has weather-worn to grey. Above the box a large bell-rope is hung. In daylight one can read the tablet set beside the bell on which three characters are written: *hachi-man-gu*. The writing style is such that the first character, *hachi*, looks like two doves facing each other. Which is interesting. In addition to this tablet, all sorts of other tablets can be seen there. Most of them are arrow-targets bull's-eyed by the Clan's retainers. Each such tablet bears the name of the retainer who scored the bull's-eye. Some of these retainers have left their dedicated swords; but only a few.

Whenever the mother passes the gate to the shrine, an owl hoots among the cedar trees; and her thin sandals make spattering noises. The spattering ends in front of the shrine. The mother pulls the bell-rope, crouches down on her knees and claps her hands together. Usually then the owl immediately stops hooting. The mother prays in singlehearted fervor for the safety of her husband. She cherishes an unshakeable belief that, since her husband is a *samurai*, prayers to Hachiman, the God of Arms, prayers as a last resource, cannot possibly fail to be granted.

The child is often woken by the banging of the bell and, seeing only the pitch of darkness round him, at once breaks into crying on his mother's back. Then the

mother, busy with her mumbling of prayers, tries to soothe the child with a shaking of her back. Sometimes she succeeds and the child stops crying. Sometimes the child cries more pitifully than ever. In either case she stays there crouching for a long long time.

When all the prayers essential to her husband's safety have at last been said, she loosens the bands that hold the child and slides him round from the back to the front. Next, she climbs the steps to the shrine holding the child in both her hands. Then, always rubbing her cheek against the child's, she says to him "There's a good child; wait here just a while". She ties the child at one end of a string and secures its other end to the parapet of the shrine. Then she descends the steps and, back and forth one hundred times across the forty yards of paving-stone between the steps and the gate, she walks and worships as the ritual requires.

The child tied to the shrine crawls about on the broad veranda as far as the string permits. And if he does no more, it proves an easy night for the mother. But when the tied child cries and cries unceasingly, his mother becomes anxious. She greatly quickens her pacing of the ritual. She becomes breathless. Sometimes, feeling she has no other choice, she abandons the ritual halfway through and climbs the steps to coax the child to quietness. Thereafter she restarts the ritual right from its beginning.

The father, for whose sake the mother thus, night after night, was tortured by anxiety, and for whose safety, night after night, she prayed and took no sleep, had long ago been slaughtered by some lordless *samurai*.

This sad tale was told me by my mother in my dream.

## THE TENTH NIGHT

Ken-san has come to tell me that Shotaro, out of nowhere, came home on the seventh evening after he was spirited away by that woman; and that, from the time of his return, he has been lying sick in bed with a high and sudden fever.

Shotaro is the most handsome young man in the district. He is extremely good-natured, and honest. At the close of day he sits by the entrance to the fruit shop wearing a Panama hat and stares at the faces of women passing in the street. He is endlessly impressed by them. Apart from this dissipation he has no particular distinctions whatsoever.

When few women happen to pass by, Shotaro does not look at the street but looks instead at the fruit. There are various kinds of fruit. Peaches, apples, loquats and bananas are heaped beautifully in baskets displayed in two rows. Each basket, just as it is, can be taken away for a present. Shotaro says "How pretty" every time he looks at the baskets. He claims that if he were to run a shop, he would choose to run a fruit shop. And thus he leads his idle life, wearing a Panama hat.

There are times when he offers criticism, as when he says of summer oranges "The color is good". But never once has he paid out money to buy fruit. Naturally he would never eat one without paying. He just admires the colors.

One evening a woman appeared suddenly and stood in front of the shop. She was probably a woman of high standing for she was finely dressed. The color of her kimono pleased him extremely. He was, moreover, very much impressed by her face. So he took off his precious Panama hat and greeted her respectfully. The woman pointed to the largest basket filled with fruit and said she wanted it. Shotaro handed her the basket. The woman held it by its handle, and said that it was very heavy.

Besides being a man of leisure, Shotaro is a person of an exceedingly willing and friendly nature. So, saying that he would accompany her home and carry her heavy basket, he left the fruit shop with her. And he had not been back since then.

"Even for Shotaro, such casual behaviour has really gone too far. This must

be something serious”, said his friends and relations beginning to make a fuss. Just then, on the seventh evening after his disappearance, Shotaro reappeared from nowhere. Everyone bombarded him with the single question “Where have you been, Shotaro?”: to which he answered that he had taken an electric train and visited a mountain.

He must have been riding for a long long time in that electric train. According to Shotaro, he alighted at a field. It was a vast field and everywhere, as far as eye could see, there was nothing but green grass. As he accompanied the woman across that wide green grassiness, they came quite suddenly to the lip of a sheer precipice, and there the woman told Shotaro simply to jump down. He peeped over the edge and found that, though he could see the steep cliff-side, he could not see the bottom. Shotaro again most respectfully removed his Panama hat, but more than once declined to make the jump.

Then the woman said “If you haven’t the guts to jump, you will be licked by a pig. Are you prepared for that?” Pigs and the quavery squealings of folktale-tellers are the two things which Shotaro most abominates. However, thinking he had no choice if he wished to save his life, he still refused to jump. Immediately, a pig came grunting up. Shotaro, most reluctantly, hit it smartly on the snout with the betel-nut palm-tree walking-stick which he held in his hand. The pig flopped down without the least resistance, gave one final grunt and vanished over the precipice. As Shotaro heaved a sigh of relief another pig appeared and tried to rub its filthy snout against him. Shotaro had no choice but once again to use his walking-stick. This pig, too, gave one last grunt and tumbled headlong down into the chasm. Then yet another pig appeared.

At that moment, something caught Shotaro’s attention and he looked off into the far far distance. He saw, far off, toward the end of a vast blue plain, thousands and thousands of countless pigs heading straight toward him; swarms and swarms of snorting pigs all bent upon Shotaro standing on the lip of the precipice. Shotaro was troubled, grieved one might even say, sad to the bottom of his heart. But, having no choice, he went on hitting with his palm-tree stick and with deliberate care every pig-snout, one by one, that came and pushed toward him. The odd thing was that, at the merest touch of his stick upon a snout, the pig concerned immediately and with no fuss rolled off into the bottomless pit. When Shotaro peered beyond the lip, he saw the pigs, all upside-down, falling in a long chain beside the wall of the precipice whose bottom still remained invisible. The realization that he had brought so many pigs to such a fearful fall made him feel quite frightened. But still the pigs, more pigs and more, kept grunting up toward him. The force of these inexhaustible pigs, this snorting horde, was something like the force of a black cloud, somehow legged, stumping its way through the blue blue grasses.

Shotaro, with the courage born of frantic desperation, continued hitting snout after snout for seven days and six nights. But in the end his vitality exhausted; his hands went weak and flaccid; and he was finally licked by a pig. He thereupon himself fell over the precipice.

Ken-san told me this story about Shotaro, and added that the story proved that too much looking at women was never a good thing. I thought he was quite right. Ken-san further observed that he would like to have Shotaro’s Panama hat.

Shotaro will probably not survive. Ken-san will have the Panama hat.

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*Soseki, amongst the greatest of modern Japanese novelists, and still so influential in Japan—he died in 1916—that a recent opinion survey of students and Professors at Japan’s four leading universities placed him second only to Dostoevsky in the list of writers who had most influenced the interviewees.*

# KERRY LEVES

## Papery Days

o the thin feeling  
the need for  
screens  
be they mist or rain  
a maze of intricate gestures

there is  
no sound  
but the crying of a dog  
a clock on a windowsill  
ticking

but the foghorn  
the fluting of birds  
breath, breath

a Chinese respite  
with flowery plates and a volley of stares

behind them  
the opening of fans

# KERRY LEVES

## Within the Rings

a bath of heat  
sweatdrops blotting the page o!  
useless ink

yesterday rage was a needle filled with colours  
my skin a page of work  
in a cheap tattooist's

wounds were expensive tissue  
to almost-unpeel  
in the first convenient stripjoint

o sideshow alley  
the pygmies, the bearded women, the man-apes  
squat under coloured skies and wait  
for an absence of mirrors

i am among them  
the astounding  
two-headed manatee weeps, my muscles tense

tattoos interact on my back like vines in a windy jungle  
populated by tigers, by roses and vows to mothers  
wrestlers who carry knives and Chinese dragons

a Soudanese courtesan in silks, winking if i twitch  
poppy-flowers in undulant hair  
some count the petals

while i  
revolve on my tented plinth like the mapped globe  
and who could wound my perfected screens

a man dressed like a bellboy  
prances through cages  
to tantalize Africa with whips, with kitchen furniture

i remember a house  
tight and close as a hatbox

i remember ferns on my flesh, green worlds half-shaded from sun  
i used to watch the shadows move across my blank skin  
changing

GRAEME KINROSS SMITH

## The Intricate, Devised Hearing of Sight . .

### A Profile of Rosemary Dobson

Climate of stillness: though I hear  
No sound that falls on mortal ear  
Yet in the intricate, devised  
Hearing of sight these waves that break  
In thunder on a barren shore  
Will foam and crash for evermore.

This grey and silver Hogarth made  
To paint the children as they played  
Is silver sound of bells and cries.  
I hear them call; they stretch their hands  
To reach the cherries overhead—  
The children who are long since dead.

And you, grave Florentine, who turn  
And look at me with eyes that burn,  
I hear you asking—"What is Time  
Since Art has conquered it? I speak  
Five hundred years ago. You hear.  
My words beat still upon your ear."

"Paintings" by Rosemary Dobson.

On the far wall, borrowing light from the flood of sun on the floor, is a Holbein print; nearer to the desk a Botticelli. Above the low book case is the complete painting "S. Ivo" by Rogier Van der Weyden from which is taken the detail that graces the cover of Rosemary Dobson's recent *Selected Poems*. ("I had to be firm about that", the poet says. "The publishers wanted a picture of Lake Burley Griffin for the cover. But it wasn't right. None of the poems related to Canberra. We'd only just come here.") A beautiful Landseer line drawing of mother and child fills the near niche of wall. ("Quite unlike his 'Stag at Bay' style", Rosemary Dobson says, savouring it again as she speaks.) And most immediate of all, resting on a shelf, is a blow-up photograph of Ghiselbertus' sculpture of the 12th century from the French cathedral at Autun. (Rosemary Dobson, tall and gracious, communicates an infectious delight in beauty, in the discovery of new beauty and the opportunity it brings for plumbing life and history. She draws her hand along the Ghiselbertus piece: "See how beautifully simple it is. The angel is coming to tell

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*Graeme Kinross Smith lectures on Australian Writing at the Gordon Institute of Technology, Geelong. He is at present engaged on a two-volume illustrated book on Australia's major writers to be published by Cassell Australia.*



Rosemary Dobson and the photo of Chiselbertus' sculpture.

the three kings that the star is over Bethlehem. See, they're asleep, but the angel has woken this one. And there's the star above them like a flower. Beautiful.")

Perhaps the most notable feature of Rosemary Dobson's poetry is the way it draws on the visual, on paintings, sculpture, on the Renaissance, on the European tradition, on Greek myth, on Italian marble. Her poems not only illuminate works of art in the tradition of W. H. Auden and William Carlos Williams with Breughel's "Icarus", but through them celebrate life itself. "It's looking at paintings that has given me such pleasure", she explains. "Almost at times more than reading poetry. I'm a kind of failed artist, I suppose."

Rosemary Dobson's husband, Alec Bolton, is Director of Publications to the National Library of Australia. Their house, once the home of a sculptress is long and low, set under the lee of Red Hill. A prospect of Canberra—gentle green of gums pinned down by the darker emphasis of pines—stretches away from the deep windows. "I think Canberra is beautiful; physically beautiful", says Rosemary Dobson. "There are things about it I don't like, of course. My husband says we are an indulged community, and he's probably right. But I don't think I've ever lost a sense of its beauty."

Born in Sydney in 1920, Rosemary Dobson grew up there until she was nine years old. Her grandfather was Austin Dobson, English poet and essayist. Her father, one of Austin Dobson's ten children, came to Australia from South America. She remembers him only as a very ill man in his last years. He died when she was five. Her mother struggled to bring up her two daughters unaided, but was greatly helped by Winifred West, educator of vision and founder of Frensham school. Rosemary Dobson and her sister Ruth (who was recently appointed Australia's first career woman diplomat Ambassador) received their education at Frensham under most generous scholarship conditions.

"It wasn't at all an unhappy childhood", Rosemary Dobson insists. "But we felt strange at first among the children of the wealthy, coming to the school as we did with a less stable background. We had nowhere to go at holiday time as they had. Sometimes we went to houses people lent to us; we were separated a few times. Or we stayed at the school—I liked being at the school when nobody was there."

As a seventeen-year-old Rosemary Dobson returned to Frensham to do apprentice teaching of art and art history. But she had an eagerness to continue to learn. With her modest earnings she settled in Sydney and haunted Sydney University as an unmatriculated student, taking as many English courses as she could, sitting for examinations as if preparing for a degree, submitting essays, savouring poetry. She recalls those two years with gratitude: "That under-the-counter education was marvellous. I did seven separate courses. It's a pity that students can't do it now, but it seems that the competition for places makes it impossible. There must be other square pegs, as I was, who would get a great deal from it."

Rosemary Dobson had come away from Frensham with deep regard for three things. Her first love was poetry—"I had been writing it from the age of seven. I knew I wanted to be a poet." The second enthusiasm was painting—"I believe one art throws light on the other. I still find myself thinking of the technique of poetry in terms of the technique of painting." The third, an insight developed in her school days working over the platen press at Frensham, became her love of typography—"I learned quite a lot about the basics of typography and printing with Joan Phipson at Frensham. She was chief printer there and is now well known as a writer of children's books. Always since I've been moved by a page of well-set type, as one is moved by a painting."

So Rosemary Dobson found herself part of the stimulating decade of the 1940's, a period probably more significant in the development of Australian poetry than any other. Her own verse began to appear. She moved from the University group with whom she studied during the day to the students at Thea Proctor's art classes—two very different sets of people. Thea Proctor she recalls as quite an austere person, but one of whom she became very fond. "It may sound somehow frivolous to say it like this", she says, "but what I gained from Thea Proctor was a sense of taste. And discipline in art—she was a very professional artist."

In the early 1940's, after a short period as a cipher clerk in the Australian Navy, Rosemary Dobson began her long-standing association with the publishers Angus and Robertson. She became a book editor. This work brought her in contact with many of the important figures in Australian writing and art at the time. As recently as 1973 she recalled the cut and thrust and cultural fruitfulness of that time in a fascinating and invaluable lecture to an audience at Sydney University when she was invited to give the third Blaiklock Memorial Lecture. She touched on her own growth to maturity as a poet and the relationship that exists for her between painting and poetry. She reminded her Sydney audience of the range of poets who came to prominence then—John Blight, William Hart-Smith, James McAuley, Francis Webb, David Campbell and others. It was also a period of surprisingly illiberal censorship and of the court action over William Dobell's Archibald Prize winning portrait of Joshua Smith and of the revivifying presence in Australia of American poets like Karl Shapiro and Harry Roskolenko while American forces were fighting in the Pacific. It was the time of the Jindyworobaks, of the establishment of *Meanjin* and *Southerly*, of Max Harris's *Angry Penguins* and the Ern Malley hoax, of the new consciousness of this country marked by Russell Drysdale's landscapes and the poetry of Kenneth Slessor and Judith Wright. It was the time of the first tentative lectures on Australian literature in Australian universities.

Against this backdrop Rosemary Dobson was submitting more and more of her work to editors whose acceptances, when they came, were more often than not in those days accompanied by apologetic notes explaining that they could not pay for the poems. "I remember feeling that I expected no remuneration for poems I published then", Rosemary Dobson has said. "I was so much an apprentice to my trade that to see something in print was satisfaction enough."

At Angus and Robertson Rosemary Dobson had stimulating contact with her renowned editorial colleagues Beatrice Davis and Nan McDonald. And through her submissions to the *Bulletin* she came to know Douglas Stewart (then not long in his position as literary editor) and his wife, the painter Margaret Coen. "In those days", she recalls, "both Angus and Robertson and the *Bulletin* stood in the same relationship to Australian literature—that of guardian. I met and got to know a lot of writers. My job was general editing. We all did everything from book indexes to blurbs. I learned a lot from Nan McDonald. Beatrice Davis described her as the best book editor in Australia, and I think she was. She was a very fine poet, too. Much underrated because she was so retiring. Anyway, we also read submitted manuscripts and spoke to the authors. We had all sorts of work coming in, including the terrible manuscripts with the note attached—'my book has been admired by my whole family'—that sort of thing."

It is Douglas Stewart's encouragement of her poetry that Rosemary Dobson particularly remembers. He assisted her with the preparation of her first collection, *In a Convex Mirror*, which appeared in 1944. She often visited the studio at 12 Bridge Street, Sydney, that Douglas and Margaret Stewart shared with Norman Lindsay. Later, married to Alec Bolton who was then editor for Ure Smith, the publishers of several of Lindsay's books, she used to visit the painter and writer at Springwood. "I think in his own way Norman was just as sure of his skill in

what he was doing as Thea Proctor was of hers. I violently disagreed with a number of his ideas, and I suppose I preferred Thea Proctor's reserve to Norman's overwhelming personality. But I liked him so very much. He had great generosity, great enthusiasms, and affections and it was wonderful to know him. How fortunate I was to have been painted by both Norman and Thea Proctor! It was fascinating to watch them at work."

From that period, too, and into the 1970's extended a three-way friendship between Nan McDonald, Francis Webb and Rosemary Dobson. In the 1940's Francis Webb, diffident, just starting out as a poet, would come to Angus and Robertson and the three would talk. Later, Rosemary Dobson recalls, as Francis Webb's mental illness began to step disturbingly in and out of his life and poetry, and when she herself went abroad, it was Nan McDonald's letters that kept the three in touch. The friendship ended with tragic swiftness when Francis Webb died in November 1973 and Nan McDonald only six weeks later.

In 1948 Rosemary Dobson's second collection of poems, *The Ship of Ice*, won the *Sydney Morning Herald* prize for poetry. She published *Child With a Cockatoo* in 1955, not long after the birth of her daughter. That book, and *Cock Crow*, her further collection that appeared in 1965, contain poems that provide a new dimension in her work—deeply personal, yet universal poems dealing with child birth, motherhood and the bonds of family; poems like "Birth", "Child of Our Time", "Annunciations", "To Meet the Child", and the title poem of the second collection, "Cock Crow":

Wanting to be myself, alone,  
Between the lit house and the town  
I took the road, and at the bridge  
Turned back and walked the way I'd come.

Three times I took that lonely stretch,  
Three times the dark trees closed me round,  
The night absolved me of my bonds;  
Only my footsteps held the ground.

My mother and my daughter slept,  
One life behind and one before,  
And I that stood between denied  
Their needs in shutting-to the door.

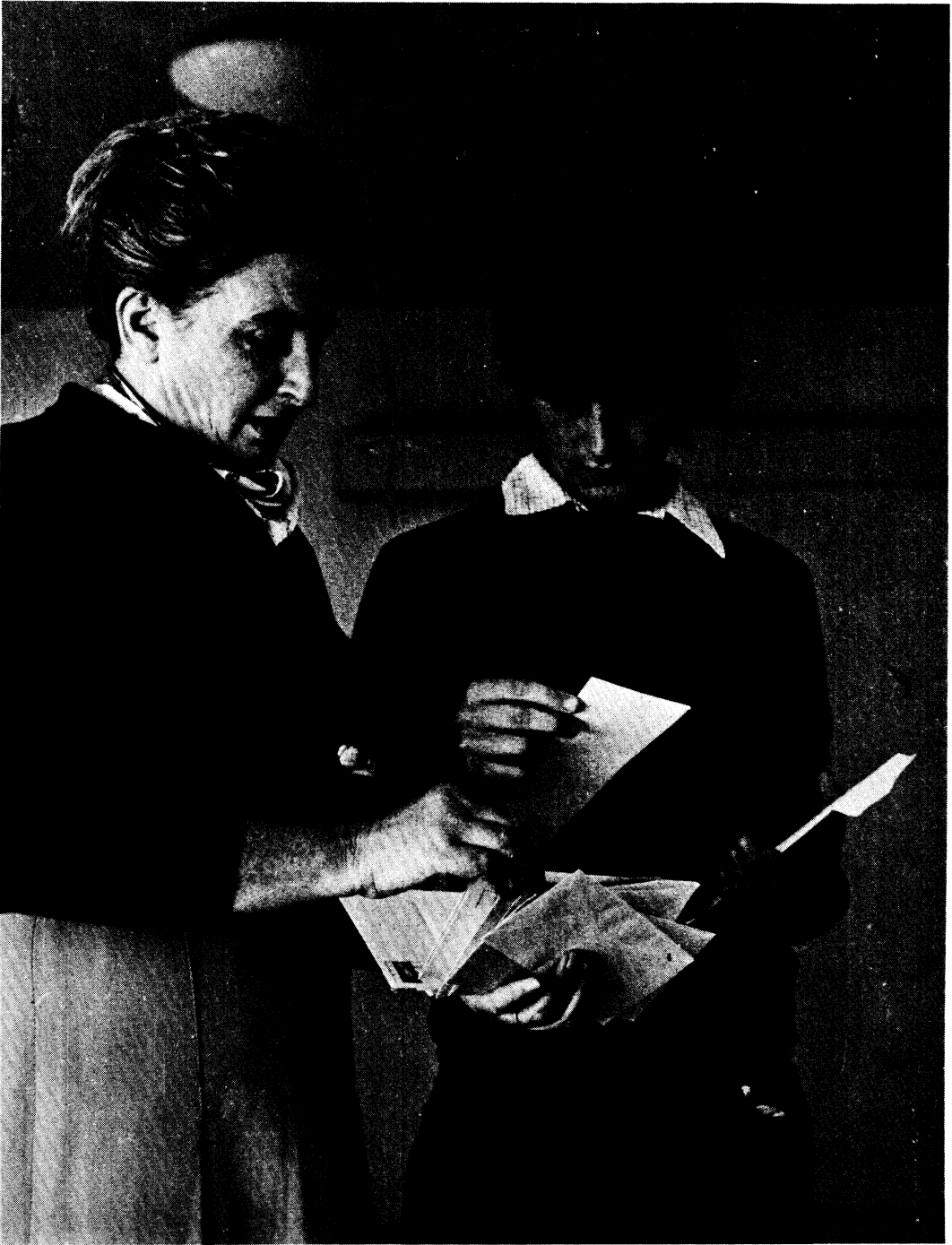
And walking up and down the road  
Knew myself, separate and alone,  
Cut off from human cries, from pain,  
And love that grows about the bone.

Too brief illusion! Thrice for me  
I heard the cock crow on the hill  
And turned the handle of the door  
Thinking I knew his meaning well.

As she talks about it, it is clear that the poem is a deeply-felt one for Rosemary Dobson: "It's to do with the feeling of being torn in two ways—one's human responsibilities as opposed to what one wants to do artistically. Yes, I think at certain stages in one's life it is necessary to be a bit ruthless in pursuing 'that one talent that is death to hide'. Everybody feels the contrary pull at some stage. I think it comes for a woman at that stage of having young children. Although on the other hand the man has to earn money for a family and so on. It applies to both. I know that I've been very lucky. My husband has given me a great deal of help . . . support . . ."



Rosemary Dobson, and Ray Crooke's painting "Morning Light".



With her elder son, Robert, sorting new submissions for the Canberra Fellowship Anthology.

As her children grew up, and as her poetic reputation grew, Rosemary Dobson found herself more and more involved in the concomitants of writing—lecturing, anthologizing, and preparing for the occasional television programme. She continued to produce poetry steadily, but painted less and less.

In 1966, when her husband was posted to London as London editor for Angus and Robertson, Rosemary Dobson and the children accompanied him. They remained abroad for five years. “We travelled as much as we could—as much as expense, time and young children would allow”, she says. “We saw a good deal, using weekends and breaks. There are things one regrets not managing, of course. But I was very fortunate. My sister was then Counsellor with the Australian Embassy in Athens. I stayed with her in Greece for a while. It was beautiful. When we returned my husband gave me a copy of the travel books by Pausanias—marvellous! He was the earliest Greek travel writer, if you like. He travelled all over Greece in the second century A.D., just absorbing it. He was most concerned with the divinities, the temples, the shrines and so on. His books are a store-house of description and legend. And I started to write then the series of poems that I’m still working on, called probably ‘Poems from Pausanias’. I hope my Literature Board grant might get me back to Greece—and then I’ll finish the series.”

On return to Australia in 1971, the family soon found themselves in Canberra as a new home. “Ah”, says Rosemary Dobson, suddenly the housewife of *Cock Crow* again, “Canberra was welcome as a place where you could hang something out and it would actually dry! I’d said if not Sydney, where we had a lot of our friends, then Canberra. And here we were—Alec was appointed to the National Library.”

Rosemary Dobson works in the airy, sunny room at the end of the house, down the long corridor, down three steps, away from lounge, diningroom, kitchen, bedrooms. She is organized and painstaking in the work she is doing at present as editor by invitation of a new anthology of Australian prose and poetry to be published by the Australian National University Press for the Canberra branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. Manuscripts—some 1,200 of them—litter the table in her workroom. She goes to the library at the Australian National University perhaps a couple of days a week. “I like to be where students are working. And without telephone and interruptions”, she says. While the anthology takes most of her time at the moment, she also is called upon to give lectures from time to time to such groups as the Women’s Graduates Association, or to the Australian Literature course at ANU where her daughter is doing second year Arts. Once a week she meets fellow poet David Campbell and Robert Dessaix of the Russian Department at the University. Over lunch in the grounds of the University Staff Centre the three confer on their versions of poems by the Russian poets Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam. David Campbell and Rosemary Dobson have a selection of these poems ready for publication in book form. (see page 64)

While she was in London, Rosemary Dobson was asked to prepare some of her poems for the University of Queensland press *Poets on Record* series. She also completed most of the work for her book on the Australian painter, Ray Crooke, commissioned by the same press. Two of his works hang in her Canberra lounge. “And now”, she says with an unassuming tone of surprised pleasure that is typical of her, “I’m doing life classes in Canberra. I did some line drawings of buildings in London. In life classes, I can concentrate on ‘volume’. I’ll never be any good, of course, but I like to do it.”

In the small room behind her workroom in the Canberra house is her husband’s hand press. Under the imprint of Brindabella Press Alec Bolton has already produced a beautiful small sheet edition of some of the Pausanias poems, as well as a slim book of a sequence of poems by David Campbell. “The press is something for

the future and it is Alec's project", says Rosemary Dobson, running her hands over the cold of the metal, looking into the trays of type on a shelf. "We both have a real joy in typography. There's a lot still to learn. But the private press is to be considered an art form in its own right these days, what with the standardization that has come about elsewhere with such things as computer type-setting."

The Poems from Pausanias, of course, are a natural part of Rosemary Dobson's lifelong fascination with myth and fine art. As she has always done, she writes her poems one at a time, and usually at one sitting, trusting first versions by and large, rather than second thoughts that are re-worked. "Sometimes I write a poem more or less as a discipline", she says. "And I find I can usually bring it off. I think, though, that in those cases something has been working subliminally that I haven't been aware of." She is very interested in the work of the younger poets, feels that they must be well represented in the Canberra Fellowship anthology. "What we older poets read at Canberra poetry sessions is very different from what the younger ones are doing", she says. "But it's not merely a matter of age—the individual's world view underlies the difference too. It seems to me that when you are younger you have lyrical impulses, so to speak. You think of lines and then relate them and make a poem of them. When you're older you think of an idea and work on it to make a poem. As far as my own work is concerned, I like to keep my options open. I'd like to think of myself as a flexible traditionalist."

In a small courtyard beside a pond where goldfish slide slowly in and out of the sun, Rosemary Dobson sets lunch. The food on the tray is a still life—cheese, butter, meat, figs, walnuts, fruit—and the white wine and the bread. It was Douglas Stewart, with his particular gift of sudden penetration, who said that Rosemary Dobson in her work is a religious person in the deepest and most important sense. And she herself has written, in the Introduction to her *Selected Poems* of 1973, the following words: "I hope it will be perceived that the poems presented here are part of a search for something only fugitively glimpsed; a state of grace which one once knew, or imagined, or from which one was turned away. Surely everyone who writes poetry would agree that this is part of it—a doomed but urgent wish to express the inexpressible."

Nowhere is her humility and artistry better reflected than in her recent poem, "Being Called For". In this poem, as A. D. Hope has written, Rosemary Dobson "sees herself in the mirror of eternity . . .".

Come in at the low-silled window,  
Enter by the door through the vine leaves  
Growing over the lintel. I have hung bells at the  
Window to be stirred by the breath of your  
Coming, which may be at any season.

In winter the snow throws  
Light on the ceiling. If you come in winter  
There will be a blue shadow before you  
Cast on the threshold.

In summer an eddying of white dust  
And a brightness falling between the leaves.

When you come I am ready: only, uncertain—  
Shall we be leaving at once on another journey?  
I would like first to write it all down and leave the  
pages  
On the table weighted with a stone,  
Nevertheless I have put in a basket  
The coins for the ferry.

# DAVID CAMPBELL

## Crimea

The stream of yellow mead flowed out of the long-necked  
Bottle like honey, and the hostess had time to recall:  
'Here in miserable Tauris, so casually wrecked  
By fate,'—glancing over her shoulder—'we're not dull at all.'

Everywhere people are about the business of Bacchus.  
Only guards and dogs are left on earth. You walk;  
No one. Quiet days roll by like heavy barrels.  
In far huts, half heard, unanswered, people talk.

Like eyelashes dark window-blinds are lowered  
On the vast brown garden after tea. We pass  
White columns on the way to see the vineyard.  
The mountains sleep in a clear glaze of glass.

And I say: the vineyard is an ancient battleground  
With curly horsemen fighting in bushy lines.  
In stony Tauris, Greek sciences are found,  
The gilded acres in rows of rusting vines.

In a white room silence stands like a spinning-wheel.  
There's the smell of vinegar, paint, fresh wine from the cellar.  
Remember, in the Greek house, the wife courted by all?  
How long she sat at her spinning—not Helen—another!

Ah golden fleece, where are you, golden fleece?  
All the way, unceasing, waves heave and chime.  
And leaving the ship, having stretched its sails on the seas,  
Odysseus came home, a man full of space and time.

*After Osip Mandelstam from the  
translation by Robert Dessaix*

# ROSEMARY DOBSON

## Crimea

The stream of honey flowed from the bottle  
So slow, so thick, that our hostess was turning  
Her head half over her shoulder to tell us,  
“Here in Tauris where Fate has flung us  
We haven’t time to be dull a moment.”

Everywhere, everyone’s serving Bacchus.  
You’d think there’s no one in the world else—  
Just guards and dogs. You notice no one.  
The days roll by like weighted barrels.  
You half-hear voices in distant vineyards.

After tea we went into the garden.  
The dark blinds seemed like lashes lowered  
Over the windows: past white columns  
Down to the vineyards. Airy glass seemed  
Poured all over the drowsy mountains.

I said: “It seems like an ancient battle  
This vineyard—vines with twisting tendrils  
Are curly-headed horsemen fighting.  
Stony Tauris learns from Hellas  
Here—in gold, in rusty acres.”

In a white room where only silence  
Stands like a spinning wheel left untended  
There’s scent of fresh wine, paint, and vinegar.  
Remember the house in Greece—the woman—  
Not Helen—she who so long embroidered?

Where are you, golden fleece, where are you?  
The waves of the sea made distant thunder.  
He left his ship, Odysseus, traveller,  
Left his ship with its thin strained canvas,  
And time and space were his load at landfall.

*After Osip Mandelstam from the  
translation by Robert Dessaix*

## TWENTY FOUR KOREAN SIJO

Translations by Graeme Wilson

### Defying Age

In this right hand I hold a stick,  
Thorns in the other hand.

With thorns I've blocked the road to age  
And now, defiant, stand  
Daring the hordes of hoariness,  
Though they be minutes thick,  
To rush my bramble barricade  
And the bashing of my stick.

But white hairs, understanding  
The bold front of my mind,  
Slipped round by some back-road of time  
And took me from behind.

U Tak (1262-1342)

### At the Chinese Frontier

The north wind rasps on barren trees  
Whose jagged branches throw  
Shadows yet more jagged  
Into the moonlit snow.

Through endless miles of wilderness  
On either frozen hand  
Our line of frontier-fortresses  
Extends across the land.

I stand with my sword beside me.  
I shout, and my shout rolls forth  
Free, unhindered, echoless  
Into the shivering north.

Kim Chang-so (1390-1453)

### Sleep for Loveliness

Pear-blossoms drenched with moonlight,  
Midnight, the Milky Way.  
The red-tongued cuckoo through the dark  
Sings rivers of dismay.

The cuckoo sings of heartbreak.  
How can the cuckoo know  
The heart of spring is in that bough  
Whose flowers could be snow?

Deep rapture is a sickness.  
So sweet its deep dis-ease  
One cannot sleep for loveliness  
On such spring-nights as these.

Yi Cho-nyon (1268-1343)

### Moonfisher

Night on the autumn river.  
I trail my hook and line  
In quiet pools too cold to hold  
More than the moon's design.

Happy to have no catch to show  
For all these hours afloat,  
Home with a haul of moonbeams  
I row this empty boat.

Prince Wolsan (1452-1483)

## Zen Road

The birds have vanished to their nests,  
The new moon's on the rise.

A Zen priest picks his cautious way  
Along a log that lies  
Athwart that shining river's  
Smoothly incessant flow.

How far, I thought to ask him,  
How far he still must go?

But then, from somewhere far away,  
The boom of a temple-bell  
Gave me the sombre answer  
No priest would wait to tell.

Song Sun (1493-1582)

## The Way

Even fools know something  
For even fools can act.  
Doesn't it follow that the Way is easy,  
Almost matter of fact?

But even wise men don't know everything.  
Doesn't it follow then  
That the Way is hard, and maybe hardest  
For the wisest men?

To ponder whether it's hard or easy,  
Right conduct in a sage,  
So fills my mind that I forget  
The agonies of age.

Yi Hwang (1501-1570)

## Crazy Crazy Crazy Love

Alas, it was my doing.  
But how was I to know  
That, if he took me at my word,  
My words would hurt me so?

He never would have gone  
Had I but told him stay.  
Crazy it is that I should yearn  
For what I sent away.

Crazy, crazy, crazy love!  
I cannot comprehend  
Love that has only grown because  
I brought it to an end.

Hwang Jin-i (1506-1544)

## Two Stone Buddhas

There, by the roadside, face to face,  
Two stone Buddhas stand.

Rain has greened the patient shoulders,  
Frost has split a hand  
And wind has brazed the lowered eyes.

Yet, cold and hungry there,  
I envy them their ignorance  
Of man's divine despair.

Chong Chol (1536-1593)

## Apostasy

This robe, thus ripped, shall make  
Some girl a saffron dress.

I'll wrap this blessed rosary  
For donkey-breath to bless  
Around the butt-end of its tail  
That years of Buddhist bray,  
Of counting beads and chanting prayers  
May all be blown away.

For, locked in a woman's arms,  
I've learnt this truth: that prayer  
Is waste of breath, just one more kind  
Of air blown out on air.

Chong Chol (1536-1593)

## The Tree of Happiness

On broad leaves of paulownia,  
The one and only tree  
Whereon the phoenix will set foot,  
The rain falls heartlessly.

The rain's sad tapping overhead  
Compounds my weight of grief.  
Who now could have the heart to plant  
Trees of so broad a leaf?

Kim Sang-yong (1562-1637)

## Marriage

The incense in the censer  
Burnt out long ago.  
The water in the water-clock  
Has dribbled down so low  
That night, by now, must almost  
Have leaked itself away.

Where have you been these hours and hours?  
What party was so gay  
That only now, when wearily  
The flat moon climbs the fence,  
Do you return to plumb my grief  
With such cold confidence?

Kim Sang-yong (1562-1637)

## Willow Cuttings

I sent you willow-cuttings  
Culled from the mountain-side.

Plant them, love, where you may see them  
When the servants slide  
The windows of your sleeping-room  
Sideways to expose  
Morning and the garden,  
Green willow and red rose.

And should the night-rains coax these cuttings  
Into willow-flowers,  
Cherish them, remembering  
What long rain-nights were ours.

Hongnang (16th century)

## Tao

Do not ask me who I am.  
Names are names are names.  
I have learnt from Lao Tzu.  
Lao Tzu proclaims  
That the world is chaos,  
That the real is sham.

I, that am here, am not here.  
I, that am not, am.

Sin Hum (1566-1628)

## Pomegranates

It rained last night. The pomegranates,  
Red and orange-red,  
Have all burst open into flower.

Not to be comforted,  
I sit in this cool pavilion  
Set in a lotus lake  
And under its glassbead curtains wait  
For my closed heart to break.

Sin Hum (1566-1628)

## What Power

Even as the flowers fade  
New growths of leaf appear

Under the irresistible  
Successions of the year  
Green grubs crawl up from ditches  
To flash as dragonflies.

What power guides this magic rule  
That all must live which dies?

Sin Hum (1566-1628)

## Politician

Great winds father crookedness.  
Do not mock the pine  
Whose writhen trunk is no less crooked,  
No less wry than mine.

Spring flowers go to pieces  
Long before the snow.

You who mock, remember me  
When the great winds blow.

Prince In-pyong (1622-1658)

## Falcon

More than a full foot tall  
My falcon is now grown.

Only the day before yesterday  
He first let go the bone  
Of my left wrist and arrowed  
Into the sunset sky,  
His tail-bell ringing as he sailed  
High as the sun is high.

And who that has not flown a hawk  
Could ever understand  
How the heart flamed as that red star  
Clamped back upon my hand?

Kim Chang-op (1658-1752)

## Who Says I'm Old

Who says I'm old? Do old men  
As dancetty as I?  
Do flowers make old pulses feel  
Thus springularly spry?  
Does the mere touch of a wine-cup  
Bring laughter to old lips?

That these black hairs have undergone  
A negative eclipse,  
That what was dark is turning light  
Seems scarcely to imply  
That night is coming closer.

Who says I'm old? Not I.

Yi Chung-jip (17th century)

## Time to be Writing Songs

Where have you been, I ask myself  
Now that it's time to go.  
Old as I am, I ask myself  
What do you know you know?

That over the fence the golden  
Crysanthemums grow;  
That, on my desk, my ebony harp  
Sleeps, and its shoulder-thongs  
Shine sleepily as though to sleep  
All timelessness belongs.

Who, in a world so wise, could find  
Time to be writing songs?

Kim Su-jang (1682-1765)

## Zen Testament

To the chrysanthemum  
I leave this sick old mind;

To that painting of blue grapes  
Whose tendrils are entwined  
So cleanly, I leave  
My mess of tangled cares;

And to some longer poem  
These time-distempred hairs.

Kim Su-jang (1682-1765)

## Magnet

It seems that I'm a magnet:  
It seems that girls are pins.

For when I sit, girls follow me;  
And when my sleep begins,  
Girls follow me; and when I jump  
To make off on my own,  
Girls follow me. Girls follow me  
As bitches will a bone.

Spatting married couples,  
Hear me and obey:  
Boil this magnet, drain the liquid,  
Drink it twice a day.

Kim Su-jang (1682-1765)

## New Year

Some boy outside my window  
Shouts that it's New Year's Day.

I fling my eastern window wide  
And, simmering away,  
There's the same old sun again.

Boy, I bellow back,  
When there's a new sun, tell me:  
Till then, hold your clack.

Chu Ui-sik (18th century)

## Girl in the Rain

Her violet cloak clutched round her head,  
As quickly as she can  
She runs through rainfall to the pear-bloomed  
Village and a man.

What blandishments, I wonder,  
What whispers, what untrue  
But wonderful wonderful promises  
Have soaked that silly through.

Anonymous

## Raven

However hard the raven croaks,  
Omen of decay,  
My old man's not up for taking.

I need hardly say  
That I myself shall not be taken,  
Nor shall the greedy tomb  
Gulp down my son who ploughs the field,  
My daughter at the loom.

But my son's wife, out hauling water  
From the awkward well,  
Raven, there's a girl I'd gladly  
See you drop in hell.

Anonymous

# BOOKS

Bruce Beaver, *Lauds and Complaints*: South Head Press, 1974. 96 pp. \$4.50.

Of the poets who first emerged in the 1960's in Australia, the most important are Bruce Beaver and Gwen Harwood. Beaver is the more prolific of the two: *Lauds and Complaints* is his fifth volume of verse.

His first major book of verse, his third altogether, was *Open at Random* (1967). It drew from R. D. FitzGerald the gracious compliment, "There are no Australian poets of his generation, and few of any other, whose work I have been willing to give such diligent attention to as that of Bruce Beaver" ("Bruce Beaver's Poetry", *Meanjin*, 28 (Sept. 1969), 407-412). *Letters to Live Poets* appeared in 1969, but after FitzGerald's article had been written, and showed development in directions that neither FitzGerald nor anyone else could have predicted. *Letters* won the Grace Leven Prize and the Captain Cook Prize within Australia, and brought Beaver an international reputation. It is a series of intimate reflections of the letter-writing poet communicated to his readers, the "live poets" of the title. In *Lauds and Complaints* the reader's presence is less important: "at times the word-maker is alone/with his silence."

*Lauds and Complaints*, like *Letters* before it, is a series of more or less separable poems, headed by Roman numerals instead of titles. The poems in *Lauds and Complaints* are only loosely connected with one another, through the author's view of life as a continuing play of tensions, a cause for varying lauds and complaints. He finds much in life to celebrate and to lament, whether in his survey of an old man's life or in his account of a young man's suicide. In the opening poem Beaver sets the tone carefully and in the concluding poem he makes a final, considered statement about life. The opening poem represents life as quite capable of breaking a man. It expresses immediately and strikingly the misery of isolated man:

fallen among enemies yet such a consum-  
mation  
despair has given up your ghost at last  
never enough to tumble into and out of again

the stinking ditches and the perfumed beds  
holding onto your blind neighbours  
their seraphic bland faces turned upward  
their howling masks mouthing up at sun  
moon and those myriad other fragments of  
eternity

you looked down and saw yourself at one  
with the dark earth that broke and received  
you

like a sacrificial bread of nerves and ecstasies  
o we are all eaten by time but you  
kicked in its teeth the day you rose to fall.

Beaver deliberately withholds judgement on the meaning and value of life here, but this is his darkest view of life, a view that lightens already in the following poem. Poem No. II extols a Manly fisherman who has endured over 98 years of life, and pictures him finally walking upon the waters like Christ, out through the Heads of Sydney Harbour. The concluding poem, No. XXVI, is quieter than No. I, which rather endorses the suicide of a young man "fallen among enemies": it re-presents the world of Delvaux, where there is no communication, but where there is beauty, however cold and passionless, and where there is at least the search for communication as people turn "towards and away from each other".

Wholly dedicated to his art, Bruce Beaver is unusually articulate in his verse about the writing of poetry. One of the best poems in this volume deals with the process of creativity (No. VI). It is the most vigorous of all his poems about writing, the most charged with imaginative power. The vigour is inherent in Beaver's basic image of "the beautiful and hideous horses of creativity", his sense of excitement, the urgency of his verbs, and the concentrated energy of his short lines. "Hold your horses", he advises,

rein them in awhile  
and ponder this  
animal strength  
in abeyance to time and  
occasion.

This is a dazzling poem, flowing easily from homely image to glamorous image. So he writes of creativity in the conventional achievements of the

pets of the milk and  
bread carts  
of the past knocking repeatedly  
stubbled muzzles  
at doors

or the creativity in the singular tour de force  
of a Clever Hans who

counted his master's  
breaths  
and knocked upon the  
door of the ground  
in answer  
to the sums set him.

The best course, Beaver tells himself and other  
poets, is to

first grow as strong as a  
horse and then  
abide  
the breaking-in has been  
effected.

"Abide and learn" becomes his motto: he is to learn how to perform amicably among the various showmen, whether clowns or aerialists or lion tamers, then proceed past the sawdust and the canvas to ruminate in a quiet corner. With a certain wry wisdom, he accepts that he has a long way to go before he is hailed as the poet Messiah of a welcoming Jerusalem, and that nobody will get impatient waiting for him. At the head of the poem, he alludes to one of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* (First Part, No. XXII), which stresses the need to abide in patience:

Alles das Eilende  
wird schon vorüber sein;  
denn das Verweilende  
erst weiht uns ein.

("All that hurries is soon past; the abiding is what consecrates us.")

The poems in Beaver's last two books are longer and fuller than in his earlier books, more reflective and less condensed in expression. In relaxing from the earlier condensation, though, he can be diffuse or blur his focus, as in No. III, the poem about the man who wrote "Eternity" on the sidewalks of Sydney in the late '40's. Sometimes he makes transitions that are too abrupt, as in No. V, a poem that sets man's animal dependence on food alongside the social hierarchies in which he operates. At one time we are in the world of supermarkets and small food stores operated by Europeans of many nationalities, at another we are back briefly with "the fruit and root/eating survivors of Lemuria", then again in the world of mass consumption. There are a couple of quick snap-

shots of dinner guests and a contrasting picture of the poor of Australia who live on canned pets' food. The poem has too many ideas loosely organized, a weakness that the poetic skill does not quite conceal. Beaver does endeavour to keep a firm control over the structure of these longer poems, and he succeeds with the broad framework: the end of a poem, for instance, tends to return to the beginning. It is within the poem itself that he can be diffuse or blur the focus. His best structured poems are those that progressively deepen through what may at first look like a series of short digressions. Such a poem is No. IX, an elegy for Jack Kerouac, which moves from a lament for Kerouac who died of "massive internal / weeping alone as ever" to the notion that "we're all alone/together" and so to a statement of his permanent significance to "the halt and the blind", his neverending being. The less formally structured poems, like No. II about the Manly fisherman, tend to drift to their conclusion, so that when it happens that they end at the foot of a page and without a full stop, we are not immediately sure that the poem has ended.

*Lauds and Plaints* goes beyond *Letters to Live Poets* in its technical experimentation. The lack of conventional punctuation and the word-or phrase-a-line poems (Nos. X and XI) at the heart of the book are only the most obvious signs of an experimentation that extends to an attempt to render in verse the flow and language of conversation.

Beaver has developed and thoroughly mastered his own kind of punctuation, punctuation by spacing, without any of the conventional marks like the comma or full stop. It suggests the pauses, the word groups and wider thought groups within speech. Curiously, Beaver keeps some hyphens (like "over-seasoned meals"), at a time when they are fast disappearing—probably because R. D. FitzGerald criticised him for the lack of "helpful" hyphens in 1969. *Open at Random* had contained his first unpunctuated poem, "Capsicum", but that was an isolated poem, not part of a series, and did not replace punctuation by significant spacing.

The most experimental poems in their form are Nos. X and XI, with almost one word to a line. No. X, the most ambitious poem in this volume, conveys brilliantly the ebb and flow in nature and in life, in change and changelessness, life and death:

the bland  
air  
melts  
echoes  
  
the ocean  
fulfils  
itself  
yet stays  
always  
unsatisfied.

The poem is built up of separate effects much like a painting that is built up of the separate strokes of a paintbrush. If Beaver's view of life is sad in the other poems, he is strong and positive in this, one of his most considered works:

*neue  
kraft  
führend  
the earth  
o lord  
is full of  
thy mercy  
teach  
me  
thy  
statutes.*

Poems No. X and XI are deeply serious compositions, rich in humility and prayerfulness. Thus No. XI concludes with dignity:

whatever  
day  
dawns upon  
or  
whatever  
night  
transcends  
will  
be known by  
the creative spirit  
this  
is  
enough  
the rest  
is of  
and other  
than  
silence.

Beaver is experimental in poetic diction as well as in line length and punctuation. Without disharmony, he can set a colloquialism alongside an exalted exclamation:

o we are all eaten by time but you  
kicked in its teeth the day you rose to fall.

He does not eschew clichés ("even clichés/have their uses"), and at times (in Nos. IX and XIV) adopts the style of popular songs:

what does the world know of you and me  
together what does it know of us together  
why should it care.

If he resembles any other writer, it is mostly Patrick White, whom he considers with some justice to be the greatest Australian poet. When we read of the hands of the young suicide encountering "the innocent depths of air", or of the "green prawn scented gloom/steamy with summer", we are reminded of White's anthropomorphism and sensuousness. Beaver's fondness for pairing opposites, as in "the threat and promise of assorted sibs" or "no/accusing list of hoping despairing actions", can also be looked upon as deriving from White, who writes in *Voss*, for instance, that "worthiness is too little, or too much". This device of covering the total range of reactions in a concise phrase can be highly effective, but is overdone in No. VII:

the six sounds of ringing trowel  
singer hoist motors ocean and typewriter  
subdue the prowling cat's monotoned over-  
ture.

While Beaver's best poems in this volume are on the whole his most experimental ones, he is also very good indeed in simpler, more conventional poems that describe his immediate physical environment or express a direct emotional response. An example of the former is No. VIII, an account of a Sunday evening at sunset:

the silence rings  
with an absence of crickets petals drop  
plop onto earth and the cat's plate  
grates in a slow half-circle on the  
cement under an abrasive  
tongue.

His poems to his wife Brenda, Nos. XIII, XIV, and XXV, record his emotional response to her support and to her temporary absence. The time that she is away in New Zealand in connection with the death of a parent he dedicates to her, in a moving expression of love and respect:

make of my seven days' severance a suffer-  
ance task of art  
pleasing to her who is behind the single heart  
and mind  
of all my working will and wit adept and  
crucial witness  
of the creative spirit.

Bruce Beaver expresses a wide range of feeling, wider perhaps than we find in any of his Australian contemporaries. Much of his appeal lies in his very personal voice: he adopts no mask and feels no need of any. Like *Letters to Live Poets, Lauds and Plaints* contains much biographical information about the author: his life as a messenger boy in Sydney, his honey-

moon while ill in New Zealand, his family problems. While remaining inherently modest, he has grown increasingly in assurance, in part because of his happy marriage. He emerges from his verse as a most attractive poetic personality, a man of dignity and warm humanity.

JOHN B. BESTON

*Minipoems*, W. Hart-Smith: Perth, 1974.

Settling in Western Australia a few years ago has apparently given a new impetus to the poetry of W. Hart-Smith, who has now been an important voice in Australian poetry for many years and is widely represented in international anthologies.

*Minipoems* is a slim volume, slimmer than this poet deserves, though given the difficulties of publishing in Western Australia, we should be grateful for its appearance at all.

Associated early in his life with the Jindy-worabak movement, Mr Hart-Smith has always been deeply concerned with physical environment. For some poets this may be a trap—it is easy to name the writers whose talents have been crucified upon the Australian landscape. Mr Hart-Smith is passionately concerned with environmental pollution, and at least one greatly gifted poet (not to mention a host of lesser lights) appears to be squandering her talents writing rhyming anti-pollution tracts.

Poetically, Mr Hart-Smith has avoided both these pitfalls. The *Minipoems* are a curiously tranquil distillation of place and spirit. They have, if one may borrow another writer's phrase, a profound and wise simplicity which is by no means the same thing as being simple, as in "Cormorants, Trigg Island":

"Fourteen white-fronted shags  
like bits of Chinese ideograms  
are perched on a jagged stump of limestone  
rock

above me as I turn the seaweed over for  
shells  
brushing the flies away  
and the sand-hoppers.

I like the way they accept the fact  
I'm about some business of my own  
that neither concerns them nor threatens.  
We live as live-and-let-live things.  
I gather shells.  
They dry their wings."

I saw a cartoon once of two men in a barely-furnished room. One was holding a record and saying to the other: "It's a little known piece—Propnikov's concerto for worn-out stylus, clapped speakers and wobbling turn-table." The poetry of W. Hart-Smith shows one, by way of stark contrast, how much of the *other* poetry being written today is for worn-out stylus, clapped speakers and wobbling turntable. Compare the influential Kris Hemensley's statement in a recent issue of *New Poetry*:

"FITZROT is an engaged magazine, an explosion from a depressed inner-suburb of the city, whose editor is very much heir to the poet-as-prophet/the pariah as the blessed, politics, whose poetics is better summed up by the exclamation 'pow' than anything else. PARACHUTE is more ecstatic and mystical, and is as important a breakthrough magazine as FITZROT, featuring the old gathering with the new . . ."

And W. Hart-Smith's statement in "Wetlands, Perth", where the stylus is not worn out, the speakers are not clapped, and the turntable is not wobbling:

“The black marshlands  
donk  
waruk  
The sky is too luminous  
with moonlight

Only the pinhole of Venus  
for the moon’s companion  
waruk  
Night  
donk  
in Spring  
those most silent of drinkers  
taking their fill  
donk  
donk”

are streaked with moonwater  
donk

for stars

waruk  
a still night

Paperbark trees

towards summer  
waruk waruk

To use every word as a musical note, to give every space and every line its perfect weight and meaning, to achieve in the end exactly what was intended, is not as easy as it looks. Years ago, in his “Columbus” series, W. Hart-Smith proved that he had a mastery of cadence unique among Australian poets (though he is sometimes capable of making the oddly indecorous lapse of a strained rhyme), and he has not lost this mastery.

Though the two examples I have quoted deal directly with the world of physical perception, *Minipoems* contains a lot more than mere W.A. postcard landscape. W. Hart-Smith’s lyrics have always been deceptively simple, and a second or third reading often reveals a good deal more than at first meets the eye, as in “Sherpa”, “Hide and Seek”, or “Mr Connor”.

There are few good poets writing in Western Australia at present, and we are fortunate to have acquired one of national, and indeed inter-

national, stature. In this little book he has presented us, not only with some fine poetry, but with a time-capsule our children should take pleasure in opening. I hope the policies of greater Federal and State government support for the arts will allow Mr Hart-Smith a larger publication soon.

In a sense, he is more than a good poet. It is probably in work like Mr Hart-Smith’s that hope for the future of poetry as part of civilization lies. He has the potential of being a pointer to the closing of the tragic gap between the popular and the esoteric, between the pity of newspaper death-notice rhymes and the ever-diminishing circle of a closed, interlocking, *incommunicado* group, playing at poetry along with pottery and the cultivating of macrobiotic food. Though he does not here make the grand gesture, W. Hart-Smith speaks to the tribe, and he speaks from a lifetime’s dedication to the art.

HAL COLEBATCH

# BRETT WRIGHT

## My Fence Has Been Denied

It was the combined work  
of wind, age and pregnant cats.  
Which is fitting, i guess.

Rape can be fun.

But now i don't know.  
My underwear status, my callisthenic prestige . . .  
My back-fence has a six-picket wide screw,  
and through it is the damned world; gawking  
magnetically.

It hurts bad in the morning.

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