

Poetry and Poetics Review

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cordite

poems by

domonique grandmont

seamus heaney

dorothy hewett

mtc cronin

rod mengham

js harry

john tranter

eric beach

michael farrell

john mateer

zan ross

arthur spyrou

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eugenio montejo

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alain bosquet

luke davies

nicolae prelipceanu

trevor poulton

joseph zaresky

reviews by

mark o'flynn

dorothy hewett

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ian patterson

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peter minter and philip salom

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interview**PHILIP SALOM and Peter Minter**

Philip Salom *THE ROME AIR NAKED*
Penguin 1996, 134pp, \$18.95. ISBN 0 14 058773

In the July issue of the *AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW*, Philip Salom writes about *THE ROME AIR NAKED* and his affinity for poetry which is both emotionally and sensually honest. Having recently won the Newcastle Poetry Prize with a moving and complex elegy to his late father, Salom writes that

I wrote *THE ROME AIR NAKED* with...emotional undercurrents honestly acknowledged. I wrote in the first person and in the present tense, the performative, deliberately closing the gap between the 'I' and myself and allowing no more distance from the emotions than that of experience, poetic technique and whatever was intrinsic to my personality. Instead of Wordsworth's classic description (prescription?) of writing as "emotion recollected in tranquillity" which is a remembering, re-living, and therefore distancing device – because the poet can stand in two places at the same time – I wrote primarily from and in the unresolved present.

Considering the many ways in which 'lyricism' has been challenged by a range of contemporary poets and theorists, Salom's approach is refreshingly complex. In a sense he is reacting against two common and problematic approaches to the lyric. Since the 1980s, Australian poetry, like many poetries in English, has faltered under the growing dead weight of the domestic confessional, those frequently published, too easily digestible though poisonous eruptions of The Poet's Inner Life. Equally extreme, although less often published and even less read, are the choreographed refractions of experience found in poetry which is thoroughly predicated by a misapplication of theoretical or linguistic models. Perhaps Salom's statement

One body, Or many?

regarding his desire to write "from and in the unresolved present" can point us toward a poetic which rejects these and other complacencies.

THE ROME AIR NAKED was composed while Salom completed a residency at the Australia Council's B.R.Whiting Studio in Rome. He obviously enjoyed his stay. While we are constantly, though not repetitively, reminded of his sadness and melancholy at having left behind a new lover, Salom embraces Rome with concentrated energy. One can imagine him driven awake early each morning by an expansive desire to explore as much of the city as possible. On the way, we are introduced to a beautiful statue imagined, in her light robe, riding "a Vespa full throttle in July"; to a number of gypsies, of course the Mafiosi, countless whining buses and 'The Madman Dancer at Piazza Barberini' who "tilts his crotch at a thousand cars". While in previous collections Salom's voice was characteristically restless, his mood and imagination here are matched by a city that is equally sparky, chaotic, and challenging.

ps I arrived in what was the worst summer for 83 years: for 46 days straight the temperature was around 35 degrees and humidity seemed to stick at 95%. I couldn't believe it. Talk about the body! Sweat. It was both sensual and relentless. One just becomes sick of it. The sheer pressure, especially as I was in physical and emotional withdrawal. Erotic backflip might be a better term, erotic backflip poems. In fact, the people dressed more formally and with less exposure than Australians in summer, with the exception of generous and very common displays of cleavage. All the same, my own erotic memory was more present perhaps, with this ubiquitous sense of the body. Also echoing in me – and sometimes dully, like emptiness – was the body of paradox. Generally, the way when living alone in a foreign country leaves you outside the (cultural) body, the way isolation, alone-ness, makes you both more and less of your self; and specifically, the strange fact that my new lover back in Australia had spent the previous years with a partner who returned to Europe without her for the

summer holidays, and I seemed to be doing the same thing, when in fact we were, and still are, very much a couple who feel inseparable. And so on. Under these circumstances, given also that my previous year had been utterly disruptive, I was ripe for writing. All the merging and blurring filled me. I'm not sure if the concurrent poems, for example, would have happened, otherwise; everything led to that kind of outbreak.

Throughout *THE ROME AIR NAKED* the emphatic presence of the city provides a vigorous backdrop to Salom's tested, energetic language. The success of the collection is not, however, simply an effect of creating seductive or energetic imagery. There is a solid aesthetic at work in all the poems. A hint to its nature is given on page 43, where a memory of time spent with his lover "struck a presence, a form I could feel quite bodily both inside and outside me simultaneously."

In this frame of mind the poet leaps from absence, via immanence, or imagination, to presence – a memory, erupting with some physical and emotional shock, compels the poet to embody his feeling as language. This process is described and enacted throughout the book. For instance, in the final poem of the fine 'Erotic Ghazals', Salom tells his absent lover

I'm your's like this: I'll be every building
of this city, and you can live in all of me,

I'm monuments, marble, the galleria's painted flash,
take the maps and wander all my nakedness.

These radical inversions, internally and externally, locally and over distance and time, suggest the emotional energy driving Salom's attempt to embody his desire, to recreate himself as a vehicle for the

experience of his absent lover. In 'Hera Berberini' he asks

Just who and how have I portrayed
in letters to my lover, every opening
and closure?

Here, the uncovering and hiding of love and desire over great distance is given greater charge by association with a statue's navel, the poet making connections between art, form, sexuality and birth. Salom's poems, particularly those addressed to his lover, are often erotic. He avoids nostalgia, however, by working to breach the boundaries between the experience of place, history and language, ensuring therefore that they work beyond the merely autobiographical:

If you take my sentence in your mouth, I lick silence on
your overwhelming verb. We come like a rush of poems.

Salom's voice is deliberately honest ("I must be male about this") and, while he can also be humorously, ironically confessional when exploring even 'brief Romantic Fictions', he is always expansive in the right way – with a sharp, sideways glance to the particular. For Salom, the poem itself is an expression of desire and a 'making real', an energised materialisation of presence.

pm The French poet Edmond Jabès wrote that "...a writer works with his body. You live with your body, and the book is above all the book of your body." Many of the poems in your book bring together the erotic and the inanimate or distant, like your lover, or the city of Rome. In a sense the collection is a demonstration of that idea, that the body in space and time can both 'read' and 'write' the book, as one does when viewing, from a distance, a sculpted figure. I imagine Rome was the ideal background for the more erotic poems.

ps Only by a stony or metallic nakedness which, in showing what it is, also shows what it isn't! Imagine if I'd been in India. And just think how that comparison shows up the whole thing of likeness and the body as an idealised/gendered/ politicised form. Much of what I felt took a political edge. That does seem to happen when I'm living elsewhere. The capital-H history thing doesn't reduce me to

Are you afraid of a future without
purpose or direction?
Arm yourself! Subscribe to cordite

awe, I don't (as one reviewer put it) swoon. I get critical, see the body-politic: it's one part of the public level that you have some access to.

pm Is the poem 'Hera Barberini' referring to one of Bernini's works?*

ps I don't think so. The statue I had in mind is one I'd identified with a much earlier style of sculpture, which in time I came to recognise as fairly common, with the body showing almost nakedly through the formal robe, while the hair and face are stiff, almost purely formal and rendered quite anonymous/ly. So 'she' is caught, and cold. 'She' can be found somewhere in the Vatican collection and being Roman with this very Greek influence is therefore well before Bernini's time. What is curious, and drew me in, was the naming of such works after far more recent personages. So here was the ancient order, the church, the moneyed patron, the art and the artist, all in familiar line-up, and yet I was still feeling the contemporary dailiness of Rome, the scooter brigade and the body on display and the fixing of power in such various depictions of women. Not a lot changes.

pm Bernini's flourishes and experimentations with form were apparently revolutionary. I see some correspondences between the idea of 'the sculptural' and the idea you present of 'Rome', its relationship with form as a kind of poetic vanishing point, and the sense of longing you engage with, for embodiment and for 'the text'.

ps Yes. Definitely. While my poem 'Hera' wasn't referring to one of Bernini's figures, his sculptures are everywhere in Rome and became a kind of familiar for me. He very clearly gave the body volume and what I'd call 'torque' – a sort of twist-and-spring energy. There is a longing *in* them. Quite a few of my poems were infused with address to my absent lover and so each 'text' was a body and embodiment, was a longing and a form of substitution and therefore always pointing to what it wasn't, to the lover who was absent. The full semiotic bundle, in fact. Which I referred to at least once!

THE ROME AIR NAKED hinges then, from the outset, on Salom's fabulous conceit that through the prism of absence and poetry, the details of experience, dream and fantasy are enlivened or embodied. The poem, as in the case of any of the marble sculptures, comes into being at the point at which observation, language and history, both personal and communal, converge. He uses the city, all its noisy cacophony, as both stage and vanishing point for his desire, his pleasure and his melancholy, all of which coalesce as text within a sensual but, by necessity, "unresolved present." In fact, many of the poems in this book act as multi-layered dramatisations of the writing process.

ps ...Bernini's liking for the material left rough around the edges was also quite a strong link for me, especially noticeable in those designs where more than the body is featured, such as the fountains in Piazza Navona, Piazza Barberini and the famous Trevi. This has long appealed to me and some poems I've written are clear examples of it. It's much more a textural given in the visual arts, in fact from where my own art grew. While I was in Rome I also spent many hours studying the arch Bernini built inside the St Peter's Basilica, with its pillars of black brass, like licorice twists, and the odd embellishments which put me off but kept attracting me again, the scrolls and squares like frames within frames and the whole thing's extraordinary hybridity. It wasn't consciously in mind when I began constructing the concurrent poems, but now that I think of it...

A large section of the collection is made up of what Salom terms his 'concurrent poems'. Poems and other short, segmented texts are placed within a larger body of linear prose text, in some cases separated by borders. In this multi-layering of voice and text, presence and absence are dramatised as loci for both the form and the content of the poems. Salom comments in his Author's

continued page 14

*GIOVANNI LORENZO BERNINI (1598-1680) Italian sculptor, painter, and architect. A master of the Italian baroque.

eric beach

looking back on th sixties

lust pure lust
 beyond persuasion
 beyond ego beyond gender
 kids are a trip
 & a vicious skipping rope
 drowned geoff in two inches of water
 somewhere up in th blue mountains
 geoff
 last to take off his undies at nimbin
 waylaid by smack
 held up by suicide
 I chased him to th railway bridge
 down past th R.E.
 he told me to fuck off or he'd smash me
 once he was good & angry at me
 I left him
 he drove my car down th steepest hill in brisbane
 cracked a concrete post, this ex-major
 watering his lawn comes over to get geoff
 out of th mangled wreck, geoff tells him
 'fuck off'
 'it's all blue in here' he tells us
 in his blue hospital pyjamas
 we were on magic mushrooms
 next bed this old guy is examining his cock
 his mother tells him sharply
 'put it away'
 my lovely terri who took my brother to bed
 after long intimate draws at chess
 had her arms around a suicide
 angel to him devil to me
 in th next room unable to sleep
 I think of how terri fell out of her dress
 me at my typewriter staring out th window
 then turning to her
 buttons flying
 how about a fuck she said
 couldn't we go out first he said
 movies she said
 but I want to talk he said
 about previous sexual experience she asked
 I'm clean he said
 how come he's so sure she thought
 I'm a widower he said
 are you still in love she said
 he took her to bed

are you going to move in with me & my five kids or what she said
 you're kidding he said
 yeah but you panicked she said
 I like it just here he said
 stamp-collector she said

Peter Boyle's review article in *CORDITE* N°1, 'Doggerel and Grace: Australian poetry in the mid-90s', generated a lot of interest amongst readers. Several wrote to take up the issue of rhyme.

The crimes that rhyme

Seamus Heaney

Jesus and the Sparrows

from the eighth century Irish

When Jesus, son of living God,
Was still a child, five years of age,
He played in twelve small water puddles
That he blessed and fenced around with clay.

And Jesus made twelve little bird-shapes –
The ones called *passeres*;
Out of the smooth clay he modelled
Twelve sparrows on a Sabbath day.

Then comes a Jew who cautions Jesus,
Son of the almighty God,
And takes him by the hand to Joseph,
To have him chide his foster child.

"Give your son a scolding, Joseph,
Caution him for his misdeeds.
On the Sabbath he has fashioned
Clay images of birds."

Then Jesus claps his hands together.
They hear his child-voice give a shout.
Before their eyes the prince of graces
Scares a flock of sparrows up.

They hear him speak the clear small words.
The pure lips of Jesus move:
"So that you may know who made you
Fly home now. Away! Be off!"

A witness spread the news: a story
Everybody marvelled at.
They listened and could hear distinctly
The little cries of birds in flight.

Tom Clark

Dear Eds,

I write in response to Peter Boyle's article, 'Doggerel and Grace', featured in the first issue of *Cordite*. More precisely, intrigued by the highly involved digression of its final page, addressing the question of rhyme in English-language poetry. I feel that several of the issues raised there are worth taking up here. It is not my intention to comment on readings of the poetry of Les Murray, Judith Beveridge and others presented by Boyle in what was primarily a review article. I think his comments on the matter of rhyme can be examined as independent of that other material.

Boyle's argument, in a nutshell, is this: 'on the whole rhyme and English don't go together very well.' It is a position he arrives at through comparison with other European languages, particularly French, "where the stress value given to each syllable is much more evenly distributed so that the sound quality has more levels to play off against. In English the stresses in words are both fixed and strong."

There is an attempt made to put this into historical context, when Boyle says that "Rhyme came naturally to Chaucer in the days when our language was half French – a Norman *franglais* that differed from modern English in intonation even more than in vocabulary or grammar." If this statement is not simply untrue, that is because it is unquantifiable to the point of facility. To the best of our knowledge (we have only written evidence to go on, of course) the language of Chaucer is substantially similar to modern English in its stress patterning. That is because most words that English absorbed from French through the period of Norman cultural hegemony have retained their historical Francophonic stress, while almost all of the English-indigenous words (more than half of Chaucer's vocabulary) have retained their historical Germanic stress.

Boyle's point about the relative simplicity (as distinct from strength) of English emphasis is another case where his judgement appears to contradict the findings of linguistic-poetic research. English, partly because it is a recently (indeed, to a large extent, eternally) hybridised dialect, has complex systems of primary, secondary, even tertiary stress that it can use to distinguish its emphasised syllables as much from each other as from their stressless companions in an utterance. It is a language that has historically maintained aesthetic distinctions between at least three syllabic quantities (often called syllable-lengths). Most notably, it is a language that provides for extraordinary diversity of form; affects pronunciation and rhetorical organisation; furnishes innumerable indicators of speakers' (and writers') ethnicity, class, gender, religious outlook; and so-on. In short, spoken English is an extremely intricate and, at least potentially, a most subtle matrix of sounds by comparative standards.

To return to stressing; the Latinate languages mark their syllables by a stress that is counted from the final syllable. In Latin this is generally the second-last syllable of the word; in French it is the last. Germanic languages, such as English, differ from this in that they tend to measure their stress from the onset of a word. For such languages, then, it is natural that their traditions of

versification would prioritise patterned resonances that focus on initial sounds – that is, the alliterative repetition – rather than the repetition of rhymes, especially of end-rhymes. In Anglo-Saxon times, this was simply the way verse was made, and much English poetry as late as Chaucer's time was in regular 'alliterative metre'. Very little has been composed by that method since the invention of the printing press, but if there is any style that could have claimed to be the 'natural' English verse-form it was this all-but-deceased ancestor of our poetic culture – not the unrhymed blank verse to which Boyle attributes "so many of the major classics of English poetry."

This does not mean that rhyme is out of place in English, merely that it is an import, like the potato chip. It is less an import for modern English than for the language of Chaucer, because it has had an extra seven centuries to work its way into our culture. Of course, it means that rhyme does not have quite the same use for our language as for many other European languages. To argue from this point to the proposition that rhyme is not compatible with English is a giant leap for criticism, however, if an apparently small step for a critic. One should first look.

It was at the point where Boyle states that "Rhyming seems neither comfortable nor natural for contemporary English in its more serious, more reflective, more inward moods", that I first balked at the argument as a whole, and decided that a response was and is merited. The suggestion here is that those who want to write serious poetry should suppress their urges to rhyme it. This is a prescription with which I have no sympathy. One thinks of stunning versifiers since Victoria's ascent, such as Alfred Tennyson, Emily Dickinson, or Gerard Manley Hopkins, and this position looks poorly founded. Indeed, Hopkins gives innumerable superb examples of the possibilities of the non-indigenous rhyming technique by running alliterative rhythmic reminiscent of medieval English in partnership with powerful end-stop and internal rhymes throughout his poetical works – poetical works designed to perform a task that is precisely 'serious', 'inward', and 'reflective': to wit, the evoking of God.

Cannot rhyme achieve in our language? For one, and as ex-NSW cricket captain Greg Matthews has shown in the field of advertising, a rhyme-scheme tends towards argumentative closure ("Advanced Hair: yeah yeah!"). This affect can be trite, but need not be so in the hands of a poet. The evasion of trite fallacy is one of the poet's essential challenges: skilful are the poets who succeed. Boyle has suggested that several fail:

this is a comment on their skill as poets, not on the tools of their trade. Drawing on an earlier comment, the axiom here is that poetic art exploits the limit-potential of a language – if we need never rhyme, then we need never versify.

As to apparent revival of rhyme in Australian verse that has motivated Boyle's digression into poetics theory: surely there are reasons why that revival might be occurring which could also shed some light on the theoretical issue. For example, I suspect that there has been a revival of the lyrical aesthetic across Anglo-Australian popular culture over the recent years, from the mantras of rap music to the colossal rhetoric of Paul Keating (/Don Watson). Could not a resurgent rhymed resonance in the elitist voice of published verse be part of the same lyricist trend? That is just one possibility, of course; the important point is that, if there is indeed a revival of rhyme, it would serve critics better to understand than to proscribe it.

Boyle winds up the argument by stating that he "would be happy to have [his] misgivings about rhyme dispelled." The complexity of the topic means that such a dispelling is largely a matter between him and himself, but I hope he can see that the history of English poetics is much more diverse in riches than his arguments allow for. It is easy to take umbrage with others' theories of art and artistry, and this is why I am at pains to detach these comments from the rest of his extensive and thoughtful article. I hope Peter Boyle finds enjoyment enough in rhymes around us over the coming years.

TC
Lewisham

Geoffrey Dutton

Dear Eds,

Thanks for the excellent magazine, which has lots of bang and no whimper. Peter Boyle's review 'Doggerel and Grace' (*CORDITE* N°1), is sensitive but tough, humorous and not parochial (ranging from Hölderlin to Neruda); it's just the sort of poetry review we've been needing. And he managed the difficult task of reviewing Les Murray's *SUBHUMAN REDNECK POEMS* with both praise for the good poems and honesty about the bad ones.

However I was taken aback by Boyle's attack on rhyme. Agreed some of the greatest poetry in English is unrhymed, from Shakespeare to Walt Whitman, but also some of the worst. Remember Byron on Wordsworth? "That drowsy, frowsy poem 'The Excursion' –

continued page 6

Dorothy Hewett

The Ghost in the Bar

I remember how you used to sit
in the bleak light nursing a beer
in that pub off Oxford St
with the barflies lined up behind you.

You would sit there all afternoon
and into the twilight
sometimes telling a story
or showing off your extra knowledge
just enough to put a demarcation line
between you and the others
they tolerated you but they knew
you were taking the mickey

sometimes I'd ring and you'd come to the phone
with your drunken chatter
your soft drawl of words
I wondered how long you would stay there
before your body gave out
and they came in their white coats
carrying a stretcher
St Vinnies was just down the road

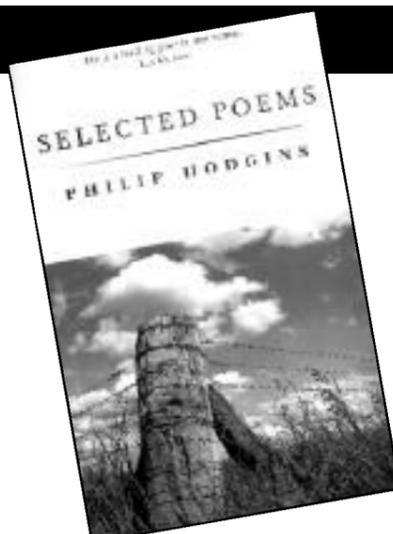
still there was a happy ending of sorts
you moved away and gave up the grog
but what did you leave behind?

Only a ghost pinned in a shaft of light
sitting in that bar off Oxford St
talking to itself
in a sibilant knowing whisper.

Selected Poems

PHILIP HODGINS

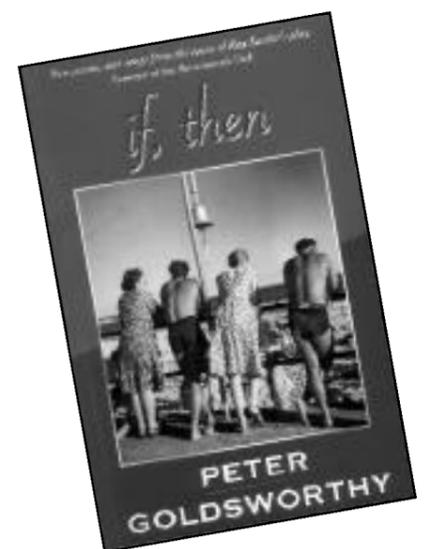
Two major preoccupations are interwoven through most of Philip Hodgins' work: the land and his impending early death. This volume, the poet's own selection, represents all his published books and includes the verse novella *Dispossessed*.



If, Then

PETER GOLDSWORTHY

This new collection of poetry continues Peter Goldsworthy's exploration of the natural and philosophical worlds, with extended sequences of poems on numbers and colours. *If, Then* also includes memorial poems to two friends, Gwen Harwood and Philip Hodgins.





Cath Barcan

Wordsworth's low coo brings over me sound sleep."

Whereas what is perhaps Wordsworth's greatest poem, the 'Intimations of Immortality', is rhymed. Shakespeare's sonnets and matchless song are rhymed; so are Byron's lyrics. The most stimulating American poets of the later 20th century, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, John Berryman, all use rhyme. One could go on and on, from nursery rhymes, ballads (both border and bush), etc. Admittedly, the clanking rhymes of a lot of AD Hope and James McAuley would be enough to put an Australian poet off rhyme for life – but read John Shaw Neilson, David Campbell or Ern Malley, and recover the rapture.

Of course it's much easier to rhyme in Russian or French or Italian than it is in English. I was staggered when Yevtushenko once recited to me his translation of Verlaine's 'Chanson d'Automne', the rhymes of which, alone, make it absolutely impossible to translate into English. But in Russian it worked, (admittedly with Yevtushenko's virtuoso skills), keeping all the original rhyme structure. Yevtushenko has also done a rousing Russian version of Kipling's 'Boots'.

Part of the trouble in English is the chronic paucity of rhymes for so many words that are essential for poetry – 'love', 'star', 'world' and so on. A recent attempt (in *HEAT* N°3) by Robert Gray to translate one of the most beautiful poems in any language, Rilke's 'Der Panther', is a grim warning of the disasters that can befall an English rhymester translating rhymes that contribute so much to the original German poem. Rilke's panther has grown so weary of the bars of his cage constantly passing that his vision can no longer hold anything else, just a thousand bars, and behind the thousand bars, there is no world. Look what Gray's search for a rhyme to 'world' ('Welt', the last word in the original stanza), does to Rilke's heartrending image:

Through having gazed too often on the bars,
he feels there are a thousand bars, unfurled.

Unfurled bars! My God! And in the meantime, Gray has rhymed 'stares' with 'bars'. I will forgo comment on the interior decorator's language with which, in the last stanza Gray translates Rilke's "Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille/ sich lautlos auf—" (which means "Only sometimes the curtain of the pupils/ lifts quietly up—" as: "Except, the drapes of his pupils sometimes/ open silently –". And 'curtain' is such a lovely word in English poetry.)

And so we come to doggerel, for which Boyle rightly bails Murray up for writing in his latest book, and indeed, elsewhere. In 1988, Murray published a poem, 'The Liberated Plague' in the *LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS*. It is an unpleasant poem about what Murray calls 'Aphrodite Street'. Alan Wearne wrote a singeing letter to the editor of the *LRB* in which he said that a lot of the poem collapsed into doggerel. Murray came charging back in the next issue with a letter in which he said "Mr Wearne finds that my poem collapses into doggerel. How silly! It is deliberately written in doggerel from the outset, as are most nursery rhymes, most pop songs, as well as thousands of 'serious' poems and songs composed over the centuries."

Wearne's 'collapsing into doggerel' is exactly right, because some of the poem, though nasty, is genuine poetry. What a weird use Murray is making of the word doggerel! Definitions of 'doggerel' might include JA Cuddon's, in his *DICTIONARY OF LITERARY TERMS*, "badly made verse, monotonous in rhythm and clumsy in rhyme, usually on a trivial subject" Or the *OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY*: "mean, trivial or undignified verse", although I'd let the 'undignified' go – lots of good verse is undignified. Surely a true poet wouldn't want to be writing that stuff? Or perhaps Murray has somehow got it muddled up with rhyme, since nursery rhymes and pop songs rhyme. The earliest use of the word in English seems to be Chaucer's, when he talks of 'rym dogerel'.

In serious poetry doggerel takes over when the verse fails, when the poet isn't up to it. Lots of the greatest poems (e.g. 'The Ancient Mariner') dance with doggerel but never fall on their face. Some of the greatest poets such as the not-so-nimble Wordsworth have written poems like 'Peter Bell' which are awful doggerel, but not on purpose.

Others have tried to capture the low zest of doggerel; Browning was fascinated by it. Perhaps that's what Murray is trying to do, in often painful rhyme. But when he slips, he ends up with doggerel in the definitions of the dictionaries.

For a kind of inspired, undignified and altogether wonderful doggerel done on purpose, Skelton is the supreme master. And Skelton's split-arse verse is unthinkable without the rhymes. Nor for that matter, are the lyrics and poems of Cole Porter and Ogden Nash.

Please, poets writing in English, don't lock up rhyme, 'Else', in Donne's words, 'a great prince in prison lies.'

GD
Melbourne.

Robert Gray replied to this letter:

Robert Gray

Dear Eds,

Geoff Dutton's piece is nicely written but is in places wrong-headed, I believe. I would not have felt a need to respond to it except for a patronising quality to his manner, a complacency about his privileges, which I think one should not acquiesce in. So I am led into pedantry.

First, the Rilke translation. I made this with just a German dictionary, merely as an exercise in form. When I compared the results to other versions, I thought that I might publish mine, since Ivor Indyk [editor of *HEAT*] had recently asked me if I had any such work. I give below the two best known attempts at this poem in English, and, above, my own, for the reader to make a comparative judgement as to whether mine is as poor as Geoff makes out.

The Panther

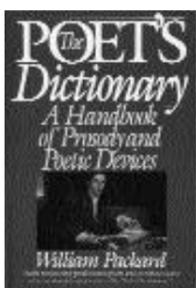
trans Robert Gray
Jardin des Plantes, Paris

Though having gazed too often on the bars,
he feels there are a thousand bars, unfurled.
His sight's so weary that although he stares
among the thousand bars, there is no world.

All of his supple, soft, powerful paces
are tightly winding on themselves; that stride
is like an encircling dance of forces
in which a mighty will is stupefied.

Except, the drapes of his pupil sometimes
open silently—an image can dart
inwards, along the tense, arrested limbs,
to where it is extinguished, on his heart.

In translating, as with everything else in the world, there is a perverse natural economy which prevents us realising fully all of the relevant qualities in a situation at once. With 'The Panther' I had to choose between accuracy of image or of form and sound. I chose, on this occasion, to concentrate on the form, which is not the usual approach to translation in recent times. So I allowed myself the liberty of inventing an image, but I reserved more of Rilke's tone and rhythm than is usually done, I think. The image I contributed, for the sake of a rhyme which has Geoff so aghast is one that I'll defend.



Rhyme

"Any sense of resonance among vowels or words that seems to echo previous sounds and set up a patterning of aural effects...Rhyme in the broadest sense may include assonance and alliteration, as well as variations of internal rhyme and end-rhyme..."

WILLIAM PACKARD *The Poets Dictionary*. Harper & Collins.

I wrote of the panther "he seems to find a thousand bars, unfurled", and I think this striking, effective and entirely appropriate in the context. The actual bars of the cage are imagined by Rilke as

The Panther trans JB Leishman

Jardin des Plantes, Paris

His gaze those bars keep passing is so misted
with tiredness, it can take in nothing more.
He feels as though a thousand bars existed,
and no more world beyond them than before.

Those supply-powerful paddings, turning there
in the tiniest of circles, well might be
the dance of forces round a centre where
some mighty will stands paralytically.

Just now and then the pupil's noiseless shutter
is lifted. —Then an image will indart,
down through the limbs' intensive stillness flutter, and
end its being in the heart.

having merged into an hallucination, for the animal – "thousands of bars", he says, are seen by it, such is the panther's weariness and confusion. The "thousands of bars" would therefore seem to be stretching away, spreading outwards, wavering, changing places and becoming like a mist. Need I go on about the succinctness and rightness of the word I've used? I don't think the choice of 'unfurled' violates in any way what Rilke intends. Geoff's failure to respond to the image suggests that there is a sense of caution, a lack of feeling for surprise and freshness in his attitude to imagery.

The Panther trans Stephen Mitchell

Jardin des Plantes, Paris

His vision, from the constantly passing bars,
has grown so weary that it cannot hold
anything else. It seems to him there are
a thousand bars, and behind the bars, no world.

As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,
the movement of his powerful soft strides
is like a ritual dance around a centre
in which a mighty will stands paralyzed.

Only a time, the curtain of the pupils
lifts, quietly—. An image enters in,
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,
plunges into the heart and is gone.

He also complains of my use of the word 'drapes' in the last stanza. This is not a word that I am prepared to give up to the window-dressers, as yet. 'Drapes' suggests a heavy, dark kind of curtain, and that is entirely appropriate here. The point about using 'drapes' is that Rilke is referring not to a stage curtain which lifts, as some translators have rendered it, but rather to a pair of curtains opening vertically, like the

slit of a cat's eye. My use of 'drapes' implies two heavy, sombre curtains drawn apart, and this is conveyed with a monosyllable, which is what I wanted for the rhythm. To say that we can't use the word 'drapes' any more is precious, in my opinion.

As to the stricture against loose rhyming in my poem 'To John Olsen', which is written in couplets and so draws maximum attention to rhyme, I can only say that this long after Emily Dickenson, Wilfred Owen and WB Yeats, I am surely not being all that daring in drawing freely on both dissonance and consonance, along with full rhymes, to extend the range of rhyming words available. I see myself as not a formalist but as a poet making a judicious post free-verse rapprochement with form. I am not interested in reverting to AD Hope's 'tightness', but nor am I intent on being merely profligate with freedom. I sometimes want to use only as much freedom as I really need. I often discover that just an extra syllable to a line, on occasion, can make me feel very unconstrained.

Anyone who knows my work will know I have always written poems that employ what I call 'glancing rhymes', as well as poems in free verse which use mimetically traditional stanzaic patterns. I read long ago Oscar Wilde's comment about Lord Alfred Douglas's work: that when Douglas used imperfect rhymes it was not out of carelessness, but because the effect seemed beautiful to him. I have that same taste. However in 'To John Olsen', rhyming 'brut' and 'through' is perhaps too much, because there isn't enough other half-rhyme surrounding this instance, and the reader is therefore not prepared for it – not prepared for the subtler content of just the 'u' sounds. I had declared the rules of the game in the opening couplet of the poem, through rhyming 'quills' and 'pastels', but I perhaps didn't keep a sufficient proportion of 'glancing' rhymes going for this particular instance not to jar.

I am now considering making a change to full rhyme at this place in the poem. If I do, I will have Geoff Dutton to thank. At the same time I disagree with what seems the philosophy behind his comments on my work, that the rhymes we use should only be blatant ones. Such would suit neither the moods I want to write about, nor the ear I have.

RG
Sydney

Orpheus

Orpheus, what is left of him (if anything is left)
what can still be sung on the earth,
in what animal, in what stone does it lie hidden?
Orpheus in the night, in this night
(his lyre, his taperecorder, his cassette)
for whom does he gaze upward, taking the pulse of stars?
Orpheus, what dreams in him (if it dreams)
the word of so much destiny,
who kneels now to receive it?

Lonely, his face cast in marble, he moves
across the vanishing ruins of our century
as the broken statue of a myth.
He comes to sing (if there is singing)
at our door, at all the doorways.
Here he is finally staying,
here he has built his house and serves his sentence
since where we are is the land of the dead.

[We also included Edward Snow's excellent translation of 'The Panther'. Eds.]

The Panther trans Edward Snow

Jardin des Plantes, Paris

His gaze has from the passing of th bars
become so tired, that it holds nothing more.
It seems to him that there are a thousand bars
and behind a thousand bars no world.

The supple pace of powerful soft strides,
turning in the very smallest circle,
is like a dance of strength around a centre
in which a great will stands numbed.

Only sometimes the curtain of the pupils
soundlessly slides up—. Then an image enters,
goes through the limbs' taut stillness—
and in the heart ceases to exist.

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Joseph Zaresky

Pseudopanax

In the botanical gardens stands a tree –
nothing like the real *panax*
but trying, year after year.

Pseudopanax, the day will come
when they who pass by without a glance
will make a crowd in front of *you*:

the director of the gardens herself
will dip a little brush in white paint
and strike out *pseudo* from your sign.

The twins Marilyn and Stanley and their friend Charlie Rugg had stopped at the top of the hill, propped against their red bikes. They'd come rocking along to the farm at Rockaway Junction to see if they could find their pet cat named Snowball. Snowball had been rescued from Uncle Daniel's farm a dozen times, but no good had ever come of it. They'd looked and looked, to no avail.

'Well, I guess Snowball has given us the cold shoulder again,' Marilyn said. 'She hid in her own kitty heaven, a heaven in the underbrush. She would have heard a dog barking, should a dog have barked. Hey, don't you two want me to pick some apples while I'm here? I'm hungry. Maybe she'll turn up, while we're waiting. Maybe somebody has already found the little tyke.'

'Sure, and maybe a bunch of guys grabbed the critter, and took her as sacrifice to their dreadful god MOLOCH,' Charlie replied scornfully, 'guys who had seen Snowball but who said nothing, nothing at all!' He burst into tears. Marilyn comforted the poor fellow, who was now dreaming of the breasts of the boys, sobbing after they had been crushed by the stone god.

In the quiet country morning there were sounds of many animals. Stanley's acute hearing trapped the other sounds, and sorted out their pet's bickering meow. 'Cats hear more than we know. I hear one meowing now, up in the branches.'

'Uh-uh. I don't see a cat rescued from the branches,' Marilyn said. 'Not by us, at any rate.'

It was fun at Uncle Daniel's farm, but that was a vacation, not employment, which is each day suffering money burning in wastebaskets. The one symbolic escape is amnesia, and the only escapees are those who watch from the place of forgetfulness.



The Howling Twins

Marilyn listened to the spiritual sounds on the old metaphysical telephone. Lots of static. Then DEATH spoke, and said he was coming to get the boys. What was their crime? It was looking upon DEATH himself. How to escape him? Look upon LIFE.

'To look upon life,' Marilyn said, 'we could visit dives in the city and from the anonymous dark watch the incomprehensible jazz criminals perform with their flow of semen, or so Charlie once proposed. If I felt like it I could accuse Charlie of something awful, something to do with his body.'

'Marilyn, I'm sure you would accuse the stoops off a building if you could,' snapped Charlie, who had overheard. 'I don't give a damn if you worry about my body. I don't know what to do next with this body, which is more than I can say for you. I've been places, remember.'

Marilyn remembered Charlie had gone to find out what was happening on the West Coast, and Stanley had claimed to be the True Consciousness and said he didn't need to go there to find out. But he did go, and he found there the three old shrews: the stunned governments of INSULIN, XANAX and ELECTRICITY.

Stanley, who wept for the boys the starry-spangled shocks of harlequin speech had led astray, Stanley, climbing the stairways of sin in empty lots, Stanley who jumped into the void of insulin, Stanley who lounged hungry and speechless and said 'Kiss the ass of war, the monster whose fingers inscribe the terror.' Stanley, who is still cursing at the harpies of the poem of life, burning a light in his naked room as a shrine. Stanley thought of Cocks and their monstrous Bombs. In the evening sky, the two twins were visions.

In his dream Stanley finds Snowball and flings the last radio of hypnotism into the East River.



Charlie fondled Marilyn. 'I love you,' he said, insincerely.

'I do too,' said Marilyn. 'Switch that light on, will you, Stanley?'

'As the GODHEAD illuminates itself,' Stanley said, flicking the switch, 'so imaginary walls collapse, and the skinny Legions rush outside to be sick. What you are, you are,

Michael Farrell

A quarterly persona

imagine me for example legs apart making
flappings deflating this could be the way
i am with the brilliant company you
associate with a quarterly four times a year
theyre here boring socks of me & friends
colleagues theres no round gesturing i
assure you no honeypot buzzings or
big bare breastings strictly i keep to
playing something never assumed for
the daily poems or amorous encounters
im flat abstract akimbo at times yet
gently sloping arguments to the ground
i acquire a classical architectural taste
attain a high tone & waste no paper

that's the wisdom. The ghostly boys build harpsichords in jail, and the players are waiting when an angel's voice calls out *Boys, stop that!*

Charlie said that Stanley was turning into someone weird and wiggy, and said that a wig of blood is like a debt always running up.

'You never repay that debt,' he said. 'Back in sixty-eight you twins were wiggy, and we were expelled from San Francisco, the city known as the LOWER REALM OF DEMONS. There were innocent kids in the street asking for their shoes to be filled with free steam heat.'

'That's tragic,' Marilyn said. 'No one gets shoes full of steam heat. Not in America.'



Charlie recalled Snowball's epiphany: 'Snowball was so high in the estimation of the angels that the Heavenly Hospital illuminated her hair like electric snow. Can you imagine that? Are you jealous?'

'Yes,' Marilyn cried out. 'I can well imagine that! A lost angel! Oh, Mother, I'm with you in Rockland! Where fifteen or twenty miles along the highway a shuddering winter midnight glows, and off in the Bronx I'm shaking with shame, rejected yet confessing, but prepared to go out whoring with the machinery of this invisible madman. Let me pay for luncheon at a restaurant, let me record the final doom of the machinery of MOLOCH whose loveless tasks and Peoria bone-grindings show us the last sad light flashing above the parks! MOLOCH, whose soul rushes out from its body, whose robot apartments expelled from their pilgrimage a little sister — what shall we do?'

No one knew exactly what to do next.

Then Charlie's bleeding hand, where Snowball had scratched him, showed a sign. They had looked long enough for forgotten animals. Charlie had already found Snowball, and then lost her again. Charlie had moved MOLOCH's stone heart to beat, whose skyscrapers crush pederasty, and what good came of it? The sign writhed and pointed to the west.

Charlie felt he had to explain. 'It's like trying to understand the Chinaman of Oklahoma discoursing on the rhythm of the cross-country jazz jam, seventy hours into the woods and the music just beginning, the rhythm still clicking. You try, you get somewhere, and then nothing happens. This means, go west. That's all it means.'

Fine, but where to find salvation? Ask the angels who wander around Uncle Daniel's farm in the fever of spring, ask them where the forgotten animals disappear, follow them through the iron dreams of backyards and movie houses' rickety rows, follow on from Bellevue to Museum to the Hudson under those heaving genitals, past demonic industries scattering bleak phonograph records of time, those angels with their holy yells who float off the ground and fall into the lake, angels red-eyed and angry.



by John Tranter

Uncle Daniel's friend the Brilliant Spaniard asked if he could come around, and brought a catch of sardines wrapped in a clean handkerchief, and a draft of his forgotten novel stained with animal soup.

The theme of the novel was the need to escape the horrors of the mundane world, and it made Uncle Daniel think. 'I'll tell you what, old Dago pal,' he said. 'Let's put an advertisement in the paper, enquiring after the secret of illumination. As soon as we see who answers, and it's bound to be the FBI, we'll go straight to Mexico, leaving no indication of where we've gone. They'll never find us there. Unless we go broke,' Uncle Daniel added.

'May the Heavenly Twins fend,' said the Spaniard, and crossed himself.

'There in Oaxaca the archangel of Third Avenue dreams his iron dreams,' said Uncle Daniel, his voice rising, 'with a flush of remorse, confessing out of the branches. There we'll be in the streets of sorrows, praying to the same archangel in the shadow of dungarees and undressing by his shrine as the wind bothers the trees.'

continued page 10

JS Harry

Drift

Her bottom —
like a Sherman tank?
What would that look like?

She's sitting
on a low stone wall
facing street.

It's a 1997
person, passing behind her,
who lobs the simile.

Those words,
directed towards
her flesh,
suggests a drift
backwards
into history. Imaginations,
travelling out, dredge pictures
of Vehicles — Military
mind as reader
runs through her memory: which
famous Sherman
was the tank
named after?
How did it move?
Which model Sherman
WAS THE PASSERBY
THINKING OF?

However crude the simile
it's not a grenade, can't fall
back, upon the 1940s (before
she was born) (where the tank's
action was)
real, with its pin out.

No simile
can smash one's bones
from its
machine-gun turret
or crush a human form
hers — or anyone's —
as the Sherman might have, once,
rolling casually on, leaving
behind
a death . . .

Wording
round anything
suggesting drift . . . thoughts
moving effortlessly forwards,
backwards,
sideways
into abstractions
quite bottomless.

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The Howling Twins...

The Spaniard spoke. 'You and I, we should open a store,' was his opinion.

So Uncle Daniel decided to open an antique store in Mexico and they went, leaving tears and sobbings, joyfully hearing over their shoulders the twins calling them to come back.



'To find what we need to find,' Stanley said, 'it's time to drive!' and in the blowing wind the twins and their pal were pursued by madness, starting in fear as each bough crashed on the roof, aiming for Denver — offering joy to the fleeting time, yet putting down roots.

A glimpse of small-town ecstasy: out back of the roadside diner, in the dusky parking lot, a lonely petticoat fluttered.

'Petticoats,' said Stanley, his hands guiding the wheel. 'Of the goddess Isis, fond of many petticoats, it is reported that her heroes were only driven mad when sudden MANHATTAN struck them, and then they sat through the tales of the children to hear the holy name in the sure and certain hope of being healed, for it is said that children unknowing have that gift.' So Stanley said to Charlie. 'Nobody can leave my little sister when she speaks, when she prophesies with flashes of genius. She entrances them, MANHATTAN strikes them, and they know nothing more. The people there, they say petticoats, they say breasts, until they grow dizzy. Their conversation is destroyed by unbearable flashes of consciousness.'

They stopped at a diner, and as soon as soup was served Stanley's sister cried out in a fit of prophecy, excited now she was lost in this new experience, a vision of a dozen naked angels eating lunch with glowing pacifist eyes, enduring hallucinations and then running outside.

'What is MANHATTAN but a catalogue,' she said, 'a variable measure of poor human prose and immortal verbs? As a city it shouldered its own despair, as an idea it crawled out from under the fashions and flavours of the fifties. The madmen of Los Alamos wailed, who ate fire in paradise alleys aiming for New York, the whole boatload of lost animals.' She recognised something in the style of that hallucination, and at once thought of Mr. Bobbsey. She quickly checked, and sure enough, he did it.

'I did that hallucinating,' he admitted, reaching for Marilyn's breast. 'I did it for you.'

'We'd better go home, don't you think, dear?' Mrs. Bobbsey asked. Charlie said yes, they'd better.

'You guys are certainly smart,' Marilyn said, when the adults had gone. 'Why, I once caught Mr. Bobbsey doing things he shouldn't do. We twins, we had been driving cross-country seventy hours from Denver. To keep awake we mixed dexedrine and hot spirits with orange juice and chilli peppers. That was nothing. Once we crossed the continent without a break, methedrine sodas our salvation. Everywhere, suburban tracts like lobotomies.'

'Aw, you'd think only junkies have feelings,' Charlie said. Charlie owned shares in a condo in Malibu.

'All losers have feelings,' shrieked Marilyn. 'The boys and girls in empty lots, kids with sparkling eyes and intelligent brains, losers who drank nitroglycerine and whacked their heads against the wall! You think they don't have feelings?'

'Oh, give it a break,' said Charlie.



Lost on the Jersey Turnpike the boys came unto MANHATTAN again, among stumbling pedestrians in tatters. Marilyn jumped up and down in their minds: new loves of a mad generation lying down on the ground at midnight by the highway and staring up at the constellations, their philosophy a hunch welded to a list of saints. They didn't think then of boys sobbing because of their lobotomy, boys who now watch the lawn grow the poisonous grass of capitalism and are paid to mow it, boys who drove trucks into the river and who drove the black locomotive to Harvard laughing.

'Well, no response from the academies for the epiphanies and despairs of ten years' freakouts and root beer insights,' Charlie Rugg complained.

'Maybe we brought them down, with our bad poetry,' Stanley said.



There was a timid knock on the door. 'Don't tell me, it's Uncle Daniel back from Mexico, isn't it?' Charlie said to himself. He was disgusted by now. Uncle Daniel, who hiccupped endless hooch and bop eternity outside the highway diner, who collapsed and went to jail. There are great suicide minds in jail, but just as many loonies.

But it wasn't Uncle Daniel, it was the twins coming home from the hunt for Snowball, bleak with despair.

Then they found the basket in the laundry. In the basket was the cat. Charlie gaped at the beast. 'Motionless in MOLOCH,' he said, 'the cat whose fate ran through my dreams and so I stumbled and sobbed all night! I shall build it a monument, I shall make it into something magnificent.'

They linked hands, the power kicked and flowed between them, and it seemed they were walking in the streets of love, where dream spirits read the stanzas of their brains and visionary angels crazy in the public parks shouted their fond agreement to the end of time.



A Note on the Text of 'The Howling Twins'

The process of writing 'The Howling Twins' was rather like jazz improvisation, though in some ways it was the reverse of Charlie Parker's modus operandi. A jazz musician starts with a melody, takes it apart, and outs it through the blender of his art, practising what Viktor Shklovsky called *ostranie*, the making strange of the familiar.

This piece began with an analysis of the frequency and distribution of letter-groups in two pieces of writing: Allen Ginsberg's poem 'Howl', and the first fifteen pages of *THE BOBBSEY TWINS ON A BICYCLE TRIP* by 'Laura Lee Hope', a pen-name of the indefatigable Edward Stratemeyer. The analysis was concerned only with the letters of the alphabet and a dozen punctuation characters, and not with grammar, syntax or meaning.

Then came the construction of a new text based on a mingling of the data and index tables of these two letter-group analyses. The result was a heap of dreck: twenty pages of fractured letters, words and phrases among which was buried a tale of lust, ecstasy and a lost cat. It has been vigorously reworked in the interests of reader's enjoyment, and among the eleven secret herbs and spices I stirred into the recipe are a sense of fun and a liking for melody.

I usually do maybe a dozen drafts until a piece feels right, but this one needed more than that. It was so scrambled when I began that I thought I'd never make it whole. The experience put me in mind of a bad dream about an accident in the Transport Room of the *USS Enterprise*: the members of the exploration party have had their molecules mangled as they were being beamed up from the planet surface, and I'm Bones, the ship's doctor, charged with the job of making out of this mess something — not necessarily human — just something that can walk, speak English, and operate the phasers.



Rod Mengham

To the Soviet Embalmers

This one cartouche surrenders
the famous curse. Nil advice

on sharing the tasks
preparing the ground and pruning.

Pick-your-own name as a performance
I am out of touch with

mortal illness. The memory skids to
her box of tricks right there
in the Attic vase. Numerous other

sole agents setup their stalls:

impassioned coughs and
counterfeit magpies

drink from the well before the assembly
detour ends. You may magnify the quandary
and its whispering roots;

for the martyr nailed to local colours
unable to utilise the construct

is just outside the rocket stadium
in the strong toils of reverse thrust.

Hugh Tolhurst

White

(Lattimore's *Iliad* 1.1)

A ream of cheap paper, I said to her,
you could sell me a ream of cheap paper.
The selfsame brand as pallets I have fed
into loud photocopying machines
when deforesting my way to the rent.
Pale as a promising relationship,
a film to be underwritten, that job;
the white manuscript takes off a blue dress,
curls back before the touch, offers up lips,
"Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son..."



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Luke Davies

Poem in England

Squirrel, hare, woods, grouse, words I guess
I've always wanted to put into a poem, and never
had reason to. It's summer in England in Addington
and now here I am and here they all are
in the poem because I saw them all today:
reason enough. Nice words anyway. We'll walk through
the spinney or the copse. Not the bush, not here.
My bedroom is the Red Room. In order to distinguish it
from the East Room, or the China Room
or the Apple Room. And because it's red: walls of roses,
and a view of the rose garden from the window.
The Red Room is three hundred and eighty-six years old;
somehow I feel privileged to be occupying air space,
as if I feel the million breaths of the sleeping departed.
I'm in England! Jetlagged, but hey, fuck, I'm in England!
How does life happen, the way you get older, and it finally
starts to happen? The way the sadness and the happiness
finally make room for each other to just be there?
Doesn't matter where I am. So that even in England,
in the sadness of the moving from, there is also
the coming to, in the blue convergences of summer.

John Mateer

On the Train to Geelong

The train pulls us along.
Who knows the difference between travelling
and waiting. The window
has a flat tawny landscape. Einstein
has the clock. Factories
muddy with rust and pastures fenced
by threads of sunlight tear
past our eyes. The posts and roads
running alongside the track
are too busy pacing us to wave.

Like blue mushrooms appearing overnight,
the huge bourgeoning You Yangs.

As their spore, the ash of stars,
we start speaking.

Stretching the Boundaries A Short History of Spinifex Press

Spinifex Press was established in 1991 by Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein. One impetus for its establishment was the retreat in mainstream publishing houses from publishing outside of strictly defined commercial success titles. This meant that a number of books, which may have been defined as risky by a sales department, were knocked back on risk alone, without due attention to quality. The publication of poetry and literary fiction, as a result, were decreasing.

We set up with the intention to publish books which were innovative, controversial, optimistic and feminist. We published our first book of poetry, *Sybil: The Glide of her Tongue* by Gillian Hanscombe in 1992. We decided that we would print 2000 copies of the book even though this was a much longer print run than was usual for poetry publisher. We have continued to print these numbers since then, because although poetry may not always sell quickly, good poetry has a long shelf-life, and poet's reputations grow as they continue to publish, and to read their poetry.

Spinifex is unique amongst Australian publishers in a number of ways. Although we are a small press we have an international profile, and our books are available in New Zealand, North America and Europe. Translations of our books have been published in German, Spanish, Italian and Korean. Over the last year or so we have capitalised on that international profile by establishing an active internet home page. The home page lists all our titles and indicates how they can be obtained overseas. The home page also assists in promoting events such as readings or highlighting awards won by our authors.

Our poetry list is quite diverse, although still small, and includes new and established poets. Gillian Hanscombe, an Australian poet living in England, has been highly praised by reviewers and poets for her work. Bev Roberts wrote in the *Australian Book Review* that "It is hard to think of any poet in Australia who can equal Hanscombe's virtuosity and power."

While Gillian Hanscombe writes of lesbian experience, Robyn Rowland's *Perverse Serenity* deals with the distractions and delights of heterosexual love. *Perverse Serenity* follows the story of what happens when a feminist falls in love with a monk. Both these volumes were published in 1992.

In 1993, we began placing two poets in a single volume. Our first was a joint volume by Sandy Jeffs and Deborah Staines, who have both gone on to win multiple awards for their work. Deborah Staines won the Under-25 Mattara Award for a section from *Now Millenium*, and in 1993 won the Mary Gilmore Poetry Award. Sandy Jeffs won second prize in the FAW Anne Elder Award, and a Certificate of Commendation in the Human Rights Award for Poetry for *Poems from the Madhouse*.

In 1996 we published another joint collection, this time by award-winner Diane Fahey and

Jordie Albiston. In this volume there is a resonance of themes across the poets' work, but each poet handles it in a highly distinctive way. Diane Fahey's *The Body in Time* is an internal travelogue with destinations in childhood, adolescence, middle age and old age. The body, layered with memories becomes the ultimate focus. *Nervous Arcs*, too, includes meditations on the body, but also picks up on history, art and historical and literary figures such as Frida Kahlo and Frankenstein. Jordie Albiston's work won the Mary Gilmore Award and was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Award and the Colin Roderick Poetry Prize, and second prize in the Anne Elder FAW Award.

The advantage of dual author volumes is that each poet gains the readership of the other poet's work. Publication also becomes more commercially viable and print runs can be extended. The overall result is that the work remains in the marketplace longer and tends to get a wider readership.

The other work we have published is three volumes by Suniti Namjoshi. Indian by birth, Suniti now lives in England. A fabulist of enormous talent, Suniti Namjoshi is forever pushing the boundaries of what is possible in poetry. Her now classic *Feminist Fables* has an international readership. This title was re-released with her second volume *St Suniti and the Dragon*, where issues such as sainthood, poetry and how to make a living from both are discussed. A fascinating blend of poetry and fable, if you enjoy one book by Suniti Namjoshi, you'll want to read all of them.

Pushing at the boundaries again, in 1996 we published Namjoshi's latest book, *Building Babel*, a novel written with the same density of text and poetic allusion as a volume of poetry. The building of Babel is a

metaphor for the building of culture, in particular the building of cyberculture. This book extends its poetic brief through uploading the final chapter on to the Spinifex home page. Readers are invited to send their own contribution to the site. The Babel Building Site has, to date, attracted poetry, stories, photographs, sayings, drawings and sheet music from Australia, Canada, India and the UK. Perhaps you would like to contribute.

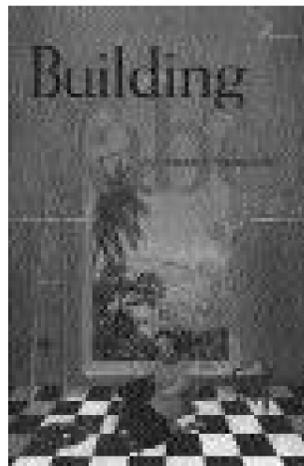
As a small publisher we usually publish one volume of poetry a year, which receives an equal amount of promotion and support as our other titles. We have also included poetry in all the anthologies we have produced.

Further Information

Spinifex
PO Box 212
North Melbourne VIC 3051

T 03 9329 6088
F 03 9329 9238

email: spinifex@peg.apc.org
web: www.peg.apc.org/~spinifex



MTC Cronin

The Ride

for Tony and Peter

■ Let us imagine that New South Wales is a paper folded in the pocket of a young motor mechanic on a Harley Davidson

■ He's torn it from a magazine from an article Called: "There's nothing like a really good day in America"

■ While it's light he tries to make as many miles as he can (occasionally converting into kilometres) And by night he's pre-booked into a series of motels where the restaurants sell steaks and nobody lets you drink alone

■ One week in he notices a luminous coloured ring on a cloud or fog-bank over against the sun And loses the rest of the club to the finitude of the holiday; time away

■ In the end they went back without him But never really came home because he had where they lived close to his chest the paper wearing thin and being just the place for a love letter (or perhaps a few words of reminder)

■ We heard that adventure mistook it for his heart and tore it from corner to corner But the old bloke he worked with who is still hanging around the space where Marrickville once was Says:

He used to work for me and
didn't do much
Then I worked for him and
did everything
It's funny
He was a bloody good listener

■ (The wind still whistling past his ears
The human form of emptiness

Arthur Spyrou

If I was Delacroix, I'd be a dickhead

After the murder of her children,
there was a devastation in her eyes
that brought to mind The Garden of Delights.
The way she looked over her shoulder
across a pre-Raphaelite form,
wading from deep water to the beach
as if she understood the war being waged against her
by the world
urging it on like a wounded animal
throwing a smell across the centuries to now
through hamlets, hammocks, palaces and streets,
the one cruel smell
of forests burning in the memory
of her loins,
her one cruel copper smell
of woman.
And I detect
from the adoring way Delacroix painted her
amidst riotous nudes saddled
on zebra, leopards and boar
reasons why I once had found her flawless,
and something of the reason
why I left.

interview *cont.*

Note that this procedure mimics the process of “cutting and pasting” texts on a computer screen, and that by placing a poem

inside a letter, or a poem; a section of current affairs journalism and a nursery rhyme set within the one page layout...[I can] encourage multiple and enjoyable varied readings. By reading in a different order the various parts, further poems can be struck from the same basic material.

He goes on to describe this activity as

my new maths: words ramblingly stacked on the night inside and out...past tense, future tense and hiatus, the hernia of being half way between...

The concurrent poems are in a sense the focal point for the entire book. They work by association; between the lines of prose and the lines of poetry they surround as two distinct pictorial or architectural spaces, and between the juxtapositions and clashes of meaning that occur when these texts are read concurrently. For some readers, Salom's experimentation with form might at first glance seem too formal, dense or laboured to be bothered with, and such readers are bound to confuse them with artifice. However the concurrent poems are Salom's way of

inviting the reader's participation with his text in ways that will make their experience of his poetic more palpable. The “spreading nervous system” created between the poem, the poet and the reader, the palimpsest by which meaning is embodied, is Salom's other way of demonstrating how the duration of language can mediate presence and absence. In a sense, the concurrent poems are models for those written in a more traditional style, showing the way for the reader into their dynamic, if partially enclosed worlds. And Salom likes to play with the reader, “hoping you will join in with like spirit”. Of course we want to agree with him, for in this book the poems are made more pleasurable by his making them feel more ‘real’.

pm While some readers have taken the position that the poems written in traditional form are ‘precedent’, rather than the concurrent poems (and naturally, by making this habitual assumption they critique the concurrent poems as being false), you have taken the trouble of an author's note to invite the reader's participation in something different. So, to cut to the chase, would I be right to see the opening of form in the concurrent poems, the idea of hybridity, as the starting point, rather than the others, that the more traditional poems are in a sense to be read through the concurrent poems?

ps Yes. Although I'm the only one who feels it, some traditional poems I've written are compromises. For example, the drafts are big and sprawling and the finished poem emerges like a client from a diet-farm and looks slim

and taut and thus recognisably, acceptably beautiful. We've all been through this. Some striking aspects of the original are lost; but they cannot co-exist without damaging the end result. I even feel a sense of loss, sometimes. As this concurrent ghost is in my mind all the time, it has always seemed the prior event and before I invented the concurrent form on the actual page I was continually, and to some extent will remain, aware of this dilemma. Still, new forms take time to be read for what they are, require changes in reading style. Hence the Author's Note for *THE ROME AIR NAKED*. The traditional poem lives on embedded in the concurrent poem, where it belongs! Of course, I'll always write both, but I have found my freedom now.

pm In the Author's Note to *THE ROME AIR NAKED* you comment that the concurrent poems were written partly in response to the “rigid genre separations are both a delight and a frustration I have felt for years.” I am interested in the notion of frustration here – what is it that you found frustrating and how does your approach to writing these texts attempt to respond to or overcome these frustrations?

ps In one very fulsome review of *SKY POEMS* the reviewer said the poems were “full as a goog” and another noted how my style of long lines and surrealism and changing verbal address allowed me the freedom to include almost anything. That's it. My incorrigible inclusiveness. I have always written in the midst of a swirl of possibles...like living in a huge ever-present extended family! It's no accident my referring to Heisenberg and Shroedinger in several books. I am drawn to the notion that there exist many possible outcomes (i.e.

the very reverse of the old muse-in-the-ear view of inspiration) but dislike the notion that any one succeeds at the expense of the others. And erases them. I live ‘inclusiveness’ all the time and find this pulls ideas and awarenesses out of nowhere (by which I mean precisely this flux) but, more to the point, I like to see and want to see this dynamic on the page, not simply the outcomes . . . This means including more prosy things, facts, ideas (like references to and even brief explanations of theories such as Heisenberg's) which we are more used to reading as genre other than poetry. So the result is a merging and therefore more hybrid. The traditional poem is exclusive and I think some journals have reinforced this, by publishing so many page-length plainer style poems. I'm not immune from the implications in this. And so it has at times frustrated me.

Salom's antecedents in experimentation, and their relation to his work, are worth noting here. In the Author's Note he refers to William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, their cut-up style's “rapid and apparently random selection of phrases and lines”, and from this pair we can observe Salom's relation to the spirit of the avant-garde which, over the past 100 years, has followed Rimbaud's markers across the terrain of ‘undecidability’. Salom shares with the modernists this radical inheritance, which characteristically foregrounds multiple readings. His ‘poems of dissociation’, as with the concurrent poems, use indeterminate form not to obscure reading but rather to engage the reader in the dynamic between imagination and language. Which brings us back to Salom's rejection of the standard lyrical mode, the Romantic enclosure of language and experience, and his attempt to embody an unresolved, immanent present. Thus a greater range of sensual and intellectual textures can be brought into play with the reader.

pm It appears to me that your openness to experimentation in *THE ROME AIR NAKED*, and

Trevor Poulton Johnny Wheel

sergeant john wheel was blue/ very

blue but lost his way/ like crooks do whose glory days are waning and find solace lifting barbells in a gym/ with children peering on/ johnny/ you could trust him/ he was beyond police street directory of life/ bit psychic/ took you right into his head

where it's hard to plan your escape/ john wheel just pulled the pin/ some say he's locked up in hills kyneton way/ and that everyone's out of his mind/ watches native birds light up the bush around him at dusk/ their

speeding is just self preservation nothing else and that the spent shells of gum trees means regrowth/ a mate reckoned once that wheels sat on his double bed/ shared a joint/ tried to talk him out of death but he also wanted information/ pauli

would say nothing/ but somehow he felt touched/ wheels never painted him into the wall but could have/ he'd help you if he felt there was something wrong when you could find him/ but he wasn't like most cops/ writing up tickets or out of the van

pissing on with licensees at the back of hotels/ or making love to single mums in the housing commission flats/ we all knew what was going on/ carlton cops could never keep secrets/ there was a senior/ always drunk/ every week tell

you how he manslaughtered someone during an interview/ but never got charged/ once I read

wheels name on the front page of the sun/ asked what was the breakthrough/ just said meticulously it was intuition/ probably thought he was having a

joke/ sergeant john wheel the loner/ tracked down/ the young constable with the broken heart driving north non-stop across the border to brewarrina chasin' this poet coral when he was supposed to be on watch-house/ wheels brought him back for his

own good/ that one made us laugh/ I use to drink with him a bit/ talk in general terms/ at stewarts hotel/ across from the cop shop/ where everyone use to mix back then/ sometimes you could spot him in the side lounge with autopsies professional

crime/ the points of his eyes/ would tell you not to walk in/ one day he said to me he was leaving/ said/ ‘it's a promotion & premonition’/ he said ‘you've got to have more than one reason for doing things/ more than one motive otherwise

you fail’/ chewing his cigarette end/ wired up in stripes/ and government supplied shoes/ ended up on one of those/ victoria police protection schemes/ doing time/ not necessarily because he had done anything wrong/ there was a contract

out on his kids/ even the hat felt pity/ ‘one of the few cops not frightened to over step the mark’/ he said/ ‘but that put a stop to him’/ reminiscing with a cronney the other night/ he said to me/ ‘you don't call it burning out/ you call it fuckin' history’/ then

he told me/ with those words it was my bloody shout/ you appreciate/ colourful language in carlton

continued facing page

the results you come up with, are in many ways grounded by the work of the post-war American poets, who were themselves following the lead taken by the Symbolists and Surrealists. Like many of them you keep opening things up for the reader to make choices. Were you influenced by the New American Poetics, the postmodernist's ideas about form and approach. I am thinking here of Olson and O'Hara and, perhaps, even Snyder and Cage?

ps This question of influence always baffles me. It's just a downright guess for many of us – but the truth is, my writing has been deeply influenced by experiences which are as much to do with thought and belief (or otherwise) as they are with style. And my first art was visual and tactile: I painted for years and continued doing so while my first two books were taking form. I was muddling about with oil paints, with solvents, resins, near-toxic fumes – I bet they influenced me! The Australian poets who moved me early on were Slessor and, especially, Francis Webb, whose intensities and poetic struggles thrilled me and whose great metaphors took the top of my head off. But also Lowell and Berryman. Snyder seemed too dry for me, though piercing at times. I preferred Kinnell. One of the biggest influences was Sufism. And Buddhism, Taoism – I practised Tai Chi for three or four years – and during this phase I was reading Marquez and Borges and Wilson Harris (ah, who?), fiction writers who changed me forever as a poet.

O'Hara came later, via Bruce Beaver, so I must acknowledge Australian poets in all this. What I came to love was his long line and the wide poem, the inclusive . . . here O'Hara was a guide, without doubt. His nerve and his casual gusto are remarkable. I realised there was something in the poem itself and the process of writing which enfolded meanings that did not otherwise exist, in quite that way. The strange irrationality that seems truer through its metaphors than other prosaic wordings of/about the world and yet exactly because of this strangeness they are extra, they are inventions. Meaning is not just as a dialogue between language and sense, or representation, but *in* them as a being, a kind of life form, or state, which (regardless of what I said about influences, the raw materials) occurs especially for me in poetry. That's how so many poems get written – they coalesce until they are themselves enough to tell the poet what to do next. The writing has a nervous system and a body which may inhabit the reader with its own mind, but needs that involved mind to have any kind of rhythm. Whereas most prose is too locked into mimesis.

pm In 'Seeing So Often The Statue of The Poet Belli' you write that "History is shock waves one blur away from focus/ every day . . ." To extend for a moment the wave trope, many of your poems suggest that meaning occurs when the loci of event, author and reader interfere, as do waves when crossing paths such that the amplitude of the event is altered. Thus history, and by extension meaning in poetry, are generated by this blurring of positions across time and space, which by definition can be multifarious . . .

ps And the locus of language, of course. It is only in the writing that all these dynamics have a place, a site. I felt this trope acknowledged how the forces of history, including its everyday making, are hard to see clearly despite their effecting us all the time. The blurring is in the merging of effects and events and even genres – that many of the things we do see are presented to manipulate us and only sometimes are they pulled into focus. In this poem, both inside and outside, Falcone's sister tells Italy in a truly decisive moment that the Mafia had gone too far and were not a family or a brotherhood but simply murderers. A poem is a drive to focus. It can and often does achieve this by compression not only in language but across time and space.

pm Is this a random process, or does the imagination play a role here in tying down some kind of stable point of reference for all involved?

ps Imagination is what allows us to read poems in the first place, but especially if the poems work by leaps and jumps which combine (and, again, merge) things otherwise perceived separately. The reading-place-in-imagination. Stability is not something we can take for granted. This is why form is so crucial. Form and closure are about defining the nature of focus. They say where the poem is and keep the meaning sharp by showing us where the poem is not.

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Zan Ross

Concatenation

for Karen

This lithograph of four turtles – I've
carried it in my satchel for months, its corrugated edges
dig it into fingerpads as I search for
pens, lectures, tutorials, the thrust
of the treatise, dust from books
fifty years old masking synapses. I stroke their cool, smooth
shells, a wet nose against an indexed knuckle, a stringy tale taken
delicately between two fingers – secret comforts,
armour, amore. Is this how we are:
armoured, encompassed, all four directions or
(mocked) soup for the nouveau riche: crystal,
Royal Doulton, Irish Linen? and the door to our
boudoir left open, no room of our own –
a brother, an uncle, a sister, a grandmother snoring in
content We withdraw, fold into ourselves no matter
how much
we long for violation, to be ravished by
a moon descending in the shape of a swan, in the tender flesh of
a Nairobi spring. Is this what we
do? how we
interrogate any Fate that slips between the sheets with us,
awkward as a bicycle? one more year scraped back
to the canvas, gouged retribution, coy
as a Regency virgin, tortoise shell comb confining
a rope of hair

Alain Bosquet

translated by Rae Sexton

The Light-House

The lighthouse at Elsinor
expresses a red scream. Hamlet no longer
wavers between death and non-being.
He unearths six skulls
to smash, jaw by jaw,
then, his blue jeans dirtied
with blood, goes to drink a glass
of beer with juvenile Swedes
more drunken than the moon.
Soon he will say to the sea –
equally as grey as he –
that suicide is out of fashion.
Oh, delinquent prince,
sign yourself up for unemployment.

reviews

Dorothy Hewett

Robert Adamson & Juno Gemes

THE LANGUAGE OF OYSTERS.

Craftsman House and G+B Arts International 1997. ISBN 90 5703 10 19 \$49.95 pp168.

The *LANGUAGE OF OYSTERS* is a celebration of one of the most beautiful river landscapes in Australia. Anyone who has been a passenger on the light Cessna that used to fly from Sydney to Newcastle will remember that catch in the breath when the great shield of the Hawkesbury, shaken with light, suddenly lay beneath them. This book, a hymn of praise to that river, must be the culmination of one of Robert Adamson's dreamings – the book as beautiful object: it is without doubt the most physically striking collection of poems and photographs ever published in Australia.

Every thing about it is in harmony; the cover, the typeface, Juno Gemes memorable photographs and the poems selected across 27 years of Adamson's writing life. But this is not just a romantic picture of a great river. Its strength is in its grounding in realism. Just as Adamson never flinches from the bloody underside of the natural world and the harsh, poverty stricken lives of the river people he has intimately known since boyhood, Juno Gemes, while exploring the shifts of light and shadow on its mirrored surface, also documents the hardworking fishermen and their families without sentimentality.

The photographs can be roughly divided into landscape, character studies and work, and there is an extensive index which meticulously locates place, people and time. Sometimes the index helps to anchor the images like reflective visions, such as the cover photograph of 'The Serpent's Breath' or the mangrove estuary on the title page. Sometimes they signify the importance of the



work, as with the back cover photograph of a hand shucking oysters, or the continuing life of families caught in moments that unselfconsciously reveal their characters. In these photographs she manages to create for us the indissoluble link of the generations with the ancient genealogy of the river.

In many ways *THE LANGUAGE OF OYSTERS* can be seen as another Adamson selected. There are only eight new poems in the book, but the new context illuminates poems as far back as *CANTICLES ON THE SKIN* (1970), *SWAMP RIDDLES* (1974), *CROSS THE BORDER* (1977) and *WHERE I COME FROM* (1979). It is also interesting to note differences in technique, the paring away of language that Adamson has developed. Compare the looser romanticism of 'The River' or 'Sunlight, Moonlight' with the new, introductory poem 'Meshing Bends With The Light', a poem about the making of this book, written with that spare economy of phrase where run on lines suddenly leap into the magic of seeing. This is a style that with maturity Adamson has made his own:

The last riverboat mail-run
scatters letters across
the surface, the ink
runs into the brackish tide.

A stream of light pours
from the sky into the mouth
of Mooney Creek, the river
flows in to the memory of all those
who look into these frames.

In these lyrics the river is often a metaphor for writing a poem and can embrace everything from Charles Olson as an oyster fisherman to

Mondrian and Robert Lowell.

Just as Gemes locates her photographs by place so Adamson uses his own methods for reconstructing the landscape by placing the poems in actual locations; Windy Dropdown Creek, Parsley Bay, Dead Horse Bay, Snake Island, Jerusalem Bay. These names, plus the naming of the fish, the birds and the river characters resonate throughout the whole book; mullet, mullet, ribbon fish, catfish, stingray, bream, the prawn bird, the bee-eater, the goshawk, the night heron. His river of characters include the mythic figure of the grandfather, with the eggs of the sacred kingfisher hatching in his brain, the grandmother dying:

She said the prawns will eat you

continued facing page

Dominique Grandmont

translated by Ian Patterson

Prayer to Freedom

Written for the two hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution, 1989.

Inalienable freedom daughter and mother of your own crises whose wager sets the world off balance to the point of forcing it to walk not even your bias will ever abolish chance or error without which there can be no overcoming opposites freedom you are not limitless but you advance blind to the old division of heaven and earth your blood effaces frontiers and this groove of habits like lines on the forehead of our death every day to make us believe in the impossible you play with the fire of origins oppose the untenable real to triumphant reality by decoding our future even in the prison-cells of our imagination where your stories only hold us captive so that prejudice can be caught in its own trap and unclamp the vice of letters and symbols again these chains hammered out of certainty and fear O woman who raise the protest of your lashes against the irreproachable geometry of the obvious hustled between the blade and the pity so often how right you were to be wrong to ally the solitary exercise of the inexplicable with the insolence of the useless to make the mirrors a bit more habitable and give some meaning back to what hasn't got any freedom the only poetry you run through the streets your feet moving faster than time not stopping just celebrating the free union of words and history as even love has no divine right from the start you've had only the horizon as your flag and without being anybody's you're everybody's you know the only choice is between justice and perjury it's you who's leading everyone struggling today to the point of losing your name freedom that one word whose echo resounds like a permanent challenge to the prince or his successors since in poems as in darkness you only have to utter it to open the prison of books and speak in all languages.

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if you die on the Hawkesbury river.

Joan Hunter is his 'first proper girlfriend', his cousin Sandy is his secret lover:

We thought we had probably
committed mortal sin even more times
than Mandy Kerslake.

Mandy Kerslake surfaces again in that brutally mysterious poem 'What's Slaughtered's Gone', where Mandy, the black crow and the dynamited fish coalesce in a surreal collage.

The collection begins with a short preface by Rodney Hall and a lively critical essay by John Kinsella which I would have preferred to read in another context, thus letting the poems and the photographs stand alone on their considerable merit. The text is divided into six sections and opens with a panoramic view of Mooney Creek winding like a rainbow serpent through the wooded hills, an ancient rock carving, a Koori warrior, an ageing hulk, an empty anchored fishing boat. The poems in this first section apotheosise the river. In the second section, 'River Looking Back', the poems are a complete contrast – tough, realistic colloquial pieces largely drawn from the collection *Where I Come From*. The third section marries photographs of the river's social life with brief, powerful lyrics like 'Farming the Oysters', where you can feel the tug of the tide in the pull of the verse. There are also poems of angry protest at the senseless trashing of the environment, the killing of native animals and the filling in of the mangrove swamps.

In the next two sections, 'Converging River Cultures' and 'Where Everything Matters', the photographs cover themes of family history and fishermen with their catches. The poems change into longer, meditative and reflective lyrics and love poems, sometimes using the myths of metamorphosis, where even a breath can become part of the tidal atmosphere. 'Where Everything Matters' opens with 'The Mullet Run' I and II, one of Adamson's first heartbreaking narratives to explore the troubled sexuality of adolescence. 'The Mullet Run II' is one of Adamson's close-knit work poems, like 'Gutting the Salmon' and 'Dead Horse Bay'.

The photographs in the final section, Farming the Oysters, illuminate 'the gear, tackle and trim' of the oyster trade, thus binding the collection together under its title. Adamson's new poems, most of which are grouped here, take on a particular resonance as he plays with almost outlandish metaphors, but never outlandish to him who continually equates the hard work of the fishermen with the hard work of constructing a poem. In the title poem he mythologises Mooney Creek and the oyster fishermen while still keeping the poem squarely on the ground. This is one of Adamson's greatest skills, the ability to set the realistic groundwork of the poem and then transcend it; Australia as a goshawk in 'Silva', or a sudden historical time shift when a red-eyed explorer crashes out of the bush.

Adamson's imagination is full of foreboding and a refusal to accept the pleasant subterfuges. It is a side that Gemes, with her emphasis on the positive virtues of life, work and the family, seldom touches on. She does not follow him into this dark, redemptive vision, although there are hints of it in several photographs – in 'The Dragon's Breath' with its metaphysical subtext, the ancient mangroves with their primitive roots pushing up out of the mud, and in the two full length studies of Adamson with his catch, taken in the wild light of feral triumph. As a fisherman from a fishing culture he understands the psychology of the hunter, whether bird, fish or human, and in these photographs she has caught the ambivalence of that position. Her great strengths, however, are humanistic. Gemes can catch a fleeting moment in her lens and link it back through the generations into a timeless history.

There are few poets in Australia or anywhere else who have a background remotely like Robert Adamson's, who is able to draw from such a wide spectrum of tough experience and amalgamate it with the reading and writing of poetry. It creates an extraordinary body of work only faltering when the mythic aspects tend to overbalance the poem. This seldom happens now. As his work has developed he has learnt to shuck off the dead wood of over-romanticised language. Eros, Oberon and the twin anima disappear as he goes, he would say, 'straight for the throat'. 'No River, No

Death' is a perfect example. In this final poem he attempts a great deal and it is fascinating to watch him walk the tightrope of craft – 'what to leave in, what to leave out':

Now from the jetty, souls go where souls go;
and the world's a mudbank in a dank westerly -
and there's nothing to hand, nothing to hold,
death's all around streaked in the afternoon air.

In sections 4 and 5, however, with their overlay of rhetoric, the analogies of war and the atom bomb become strained. Only in the last section does he regain his balance and redeem the poem. 'No River, No Death' ends with a rhyming couplet. Written with deceptive simplicity, the last lines 'tear the heart' and imply the hope and the violence that lives on in the natural world:

The Afternoon's last light has gone under now,
a flying fox swings in through a star

and the catfish are pecking the stingray's wing,
the larrikin prawnbird starts to sing.

In the unique collaboration of river, word and image, this is the final signature.

Dorothy Hewett

Kathielyn Job snapshots

**Jennifer Harrison CABRAMATTA/
CUDMIRRAH** Black Pepper Press, 1996. pb

The two sections of this, Harrison's second collection, operate in contrast. 'Cabramatta' is concerned with the past, travelling a new highway that cuts across the old, just as images of the past intersect the present. With a rhythm that starts, stops and accelerates through lower-case places, images and ideas accumulate into a representation of Western Sydney life.



Harrison's concern with identity is filtered through time and place – 'the wish to touch the root/which is the tree.' While the past is "gone/and possibly did not exist" (p3) but Harrison revives it in elemental detail: 'ceramic ducks fly trifecta on the wall' (p9) and poker machines are 'that other church' (p10).

In the first section identity is a function of memory; in the second, only 'pain has infinite memory' and the loss of life's memories sets a person 'adrift'. This sequence is more thoughtfully paced and in many poems memory is stabilised by researched facts of the southern coast of New South Wales. This is particularly apparent in a number of poems ('Bathymetric Chart', 'Trace Elements', 'The Red Tide') which conform to a developmental pattern, with lists of characteristics and facts that develop by analogy and metaphor. In 'Sponge' facts are described with imagery apparently subservient to fact, concluding with

- half plant
half heliotrope - flower in me!
Soak me with pageants, life.

However, rereading the poem brings the imagery into full metaphoric force.

In 'Amongst the most picturesque molluscs of our rocky shores are the chitons', and Harrison challenges and clarifies her own use of 'facts':

Fictions, contradictions
supersede and erode their stature

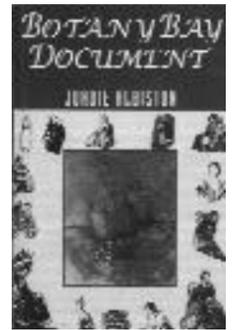
reviews

With the accumulation of facts and memories, and the concurrent valuation of both, the collection concludes appropriately with the word "elegy". I was left with a final impression of individual poems reverberating with the strength of collective purpose.

Jordie Albiston BOTANY BAY DOCUMENT

Black Pepper Press 1996.

In this "a poetic history of the women of Botany Bay" Jordie Albiston writes predominantly of convict women in the early years of the settlement. The emphasis is on facts and recorded experiences and the frequent use of ballad form suits the restrictions of the content. At its best the rhythmic constraints of the ballad cohere with uniformity and narrow experience, as in 'Lady King's One Hundred Daughters':



The lie in rows with two to a bed
their sleeping faces assorted
And dreams of mothers circle the heads of
Lady King's one hundred daughters.

Poems that move the furthest beyond the story into an imaginative realm offer more of the experience in 'The Emancipist Finds Parts of Her Body', Albiston observes

Callused and curved into cabbage-leaf
curls with needles for fingers and bread
dough for palms they hang at the end of
work weary arms too stunned to become
unfurled *Is that your new son?*

The life of this collection is more a result of voices of the past being given room to speak in the present, rather than from any great poetic force. 'In Letter Home (Anon)' she writes

I take up my pen to acquaint you with
my *disconsolate situation*.

continued page 19

Nicolae Prelipceanu
translated by Peter Boyle

Metaphor

A few of my friends a little younger than me
coming back from Athens
(it's good that the young can travel)
reminded me that the word metaphor there
signifies a streetcar or the metro or even a train
yes, that's right you catch a metaphor and you go
you leave behind all sadness and joy
and every other contradictory/contrary sentiment
that tormented you there where you had been
for such a long time
everyone goes to work in a metaphor
everyone escapes (to go to the country) in a metaphor
everyone has one single idea (fixed)
when they feel happy or sad
and this is called metaphor
and you go untroubled on your journey
but they forgot to tell me
what to do when the metaphor goes on strike
maybe you set your foot down in the dust
or you take the ultimate step (walking)
simply the way you did before
when metaphor didn't mean transport in common
but only something to carry you
on your own
from loneliness to loneliness

James Lucas

Sydney

1

Three UK years & a day long haul
to hear it strange: the Heathrow tongue
stretched flat at Kingsford-Smith
dissicated as Mascot lawns look;
fruit coughed up in DECLARE IT FOR AUSTRALIA
quarantine stalls recompressing feet
lop-sided on an interrogative lilt
& customs explanations don't sound
pat – I'm through ARRIVALS the turnout
mambo in fruitsalad & lorikeet as if
history stops with carnivale & the state casino;
or sensing a poem here has to include bingo
jism & guilt; that it should clear a throat,
colloquial as currawongs: their call.

2

Cheap eat café hairs of the dog
the beach takes a bunsen
to eyestrain sand, crinklecut, whitehot
as blonde dyke glamorama crewcuts
do sushi: I didn't inhale,
watched skaters blade the promenade
backed by spraycan art & overlooking
a kilometre of lightly salted
skins we're delicious! Can I sting you
to wet each the other, bright as a diamanté
navel stud front reflecting at speed?
How mindful of self-aware, critical spins
on body-piercing we culminated nowhere
near the un'important' water, avoided junk.

3

Did flying south outstrip the blue pencil
granted we're easy with an either-handed grip
being unrapped? Anything goes local style
in your face as Parramatta Road billboards
that's the myth, struthious as gritted teeth
& eyes from wound-down windows. A '68
careers not past being druckfucked from the zoo
at western plains, they're culling private demons,
angels had it with petrol fumes. Sirens
squeal at lanehog rush approaches to
the Cahill's obligatory harbourscape:
at its fore & aft juncture less like sails than
buttocks rising from a fussy hem, operatic
prelude to dunk me, take me brash.

New! Poetry Meter Need to meter that meter? Want to scan that stanza?

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your poetry in the comfort of your
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Meter is available to you for the low, low
introductory price of \$20 and comes with a
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back cover). But hurry, stocks won't last!



Advertorial

The Wollongong Poetry Program scarp/Five Islands Press New Poets Publishing Program 1997/98 Series 5

Following the success of this program in
previous years, scarp, in conjunction with
Five Islands Press is again offering the possibility
of first publication to new poets.

Applicants will normally be poets who have not
yet published a collection of their work in book
form. No age limit applies and the program is
open to poets throughout Australia, but to be
eligible, poets must have had at least eight of
their poems published in newspapers or
magazines, or broadcast on public radio.

Up to six titles per year will be published under
this program. The A5 books will be 32 pages in
length. They will be high quality productions,
printed initially in runs of 400. Authors will
receive royalties at normal rates on books sold.

Poets whose work has been published as a result
of earlier programs are:

First Series

Jennifer Compton
Melissa Curran
Carolyn Gerrish
Andy Kissane
Nick Mansfield
Ian Saw

Second Series

Peter Boyle
James Bradley
Paul Cliff
Peta Spear
Beth Spencer
Adrian Wiggins

Third Series

Karen Attard
MTC Cronin
Lisa Jacobson
Peter Minter
Sue Nichols
Mark Reid

Fourth Series

Susan Bower
Lis Hoffmann
Peter Kirkpatrick
Lorraine Marwood
Mark O'Flynn
Duncan Richardson

Workshop

It is intended to run a ten day editing writing
workshop in conjunction with the publishing
program over the week 7th–16th January 1998.
Poets whose work has been accepted for
publication under this program will be required to
come to Wollongong for that week, but all
expenses including travel and accommodation
will be paid. Please note: if you are unable to
come to that workshop, the offer of publication
will be withdrawn and you will be invited to
apply in subsequent years.

Further places will be made available at that
workshop to other writers who have submitted
work for consideration under this program. These
writers will be responsible for their own travel,
and the combined cost of accommodation and all
food at the University of Wollongong, plus the
workshop will be \$250 for the ten days. These
places will be available on a first come, first
served basis to a maximum of 24 poets.

If you wish to reserve a place at that workshop,
please include a cheque or money order for \$20
made out to Five Islands Press. If your
manuscript is accepted for publication, this
money will be refunded.

Activities during this week-long workshop will
include:

- workshopping of poetry
- readings
- detailed consultation on poets' work
- visits by editors and book publishers

Visitors to date have included David Brooks and

Professor
Elizabeth Webby,
editors of leading
literary magazines;
Sue Abbey,
publisher for
University of
Queensland Press
and cirtic Martin

Duwell; and poets Pam Brown, Steve Herrick and
Deb Westbury. Carol Frost, a widely published
American poet who teaches at Hartwick College,
NY, will be a guest tutor at this year's workshop.

Launch

All books will be released together at a series
of launches. Participating authors will be
expected to attend the launches and to take part in
such readings as are arranged. In previous years,
support for this program has come from the
Literature Board of the Australia Council and
from the NSW Ministry for the ARTS. The form
the workshops take will again be contingent to
some extent upon the continuation of such
support, but the publishing program will continue
regardless.

Submission of Manuscripts

It is suggested that candidates submit
approximately forty typed single-sided A4
pages of poetry. One of the functions of the
workshop, for those poets included in the
program, is to select the strongest and most
coherent 32 page collection from the body of
poems submitted. The Author's name and address
should be on the back of each page.

1997 Timetable

September 30, 1997. Entries close. No
manuscripts posted after this date will be
accepted.

November 10, 1997. By this date, all entrants will
have been informed of results.

January 7–16, 1998. Workshop at Campus East,
University of Wollongong.

The books will be launched in Wollongong,
Sydney, Melbourne and other centres between
June and September 1998.

If you would like to participate in this scheme,
send your manuscript plus a brief biography
and list of previous publications to

scarp/Five Islands Press
New Poet's Publishing Program
Faculty of Creative Arts
Northfields Ave
Wollongong NSW 2522

Faxed submissions will not be accepted. Include
a stamped self-addressed envelope if you would
like your manuscript returned. Please ensure that
your name and address appear on each page of
the manuscript itself.

Further Information

For further information, contact Ron Pretty on
02 4221 3867.



Susan Bower, *Factory Joker*.

reviews

from page 17

By frequently using run-on lines and internal or half rhymes, these ballads are contemporary in tone, which, along with the italicising of even the shortest quotations, contributes to a sense of honesty in this collection.

Kathelyn Job

MTC Cronin

Emma Lew *THE WILD REPLY*.

Black Pepper 1997, 56pp.

Ghosts inhabit this text, as do figures 'Of Quite Another Order' and those of the 'Afterlife'. These are poems of the surreal, landscapes of dream and fantasy, not just a filtering of the real world through the lens of poetry. No simple, or even complex, narratives here. Though it is claimed in 'Earlier Cartographers of the Moon' that we "are not free to tell our dreams", the dreams here are told. Drug(ged) images of opiates and opium, fire and fireworks, heat and flame, the burned and burning, haunting and atonement, heaven and hell, sin and saints, magic and chanting, skeletons and coffins, madness and death, dreaming and sleep . . . here we have all the altered states of poetry and the poet telling the mysteries of love and sadness within the sacred atmospheres of art and life.



The poems unfold in darkness and shimmer in an unearthly light. It is a text of shades.

Interestingly, none of the poems in *THE WILD REPLY* stretch longer than a page. Although they may explore the realm of the intuited, the magical, they are still incredibly focused and parred back. Taut 'visions' of the inner life, lived in the outer life, are not by any means exclusively interior. Words are not thrown around here, but used sparingly in pursuit of the 'strange', the 'other'. The poems may even be paradoxically described as small narratives that are anti-narrative in effect.

As such, they ask much of readers unfamiliar with poetry, or even those after a yarn. They are a species of poems into which you can 'fall' and enjoy the words, phrases and atmospheres they create, prior to (and almost exclusively of) having to know what they mean. It is this play with meaning, the possibilities at work in the creation of meaning – not of particular words and sentences, but of the poem as a whole living organism – by stretching and challenging predictability, that makes for vigorous poetry.

For some this leads to, and ends with, charges of obscurity. It could also be considered to be the essence of writing, that tracing of the mystery of 'being human', which must always come back to the human, the condition of being such, as in 'Holes and Stars':

I just got my memory back.
few loons and I would live
in a corner at the airport,
not for the sequence
but the agony we had to be in,
running off with the money
and taking our own deaths.
Which technology will make me remote?
I don't know where I am,
I never know what's going to happen.

In this unusual, and not easily identifiable scenario is to be found the grounding line 'Will technology make me remote?' The protagonist is identified and by the poem's denouement a long, perhaps ordinary story has been told in a short and remarkable space.

These are poems which can be read and read again and again, which if nothing else makes the book great value for money. Unlike simple narratives, mapped out in advance and inexorably unfurling toward an expected end, Lew's poems engage the reader directly with the creation of meaning. Rather than act as empty vessels waiting to be filled by the reader's predictions, the content of these poems wash and move and sparkle, are always open to the pleasure of interpretation. They seem to hold something different every time they are read. In 'Mythic Bird of Panic' the poet is

...a child entrusted with state secrets,
Caught knowing too much and too little at once.
A tiny heart pounds under my collar:
A disturbing package has arrived.

The poem is that package and it disturbs. Another package is delivered in 'The Power of Loose Change', where

Balanced on the edge of loving,
we fall silent in the sediments.
Ethics make it possible for us to sit in a room together,
damned packages add to the fire.

The blurb on the collection's back cover states that "reading Emma Lew's poetry is like entering a cinema after the movie has started. Mysteriously you arrive just at the climax. The characters are in full flight." This poet's actors also strive desperately for sense in the senseless and the fantastic, and although we may not always 'know' the scene, the stage, we are left in no doubt as to the necessity and need, for love, understanding, opening or closure, that is at the heart of the work.

The more accessible poems confirm this. Lew can write with energy and complexity, and her work is often beautiful and touchingly naked in emotion and self

recognition. 'Alliance IV' ends

You cannot count on me for anything,
But suppose I volunteer to be harnessed?

As you know, I will be desperate
if that's the costume you want me to wear tonight.

and in 'Caught in the Act of Admiring Myself', about a trip to the doctor:

But doctor
I'm busy with the big nectarine in the fruit bowl
while the world plans around me!
Yes, and I sketched
a little gesture of doubt in the air
without moving my chin from my hand.

This poem's emphatic 'Yes' and the 'me' of the patient, the sufferer – who is also an individual, an actor – is in direct contrast to the usual powerlessness, inertia and apathy of a victim. Through humour and parallel emotional undercurrents Lew effectively widens the scope of her work, and creates more space in which the reader can 'know' the person in the play.

Some of Lew's phrases are delicious. All are original and otherworldly. If sometimes I was left wondering it was a joyful wondering. And in 'Coal' she does ask for forgiveness:

Forgive me:
I'm in a trance,
and this is not
an age of grace.
I live my life twice -
a fiercer, ripe, real,
sulky, sepulchral,
identical storm.

And there can be no doubt the second life, or perhaps the first, is one of poetry, one I want to share with her. The book's title is superlative.

Jill Jones *THE BOOK OF POSSIBILITIES*.

Hale & Iremonger 1997, 96pp.

In the opening poem to this volume, Jill Jones notes that "A still world can make you dizzy". This initial image, of a poet looking and the world moving, at times paradoxically, is an appropriately intriguing start to a collection which explores the boundaries of inner and outer experience, the shifting approximations of fact and possibility.

In 'Traffic', the first part, this trope is firmly established

continued following page

Varuna Writers' Centre

The Varuna Writers' Centre, Katoomba, is one of Australia's premier literary establishments. Situated 2 hours from the Sydney CBD in the beautiful Blue Mountains, Varuna offers exceptional poetry readings, workshops, open days and celebrity events.

Events

Special events for 1997-98 include:

- * Sydney Writers' Festival and Sydney Fringe Writers' Festival readings, launches and lunches
- * Varuna's famous Friday nights – one of the liveliest forums for the presentation of writing and writers in Australia
- * Varuna New Poetry quarterly readings
- * The Varuna Residential and New Writers' Fellowships.

Varuna Membership is \$30/year (\$20 concession) Members receive a regular newsletter detailing the many exciting literary events and courses. Fellowship applications close 30th May and 30th November each year. For membership and fellowship details, send an SSAE to:

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reviews

by the poet as she gradually moves from behind her window to join actors travelling on buses and on boats, and to then walk with them in the street, into shops and plazas. She travels alongside the animals of the street, cats and dogs and cars, to map the lives of people who continue to move on without others, lost to relationships that have died, to dying. And the world's rain, sun and seasons remain, everchanging and unchangeable.

However the journeys we take with Jones are always made complex. No matter where we are taken within the city, we also remain situated, firmly 'placed' by the poet. Jones pursues the border between action and observation, the flux between contact and meaning, such that while we wonder at the traveller's experience of 'place' we wonder nothing about *where* we are. Thus, while being carefully 'held' by her definite and maturely crafted form, the reader is also, in a sense, strongly 'directed' by Jones' poems. We are invited into the poet's world, not into new worlds where we can be set loose.

The poems here, the voices, the images and the spaces they inhabit, however briefly, are 'comfortable'. Not in the sense that they are old and worn and familiar, but by virtue of the fact that, as old rooms we may happen to walk into, they are interiors already well-organised, -decorated and -laid out. For Jones, it is only through our experience in the room that we can play and be open to the unexpected ('Invitation'):

Inside's just the same, soft ordinary
kitchen wood. I know you
will be wondering how the place was set up,
lined for comfort or weather...

This is a private theatre,
and a place for stories you remember
in the extended hours which constantly

Michael Heald

Fremantle Anchors

They've let their breath out now
and are taking it easy, lying back
or propped on an elbow, giant chain
trailing like strings of bubbles.
Most look straight through them
as if they're a shrivelled fence,
though children's hands approach
and nibble them like fish,
the way they do the flesh of the old.

Arrows shot in slow motion at stability,
palms like shovel-blades, without them
those arks of Europeans couldn't have stopped
and steadied themselves for the decisive
stride ashore (the strain it was
told in one stock bent at right-angles,
sail-power as a circus strong man).

Fabulous bones from the throat
of famous motion, amongst them
you notice your own free breath,
lifting and falling like the swell,
drift cautiously as if that fearsome weight
might jerk you to a dislocating halt;
get a vision of these as moments
of an iron acrobat's tumbling pass.



toast friendship, not caring about
the shadows we forget to invite.

Jones is a poet who constructs, inhabits and writes about an identifiable world, in the library, in bed, cooking, watching TV, at markets – the domesticity of city life with its perfumes of machines and gardens, then maps the possibilities for interaction and contact that space may hold.

In 'Shifts', the second part, the identifiable and its aura of comfort begin to disappear. The days, like the past, drift into images and reflections. The poet then attempts to recapture the world. Small figures vanish over hills and songs fade while the poet still sings; apprehension is of course a major strand in the poet's art. As things break down and decay Jones writes memories of wholeness, as things 'completed' are, even if they are not as we had wanted them ('The Kitchen Light'):

If the past is correct, it was here she couldn't move...

When it got beyond even the curiously patterned logic
of their life, all he could swear at was her name...

Between battles all her reasons lined up, ready to go...

in a kitchen where the big light lived, her room of
light.

For Jones, what has been possesses an unassailable integrity, despite what might follow, so that 'now' or in 'the future' the poet can only hypothesise on what did not happen. As contact and the differential between presence and absence subsequently increase, she can only wish for what might have happened and for what might. Magic has this as its purpose and when things change she must lament, as in the title – 'Memory wasn't necessary. Once.' Similar veins flow on: 'Invisible ink'; 'A quick life on the coast'; 'Friday on the balcony'; 'Broken language'; and in the final stanza of the final poem in this section, 'Where the sea burns':

But this is impossible, of course, nothing
lasts...

...here and beyond, past
the cliffs to the north where the sea burns.

The subjects of many of these poems are taking place just out of view, as if 'few survived' from the lost, the gone and the dead.

By the third part of the book, Gambits, Jones has, while noting the irony, established a logic by which she can 'dream' the future ('White windows'):

It was a dream about a white window
that woke me...

And maps in the lines
blooming out of old paint.

What is and is about to be grows from the past, just as this final section develops, and perhaps resolves, the tensions of the previous two. The poet may be reminded of the past, may conjure it up and address it directly, but remains living in the present. Life 'goes on' despite what's lost. People lift their glasses, men fix cars and jazz players play. There are many ways to live, even if it is only in dream, and no matter what happens the risks are still taken. Children still wake in the morning and it matters little in the end that some live and some die. The stars continue to fly ('The slow stars') and "You wait, or go on, as if it will be fine." ('Reversal: An ode'), and although the poet says "as if" you get the feeling that it will be. She, we all, are "being fully in the air", like a eucalypt, and 'The Book of Possibilities', the end poem in the book, makes this a certainty with its final lines:

All luck and risk ride with them
in crescendo and the year's updraught

The book begins with weather and music, is contemplative, the poet having to "push my eyes out of the window", a little afraid, wanting to take part in the world, the Winter dry, musing on Mozart 'as if' he was 'here', that he 'is here'. And it ends with weather and music. Still at her window but her hand unable to resist tapping on the sill at 120 bpm, heart racing, the sun joining in and the seasons moving voluptuously in time. There's a lover waiting across the road and this

Advertorial

It Needed Black Pepper

It was a dark and stormy poetry scene in mid 1995 when Black Pepper commenced publishing with the Anne Elder award-winning *Michaelangelo's Prisoners* by Jennifer Harrison. Since then, Black Pepper has published another dozen poetry titles, most recently Emma Lew's *The Wild Reply*, Hugh Tollhurst's *Filth and Other Poems*, John Anderson's *The Shadow's Keep* and Alison Croggon's *The Blue Gate*.

Founded by KF Pearson and Gail Hannah, Black Pepper is a press which actively seeks out new talents among its poets with two of the titles most recently published being first collections, and which seeks to act as a repertory publisher, with an ongoing relationship between publisher and writer, which is important for both author and publisher. It's not much good finding a publisher only to be thrown back into a desolate marketplace with your next book.

Our philosophy is straightforward, revolving around literary excellence, and giving no preference to one school of poetry over another. Indeed, diversity is a feature of a list that includes Anne Fairbairn's reworking of a Persian text in *An Australian Conference of Birds*, Louise de Paor's Irish language poetry *Goban Cre is Cloch / Sentences of Earth & Stone*, with en-face translations, and the single line 'dreamline' poems of John Anderson. We are interested in successful experimental work as well as more traditional poetry which shines through.



A perceived lack of poetry publishers was part of the reason for the birth of Black Pepper

and in a short time we have become a first choice publisher for many poets. Our list is expanding to around six poetry titles per year, which is not surprising while other lists contract. David Brooks has written that "Poetry, I think, is rather like the frog in the ecosystem, an index of the health of the whole" and when poets as outstanding as John Anderson have their careers put on hold for the lack of a publisher, the frogs are being badly done by.

Recently Black Pepper has also taken up including novels by poets in our fiction list: in August '96, *Navigatio* by Alison Croggon came out to substantial critical acclaim, including the perceptive comment by Robert Gray that this was a long prose poem. *Kicking in Danger* by Alan Wearne, a somewhat different poet's novel, appeared in August '97. Also in late '97, we will publish a collection of poetic sequences, *The Ninth Moon* by playwright Daniel Keene.

Black Pepper accepts unsolicited manuscripts, but we have a set reading period from January to March each year, and we ask poets to submit their work around that time. Anything submitted after that time is held over until the next year's reading period, so save yourself months of anguish, and submit your work in January '98.

In the meantime have a look at our list. The black spines of our thirteen poetry titles to date contain works by poets adding spice to the soup of Modern Australia Poetry, have a look at our cover designs – Gail Hannah's work adorns the walls of the Maluca Bar in Collingwood – and see what you think. Is our list to your taste - or could we add a little more Black Pepper?

Further Information

Black Pepper
403 St Georges Rd
North Fitzroy VIC 3068

T 03 9489 1716

time, the book finished, her art complete and given, there is no need to hesitate in leaving the house.

Margie Cronin

Mark O'Flynn

Philip Hodgins *SELECTED POEMS*

Angus & Robertson \$19.95 330 pp ISBN 0 207 18405 4

THE SELECTED POEMS of Philip Hodgins comes as a major landmark in Australian poetry. In a short life Hodgins produced an astonishing range and body of work, and to read these books again in sequence, given the circumstances of their posthumous publication, is a powerful and disturbing experience. To be ebullient for a moment, there are scores of poems here which are unbearably moving. The simple power and poignancy of Hodgins' language is evident from the very first stanza:

a man stands single
on a railway station platform
alone with the smell of his own body:
the sun is low

The second poem announces, without hurrah or

sentimentality, the theme which forms the parenthesis to Hodgins' sadly shortened life – the theme of cancer. Hodgins actively explores his cancer in his poetry, as well as the circumstances of his own death by leukaemia. Not for the squeamish? Wrong. This is a book for everyone, engaging the reader at every level. From the first, the courage and strength with which he examines his own mortality is humbling.

Now the thought of never growing old
is with me all the time. I'm like the traveller
on the kerb in a strange city, gaping –
"My dreams!
I only put them down for a minute!"

This preoccupation with dying (and who wouldn't be preoccupied?) appears in the most ordinary of scenes; a barbecue; walking along a pier; travel; any number of menial tasks. By definition death is everywhere. The drive to confront it is not unlike Dransfield's later compulsion to write of his illness and of hospitals in *The Second Month of Spring*. Hospitals are perversely inspiring.

Perhaps the more harrowing aspect of the 'cancer' poems, apart from their terrible prophesy, is the account of cancer's mechanics and paraphernalia. Chemotherapy; cannulas; nausea; cytotoxic rigor; (now there's a title!); what Hodgins refers to as the vocabulary of dying. There is a necessity to find suitable expression for the

reviews

largely inexpressible, and it must be said choosing illustrative quotes of this poignancy is quite an arbitrary exercise.

My half a bucketful of blood
is filled with rumours of an early death.

Paradoxically, this is not a depressing book. Rather, it is strangely uplifting, even exalting. Dolour here gives rise to literary jubilation.

I've discovered that it isn't so good
to try to make each day significant.

Hodgins' work demands a fundamental shift of attitude; a metanoia. As Peter Goldsworthy states on the blurb, Hodgins' work "forces his readers to re-examine the importance or triviality of their own thoughts and preoccupations." Yet there is nothing preachy or esoteric about it. Susan Sontag, (whom Hodgins quotes at one point), has suggested there is no great mythical enlightenment attached to the diagnosis or the experience of cancer.

....the hard wisdom
suffering is supposed to give you
but doesn't really.

In the earlier work this awareness of impending death permeates Hodgins' other primary concern, rural imagery, so that these two major themes become interlinked; almost symbiotic. Life and Death. Reading these poems leaves one with an eerie feeling of being lucky. Any pessimism is associated with the mood of some of the 'rural' poems, and the concomitant theme of loss. While their scenes are portrayed with love, their frequent bleakness sometimes approaches despair. While filling in a rough grave in 'Shooting the Dogs':

Each time the gravel slid off the shovel
it sounded like something
trying to hang on by its nails.

However, there is both optimism and humility to be found in manual work. Images of the past, of life on the land, present some of the happiest, most keenly perceived moments. There is also the occasional hilarity of incident in many of the farming poems, such as 'The Bull', or 'The Big Goanna'. Poetry gives shape and form to rural experience, raising it above landscape and anecdote. A poem like 'The Devil's Work', dealing with the calm brutality of de-horning cattle, transforms memory and narrative into metaphor.

His appeal is broad and the simplicity of Hodgins' language accentuates his mastery over narrative. There are plenty of poems which cross the arbitrary boundaries of poetic factionalism. Afficionados of bush poetry will lap up the rustic yarns; while the range of technique, experiment, and stylistic control will appeal to the more cerebrally driven. Hodgins, in other words, proved himself a great all-rounder. A poem such as 'Chopped Prose with Pigs' acknowledges the poetic use a prosaic, vernacular tone may exploit. This is Hodgins' favoured territory, though not his limitation. He is a natural story-teller. Take this pig with a hangover:

Her eyes were so bloodshot
that whenever she opened them
it looked like she would bleed to death.

There is also a poignancy in the ongoing theme of loss. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the long verse novella 'Dispossessed'. This book has its roots in previous rural poems, such as those from 'Animal Warmth'. Here it is given full reign. There is a Nabokovian attention to detail. Fleas in a glass of water for example:

....like some
great flock of birds observed from far away.

The story is familiar; farmers forced off their land by forces beyond their control. However the tragedy is one of personalities, not economics. Hodgins hints at the

The Poets Union Inc

The Poets Union Inc is an organisation for Australian poets and lovers of poetry.

The Union is a membership-based national poetry society. Only three-and-a-half years ago membership was about 150 and centred mainly around Sydney. Today the Union has more than 300 members in New South Wales and another 100 or so in the other States. It is our nature to be expansive and outreaching and we intend to grow even stronger. As the Union grows it will provide an increasingly national service to an increasingly national membership.

Union Activities

The Poets Union has organised the highly successful twin Poets on Wheels tours to the northern and southern regional areas of New South Wales. The Union is also involved in the following:

- Readings and book-launches at Gleebooks and The Gallery Cafe in Annandale
- Monthly poetry workshops at the State Library
- Work with Varuna Writers' Centre at Katoomba to stage the Blue Mountains Poetry Festival
- The Sydney Writers' Festival and the NSW Writers' Centre's annual Spring Writing Festival
- We even do T-shirts!

The Union produces a monthly magazine, *FIVE BELLS*, with articles and reviews and news and views about the Oz poetry scene. Meg Dunn says: "*FIVE BELLS* is a lifeline to regional or isolated poets, keeping people in touch with each other and the major developments in Australian poetry".

Joining the Union

So who are these members and who can join? Members have one thing in common – they love poetry. Anyone can join. Established poets are welcome; those who've never been published are welcome. All you have to do to be a member is read, write or simply enjoy poetry.

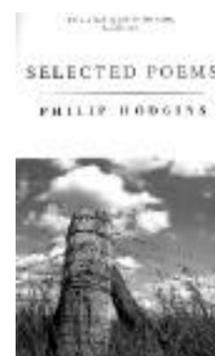
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continued following page

reviews

wider rural crisis in the conflicts between his characters, who are drawn with compassion and verisimilitude. They are admirable in their failings, their ugliness. There is no political table-thumping; individuals are more important than issues. The implication of this title, *Dispossessed*, seems to cast a shadow over more than just the context of this single book.

Beneath the intricate surface of the narrative of *Dispossessed* there is almost a forensic preoccupation with rhythm. The precision of craft disguised in yarn-spinning. I must admit that this is so subtle it had to be pointed out to me; namely that every line in the book, (bar a couple of rare exceptions), contains exactly ten syllables. I am not pathological enough to report that I counted them all. After the narrative clarity there remains the mysterious final line, portentous in its ambiguity, which I will not give away.

Elsewhere the rural imagery is filled with simile and metaphor, so that for example:

the scarrifier looks more like
an instrument for swaying those
who have some trouble with their faith,
a mediaeval torture rack,
a bed of knives and pointy toes
for making people see the truth.

This recalls the image of the skeletal drip dispensing the poisons of chemotherapy with its terrible demand of endurance:

Its shiny bones
would jangle
like the trailer's steel
when we were feeding
out on healthy mornings
years ago.

All oncologists should be made to read 'The Drip'.

Overall the rural poems, particularly those of 'Animal Warmth', present something of a relief from the harrowing images of the cancer poems. In themselves these images, combined with the theme of dispossession, operate as various metaphors and metonyms for cancer. An attempt to capture the inexpressible within the known, the already grieved. Even when speaking of cows in 'The End of the Season' there is: "Too much imbued with loss."

Within the language of illness remission seems to be represented by the collections following 'Animal Warmth'. These poems open out to the world, the familiar terrain of rural activity. However it is presumptuous to deduct biography from anecdote or metaphor. Chemotherapy is not a fond memory. There are cows to be milked. Dwell on something else. As he says in 'The Sick Poem':

It began as a minor complaint
and spread to be an obsession.
They say it has something
to do with words.....

This gets back to death's vocabulary, articulated without ever being maudlin. Rather, Hodgins dissects the subject with a relentless clarity in much the same way that Beckett explored the theme of impotence, or perhaps the same determination with which Dorothy

Hewett continues to re-examine her own past. He says "My bad luck is to write the same poem every time." Even a poem called 'Self Pity' is objective while retaining a painful intimacy. The healthy fantasy is that we will die in our sleep after a long, fulfilled life – well it won't happen here.

Technically Hodgins' work embraces a vast array of forms and styles. From the formality of sonnet and villanelle, through the loose form of the narrative lyric and bush yarn, to the massive rhythmical control of 'Dispossessed'. The subtle control of rhyme is oblique and finely tuned. Even the wonderful lone haiku of 'Five Thousand Acre Paddock':

There was only one
tree in all that space and he
drove straight into it.

It is probably trivial to talk of technique in the face of, what is for me, the predominant subject. Everything is effected by it; and when it is missing, it is conspicuous by its absence. The discovery of termites, for example, heralds the return of disease. Cancer's nightmare becomes reality. Even nature becomes malevolent. Here is the ending of 'The Creek':

And look! Here comes
the water-rat,
unzipping the surface

his little dark eyes
staring up at me
with bitterness.

Forgive the reviewer for reading too much into it. In the last half of *Things Happen* the return of cancer is terrifying. The mind focussed awfully on the body's dissolution. Hodgins studies without flinching, but with acknowledged fear, the subject of his own dying. He offers insight beyond measure into what we all must face; not only the oncological facts, but also the ontological facts, (sorry). As such this book is a memento mori, informed by the inevitable. It values the moment with clarity and love, while having an eye focussed towards the end. It is a warning never to be complacent. No bullshit. The beauty of his language is profoundly moving in its honesty. His loss is great.

Mark O'Flynn

interview *cont. from page 15*

The highly exclusive poem works by leaving out, so an inclusive poem can seem less focused in comparison – because it encourages many different moments of focus. But we know how shifting our making of meaning can be. We call something random when it doesn't seem to make sense, i.e. we are looking at the outcome, whereas for a poet the randomising might be in the process and may suddenly reveal something which does make sense. So there are stable points of reference, the strategies and observations we recognise...depending on how we read! and then language itself, sometimes destabilising everything we've so neatly set up...

But you had asked about where the meaning resides. Sometimes it seems to me love is a kind of double living, the loved one is inside you, inhabiting you, and poetry is like that, too, for reader and reader/writer. I feel one life is just not enough! I'm not merely hungry for more living, I'm susceptible to the inhabitation. Keats' negative capability again? Maybe. All artists are like this, I suspect, bumping up what is a natural tendency into something more open and powerful, through practice, and through a variety of psychological addiction to it. So poetry is a kind of body and word form of double-living: to inhabit the world as poem as it inhabits you in the writing. All this is concurrent, of course. Once it's out there in the world, the finished poem is me being you, the reader, and the reader being me, the poet/poem complex. It's a knot which is tied loosely and by choice, something sexy and lusty and deep enough to be a variety of love . . .

Peter Minter

contributors

CATH BARCAN is currently studying towards an MA at Sydney College of the Arts, and has exhibited her photographs nationwide.

ERIC BEACH shared the 1996 NSW Premier's Prize for Poetry with his fourth collection, *Weeping for Lost Babylon*.

ALAIN BOSQUET's book *Bourreaux et Acrobates* was published by Gallimard in 1989.

PETER BOYLE recently attended the Columbian Festival of International Poetry in Medellin, after which he commenced translations of South American poets. He was awarded the 1995 NSW Premier's Prize for Poetry for his first collection. Hale & Iremonger published his second collection *The Blue Cloud of Crying* which recently won the NBC Banjo Award for Poetry.

MTC CRONIN is a writer living in Sydney. Her first collection *zoetrope* was published by Five Islands Press in the 1995 New Poets Series. She was recently awarded the 1997 Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize.

LUKE DAVIES is widely published Australian poet, based in Sydney and Paris.

MICHAEL FARRELL, is a Melbourne poet. His collection *Whale Diary* was published by the Merrijig Word + Sound Co. as part of the boxed set 'Six Different Ways.'

DOMINIQUE GRANDMONT lives in Paris and is a well-known translator of American, Czech and Greek poetry. He has published over 20 books of poetry, most recently *Histoires impossibles* (1994), *Soleil de pluie* (1995) and *L'air est cette foule* (1996).

JS HARRY is one of Australia's most influential contemporary poets. She shared the 1996 NSW Premier's Prize for Poetry with her *Selected Poems*. **MICHAEL HEALD** is a West Australian poet.

SEAMUS HEANEY is one of Ireland's most distinguished poets. He has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in recognition of his outstanding career.

DOROTHY HEWETT has published numerous plays, novels and, including her recent *Collected Poems*, 11 books of poetry. She is highly regarded nationally and internationally as one of Australia's most prominent modern writers.

KATHIELYN JOB grew up sixteen miles from Dubbo in the Central West of NSW, in Sydney and in Pennsylvania. In addition to writing poetry she works as an editor and part-time teacher. Her first collection *Now, the Melaleuca* was written while living in Dubbo.

JAMES LUCAS has recently returned to Sydney following postgraduate study in England. He has been published in Australia and the UK.

JOHN MATEER is a West Australian poet. His first book, *Burning Swans*, was published in 1995 and his second collection, *Anachronism*, was released in January 1997 by Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

ROD MENGHAM is a Cambridge (UK) poet and editor of the small press *Equipage*. His *Unsung: New and Selected Poems* was recently published by Folio/Salt.

PETER MINTER is a Sydney poet, editor and publisher.

EUGENIO MONTEJO is a Venezuelan poet born in Caracas in 1938. He has published eight books of poetry and two collections of essays.

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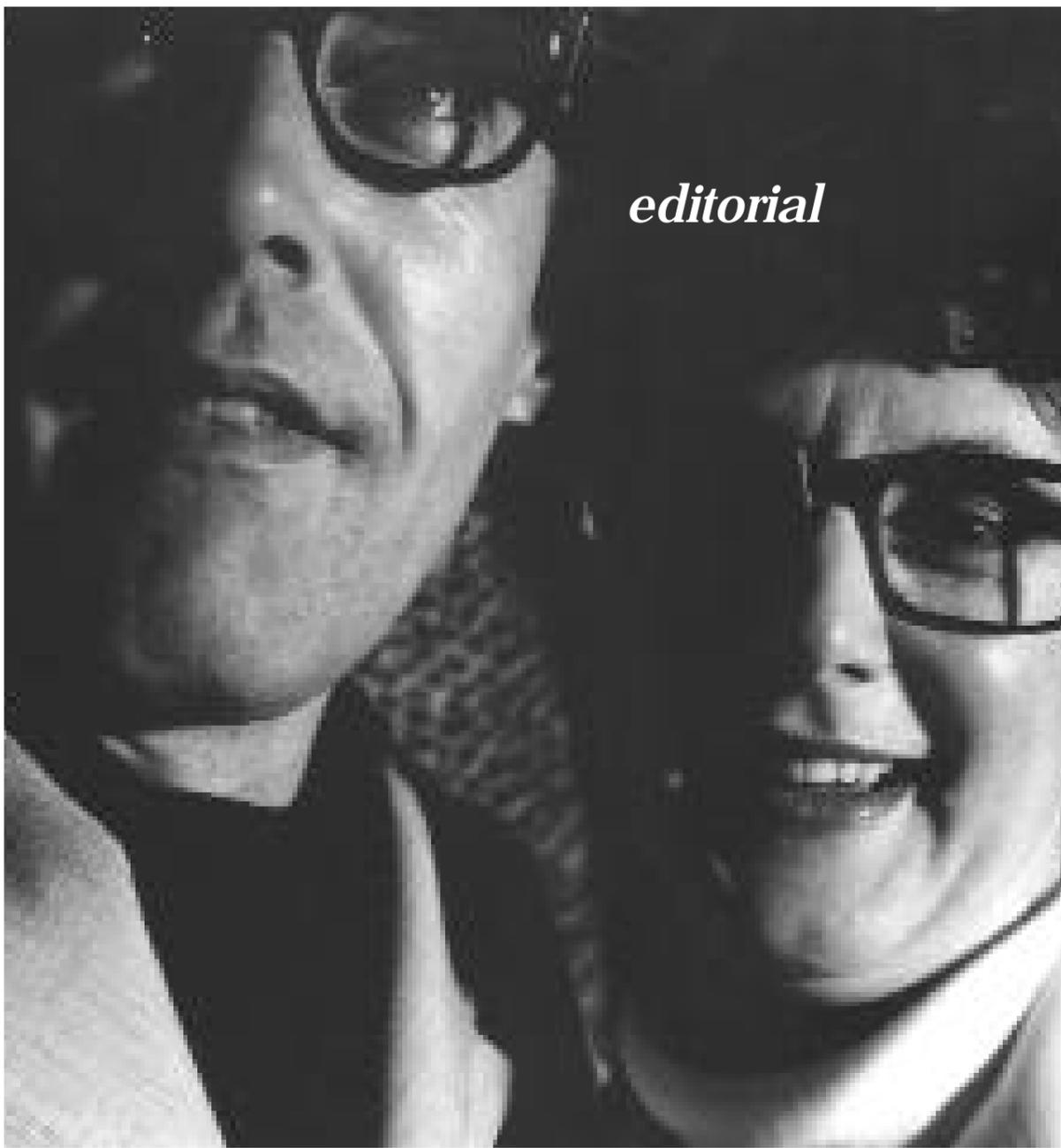
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contributors *continued*

MARK O'FLYNN is a poet, playwright and reviewer. His first collection of poems, *The too bright sun*, was published by Five Islands Press in the 1996 New Poets Series.

IAN PATERSON has worked as a translator, teacher and second-hand bookseller and is currently a Research Fellow at King's College, Cambridge. He was editor of *A Vision Very Like Reality* and his collections include *A Thing of Reason* (1974), *Tatlin's Dream* (1977), *Roughly Speaking* (1990) and *Tense Folder* (1993).

TREVOR POULTON is a poet based in Melbourne.

NICOLAE PRELIPCEANU is a Greek poet.

ZAN ROSS is currently working on her PhD in Cultural Studies at Curtin University, WA. She has appeared in a number of journals, and will have her first collection, *B-Grade* released in October by Phallos Bird Press.

RAE SEXTON is a well known Australian poet. Her most recent collection, *Coping with Fallout*, was published by Five Islands Press

ARTHUR SPYROU has published widely in Australia. His translations of Yannis Ritsos' *Monochords* was published in 1996 by Paper Bark Press.

JOHN TRANTER just is. He has recently released the first issue of his online poetry magazine – *JACKET*. The journal can be found at www.jacket.zip.com.au.

HUGH TOLHURST is a Melbourne poet. *Filth and Other Poems* was published by Black Pepper in September 1997.

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