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Poetry and Poetics Review

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Peter Minter speaks
with **Dorothy Porter**

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**Dorothy
Porter:**
poetry
and sex

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contents

KERRY WATSON The Next Wave Festival and <i>CORDITE</i> : Putting Writers in Context	8
PETER MINTER Interview with Dorothy Porter	2
MICHAEL BRENNAN Returning the Glance: an essay on Anthony Lawrence	10
PHILIP HAMMIAL New York . . . The Practice of Poetry	24 17
ADAM AIKEN The Lemons of Land's End	14
PAOLA BIBROUGH Bell Tongue	14
PAM BROWN A howling in favour of failures	11
EDWARD BURGER We didn't sit in a café and talk about our lives I got a rock N° 16	7 18
BERNARD COHEN America	20
JENNIFER COMPTON In the Worst Way	2
EVAN DANDO X / incorrect	14
BROOK EMERY A twist of hemp	22
MICHAEL FARRELL fractured adonis egypt	13 13
BENJAMIN GILMOUR Traffic Lights	18
MICHAEL GRANE Bed-sitting Room	15
PHILIP HAMMIAL Bread Arcana	17 17
BRIAN HENRY What they remember	21
DAVID HORNBLOW Untitled	8
MARTIN R JOHNSON Riight . . .	6
ANTHONY LAWRENCE The Glance Returned	10
JORGE MANRIQUE (1440-1479) In memory of his father, Don Rodrigo Manrique translated by Marisa Cano	13
GERALDINE MCKENZIE The Granary	19
GREG McLAREN Kurri Sonnet	11
Π. O. Lebanese Poetry	5
THUY ON Guava	6
JACQUES PRÉVERT Despair seated on a bench translated by Michael Brennan	15
PATRICIA PRIME Preparation	9
GRAHAM ROWLANDS Hawke for Hawke	11
MARY RUEFLE Marked	10
TRACY RYAN Rain	9
PETER SKRZYNECKI Buddha, Birdbath, Hanging Plant	12
JAMES TATE Shroud of the Gnome	4
JOHN TRANTER Serial Numbers	3
ZOE V Last train starring Fatigue Lady	7
ANDREW ZAWICKI Somniloquy	15
Contributors	23
Reviews	18
Editorial & Letters	16
Cover photograph: ARUNAS KLAPSUS	

Poetry's like sex: you can't fake it

interview

Peter Minter & **DOROTHY PORTER**

Dorothy Porter's most recent collection, *THE MONKEY'S MASK* won the Age Book of the Year Award for poetry in 1994. Her earlier collections include *LITTLE HOODLUM* (1975), *BISON* (1979), *THE NIGHT PARROT* (1984), *DRIVING TOO FAST* (1989) and *AKHENATEN* (1992). She speaks with Peter Minter about her approach to writing, her ideas about poetics and her forthcoming collection *WHAT A PIECE OF WORK*.

pm I'd like to begin by discussing your earliest experiences of writing. When did you start writing poetry, and what initially motivated you?

dp I didn't really see myself as a poet until I was about sixteen, although I did start writing when I was about eight – writing stories and making little books. It wasn't really until the age of about sixteen that I began to see myself as a poet. I came to poetry via music, particularly the rock music of the late sixties, the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jefferson Airplane, the late Beatles. It was an extraordinary time, a ferment.

I was 14 in 1968, which was an incredible year, and 16 in 1970, which is when I started taking myself seriously as a poet. That's when I started reading poetry, not just the stuff at school. I was reading the usual things, in a critical sense, like Shakespeare and Keats, but at one time there was a poem by Ted Hughes called 'The Wind' that really struck me. Much more dramatic though was seeing William Carlos Williams' 'The Red Wheelbarrow' written on a blackboard. A friend of mine was at a progressive school with a groovy English teacher, who was a poet himself, and he wrote this poem on the board. I'd never seen a poem like that before, although now when I think of the content I'm amazed that it even appealed to me, but I just felt this extraordinary sense of possibility in its clarity and focus and short lines. So I started writing these short lines, à la William Carlos Williams.

That was a key thing, and at the same time I was trying to use the beat and passion of the things that were happening in music, to replicate them in what I was writing. Prose seemed unsatisfactory. I was writing these rather 19th century-esque, episodic novels about my friends at school, and I think the music 'upped the ante' of my emotional experience without me even knowing it. It was a very exciting time, even though I was just at school. I wasn't marching in any moratoriums.

pm So when did you start publishing your work?

dp I got to university, met like-minded people, and had my first poem published when I was nineteen in the *SATURDAY POETRY BOOKCLUB*, something Rae Desmond Jones and Joanne Burns were associated with. That was in 1973. Then I was involved in the Sydney University Poetry Society and I met Robert Adamson and other poets. Things escalated from there.

pm You had many early poems published in *NEW POETRY*. It's interesting that, with regard to the comments you make about the influence of American music, a great deal of the work published in *NEW POETRY* was influenced to some degree by American poetics. Was this something that you found happening with your own work as well?

dp To a certain extent, yes. Perhaps not as self-consciously and as deliberately as some of the other writers at the time. It's not how I am.

pm I imagine you've read a number of the postmodern American poets.

dp Well, I was hanging out with people like Robert Adamson and the young Chris Edwards, who gave me that Donald Allen book of American poetics (*THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY*) as a present, and I remember reading Duncan and the idea of the poem as a field, and things by Charles Olson...

pm Do you feel that, reading that work, the ideas engaged with by those poets, were a direct influence on you?

dp Yes, I think they were, but again I'm always a person who has gone my own way, for good or ill. I'm not a cliquy, 'join-the-group' sort of girl!

pm Were there other US poets who were important to you then?

dp I think when I was older Frank O'Hara was a much more profound influence. I liked Robert Duncan's sense of the occult and the sacred, and was perhaps rather pretentiously interested in those things too, and I still am, though now in a much more meaningful way than when I was younger. I liked the sense of possibility in what they were doing, breaking all the old rules.

pm Frank O'Hara's voice seems to be present in your first collection, *LITTLE HOODLUM*. Were you reading him during that time?

dp I don't know if I was reading him that early, but I

Jennifer Compton

In The Worst Way

I want to sniff your armpits
arsehole: I want to lick your toes
until they clench & writhe:
I want to nibble buttocks: strive
against your tautened breasts: sink teeth
into your clattering eyes: sing on a note
of garbled ecstasy: shout with laughter
at the surprise of gushing waters: hit
you for being alive.

I want to take your arm & shoulder
home with me: I want to be your Mother & your Wife:
I want to steal your poetry, give you marigolds
& drink your spit. I want to hit you
because I want to drink your spit.

certainly was later on. I love his work, the warmth and intimacy, his sexuality. His poems are sometimes complex and opaque, and verbally challenging, but they're fun and, to be honest, I hate heavy, pretentious 'boys' poetry.

pm It's interesting that you make that comment, because you do use explicit, straightforward language, which is also present in O'Hara's poems, to balance the heavier, mythic or psychological density of your later work.

dp Like O'Hara, I go on my nerve. He pointed out the way in his wonderful manifesto on Personism. I like his campness and subversiveness, and the fact that, while he has a lightness of touch and an urbanity, he is not an academic poet. These are all things that did influence me, just as they did quite a number of people. But I think the question of influence is always a personal thing; it's got to become part of you on an intuitive rather than a simply popular level.

pm But myth and psychological density are important to you as well?

dp I think they're not something I'm self-consciously aware of, it's just part of the many things I'm interested in. I have an enormous curiosity and those aspects of my work are part of my very foggy but intensely spiritual sense of things, which are not a function of a materialistic or rational desire to make sense of life, but more to be part of things, to 'live life as an epiphany'. And myth is so rich. I like mythic stories – I'm a poet who reads a lot of novels and a lot of stories, and still the most extraordinary stories are told in myth. In fact, I think one the most powerful books I've read in the last couple of years, without a doubt, is Ovid's *METAMORPHOSES*. I'd only read it in snippets before, and it's about a lot more than beautiful young things changing into trees. One of the strong motifs throughout the work is the violence of incest, and lust and frustration. The stories are just unbelievably affective.

pm Such stories are a strong part of *AKHENATEN*, and in other ways *THE MONKEY'S MASK*. In what way are you interpreting the poetics and myth-making of poets like Ovid or Duncan?

dp I suppose I'm trying to compost them and assimilate them. Like a lot of writers I'm a magpie or thief more than an intellectual, and I don't think my approach is just cerebral. I work off what gives me a buzz and what doesn't. And when something gives me a buzz, whether it's Ovid or whether it's 'Piece of My Heart' by Janis Joplin, something will happen. I wait for my neurones to buzz.

pm Which is an interesting idea in itself, when some contemporary ideas about poetics prioritise linguistic models or theories within the process of writing. What you have just suggested is that you work more from an emotional, non-intellectual response to your material.

dp Absolutely. I agree with Ezra Pound that only emotion endures. I've got a problem with a lot of stuff that's theory driven. I think it can end up an incredible wank, and can back itself into a corner. And poetry has been backed into such a corner this century, so I think it's time to turn it. I'm just interested in what endures.

pm So who are the poets that endure? I've heard you're quite interested in the modern Russian poets.

dp Yes, particularly the two girls, Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva, and the two boys, Boris Pasternak and Osip Mandelstam. I've read them in translation. Then there's the gay poets, like Lorca or Cavafy. I've also learnt a lot from poets like Elizabeth Bishop, even though she and I are very different.

pm When you say you've learnt a lot from other poets, how do you respond to them? You've said that you're hesitant about engaging with theoretically based poetry, so what is it in your craft, as a material approach, that helps you 'make' this difference between an emotionally-based and an intellectually-based poem?

dp I trained as an actor and I always look at what works. Of course what works is a very subjective thing. And I do like some difficult poetry that could be seen as more theoretical than emotional, because I like a wide range of different poetries. But I don't pretend to myself that I like something when I don't. Poetry's like sex – you can't fake an orgasm. And some poetry I

John Tranter

Serial Numbers

And tell the truth – the tumult of various expendable business plans, and the evening blinked in like a landing jet, apparently graceful, in fact screaming nuts and bolts – shaking metal plus desire equals travel industry bond finance downturn explains his desperation – he never got over the way his father hated him, and shook a fist at himself in the mirror, rushing out to join his pals at a gathering, cheese and wine and social exchanges a whirling confetti – for a moment the pack of snarling gibbons recognised something simian about the crowd at the poetry reading, their embraces heartfelt yet somehow insincere – talent given muscle by a bicycle pump, show biz slang and chatter bouncing off the plexiglass – model twaddle, chop throttle, sling hash and babble – there – I don't remember a thin Singaporean speaking gently into the handset about the banking teletype network linking the island republic to a pit of treasury dread in Yokohama – banknote suction whirlwind – the old investment managers fuck up due to lack of basic training in futures hedge management – chattering over the sherry in between profit and loss is not the safety rope, he'd chosen to be an alcoholic, heavily crinkled, a choice made up of thousands of little weaknesses day by day, wearing down the rock of his self-esteem. The young professors traded gossip and influences – I had lunch with Mister Hartford – oh, really? – just lunch? – like kids with cigarette cards and pictures of Batman when they should be practising their knots and lanyards. Now the secret no one talks about – lack of talent. You see? Dead quiet. Her cow-lick was a flexible bang, while the quay water alfresco wavelets wobbled through those long railing antlers, bracket, I mean, slicing up the light into vertical samples, each related to the one parallel, drawing energy from each other, a team of singing brothers – one dollar smells like its sibling in the wallet – print, print – there's a ferry wandering and churning the surface now sprinkled with rain. The thunder there was hypnotised – widespread, miniature, far ranging – flattering the city with dreams of a distant time when everything was hunky-dory and a hamburger was something to get excited about. Not the saxophone, not the forgotten instruments, the cowbells across the evening pastures, shit on the boots, or the dew like crystal points on the morning radio news traffic report not needed here, no traffic, nothing happens in this town that God don't know about – he's dreaming it, and we're Him.

fancy and some I don't. It's like Frank O'Hara's joke about making jeans so tight people will want to go to bed with you. There are some poems I don't want to go to bed with, and there are some poems I do. I like clarity, I like honesty, I like pizzazz, I like passion, I like a pungent use of colloquial language. There's all sorts of ingredients that appeal to me.

pm So was the experience of having had a lot of your initial publications in *NEW POETRY*, where a lot of those qualities were part of the poetic, important in the establishment of your own sense of voice?

dp Of course. It was terrific. It raised my confidence and I felt part of an exciting community of poets. It was a very exciting time, but it passed.

pm So how did you deal with the boredom of the eighties?

dp With great difficulty! It was a hard time, although that's when I wrote *AKHENATEN*. The eighties were a hard time for me, but I look back, like Moses, and know that I needed to spend that time in the wilderness or I wouldn't have written *AKHENATEN*, which was a seminal book for me.

pm For what reason?

dp Because I did what I wanted to do. The things I'd wanted to do finally came together in *AKHENATEN*. I'd wanted to write a long narrative poem, and I'd wanted to explore things like gender, sexuality and history. *AKHENATEN*'s about everything. But I was nowhere near the centre of the poetry scene at that time, living in a house in the Blue Mountains, isolated,

feeling neglected, bitter and pissed off. I know a lot of people see my career just in terms of the last few years, following *THE MONKEY'S MASK*, but I've been around for a bloody long time, and during most of this time I've been ignored. So I'm enjoying it now, but I've had a long time in the wilderness, and in the wilderness I thought "Well, fuck everybody" and wrote the book I wanted to write. I think that would be helpful to a lot of poets who only have their eye on the market, or their eye only on what's happening overseas. The irony is that, even though poetry's in desperate straits at the moment, a huge amount of poetry is published, and although I've seen packed poetry readings we have to ask why aren't people buying books of poetry?

pm Was the verse-novel style of *THE MONKEY'S MASK* your way to help overcome this?

dp Yes. To my amazement that book seemed to leap across the flames.

pm Following the initial period, then, with New Poetry and the seventies and the eighties, some kind of shift happened for you around the experience of writing *AKHENATEN*.

dp Yes, for the first time I did what I really wanted to do. I wanted to really go for it, not write the usual one page poem, because I wanted to write about everything...

pm It appears that you wanted to reject the aesthetic confines of the single-page literary journal poem.

dp Yes! I wanted to write something exotic and exciting. I was reading a lot of Cavafy, and I thought "I

want to write a book that's absolutely yummy," something I'd want to read that wouldn't be a chore. And I threw everything into it, the whole shebang. I had nothing to lose. And part of me is kind of nostalgic for that time, because I had the freedom to do that. So I honestly wish sometimes that some poets would go away and say "Fuck it!" and write the book they want to write.

pm Do you feel that you can't do that now?

dp I think poets are losing their nerve. There's too much a sense of what one should be writing for the market, the critical or reading markets, the big boy poets one should flatter with a book. There's a sense of people without much nerve. I'm just longing for poetry with verve and nerve, even if I don't really like it that much. I'm longing for poetry that just smacks me across the head.

pm Is that something you find happens often? I mean, who are you reading now you would consider energetic or important?

dp It doesn't happen enough. When I calm down and listen I know that we do have some very good poets. I've just finished Peter Boyle's book, *THE BLUE CLOUD OF CRYING*, which is passionate and political. And his influences are different. They're not just the tired old Americans.

pm A more classical, European feel. Very unlike the Language Poets, for example.

dp That's right. To me Language Poetry is a poetry of a safe democracy, very much a middle class poetry, where nothing much is happening in life – being so comfortable one has to make something up. It's academic and dreary. Plenty of people disagree with me and that's fine. But I do see theoretical poetry as something fin-de-siècle. It's a poetry of lassitude, of decrepitude and fatigue. And what I found exciting about Peter Boyle's book is that, although there are some things I might disagree with, he was confronting me with things, and taking things seriously. I have a great respect for him after reading that book.

pm So you don't feel that Language Poetry and the theoretical project it assumes has helped free up the use of poetic language?

dp Well, I haven't seen it do that yet, it's too dull. I think the language of music and the language of the streets, the rhythms of colloquial speech, are much more interesting, much more revolutionary than a bunch of blokes staring up their bottoms at universities. To me meaning is important, and I think it's easy to make a virtue out of something you're not good at. It's interesting how people might eschew meaning or narrative, but they don't really know what they're doing themselves. It's also hard to evaluate poetry which becomes a form of esoteric nonsense.

pm Why do you see it as nonsense?

dp I think it can end up a kind of meaningless babel. It has absolutely no appeal to me at all.

pm Something that has interested me about your work is that, rather than assuming certain competencies of a particular readership, you appear to purposefully make your poetry broadly accessible.

dp But then some of my stunts are informed by postmodernism as well. The genre crossing of *THE MONKEY'S MASK* is a postmodern cliché, as was its non-privileging of high culture over pop.

pm How did you negotiate that, from the position of being or playing 'the Poet'?

dp Well, this is where I'll mention a name that is going to make most people fall over in horror: Camille Paglia, who I disagree with profoundly on a lot of things, but who is a passionate advocate of popular culture. And so am I. Again, I'm a passionate advocate of anything with energy, and this leveling of assumptions is a great thing about postmodernism. Of course it can be made absurd. To my mind, Tolstoy is better than Jacqueline Susan, although a purist, fundamentalist postmodernist would disagree. I believe in literature, but also in flexibility, movement. I don't want to be in an anaerobic environment, and the oxygen is in pop culture. It might be ephemeral and fizzy, but it's alive.

James Tate

Shroud of the Gnome

And what amazes me is that none of our modern inventions surprise or interest him, even a little. I tell him it is time he got his booster shots, but then I realize I have no power over him whatsoever. He becomes increasingly light-footed until I lose sight of him downtown between the federal building and the post office. A registered nurse is taking her coffee break. I myself needed a break, so I sat down next to her at the counter. "Don't mind me," I said, "I'm just a hungry little Gnostic in need of a sandwich." (This old line of mine had met with great success on any number of previous occasions.) I thought, a deaf, dumb, and blind nurse, sounds ideal! But then I remembered that some of the earliest Paleolithic office workers also feigned blindness when approached by nonoffice workers, so I paid my bill and disappeared down an alley where I composed myself. Amid the piles of outcast citizenry and burning barrels of waste and rot, the plump rats darting freely, the havoc of blown newspapers, lay the little shroud of my lost friend: small and gray and threadbare, windworn by the ages of scurrying hither and thither, battered by the avalanches and private tornadoes of just being a gnome, but surely there were good times, too. And now, rejuvenated by the wind, the shroud moves forward, hesitates, dances sideways, brushes my foot as if for a kiss, and flies upward, whistling a little-known ballad about the pitiful, raw etiquette of the underworld.

Lebanese Poetry

He came over (to the counter), ordered a coffee, and asked me if I was Lebanese (cos *he* was) – I said “*No*” / Greek.

He asked me, what I was *reading* and I said “*Poetry*”.

I asked him, did he like *it*, and he said he *did*.

I asked him, if he knew a poet called Nazim Hikmet and he said:

“When did he live?”

I said, at the turn of the century (in Turkey) – he spent a lot of time in prison layed down

a few steps

...but

the bloke, couldn't say *he* had

so I asked him

if there were any good poets in Lebanon and he said “*Omar Khayyam*”.

I asked him, if the papers (in

Australia) published *any* poems

and he said, they did

but their *meaning* (their *meaning*) he said, was *too* BIG (too too

big) and a lot of it

got lost in translation. He said, the poets (in Lebanon) were *very* clever; They'd show-Up at the market, and start reciting their poems.

One of the poets (for example) would start reciting a poem about the NIGHT (say)

i.e. How *beautiful* it was, with the moon and all the people walking up'n'down

the esplanade, and so on

while the *other* (poet)

would take an opposite view: A poem about the DAYLIGHT (say): The kids (out on the streets) playing in the gutter and so on; And *this*, he said would go on back'n'forth back'n'forth (all night) until one of 'em ran out of things to say (sticking closely to his chosen subject).

I asked him, if he could *remember* one, and he said he *could*.

He said, he could remember one about “*Horses + shoes*”!

One of the poets, he said started waxing-lyrical, about how the RICH walk around on *plush* carpets and about how the POOR have to make do with the hole in their shoe and the *audience* (and the *audience!*) he said, gave him a *tremendous* ovation, when he finished cos they liked him.

Then it was the other bloke's turn, he said and he began reciting a poem about hundreds of Horsemen racing towards a *red-ribbon* on the ground.

He said, all the Horsemen were lined-Up (behind the starting line), and when the GUN went-off the horses-hooves hit the ground so,ooo,ooo hard that the whole sky became filled with horseshoes.

A friend once said an amazing thing, that one of the greatest things that will be remembered about the twentieth century will be Black American music – jazz, soul, the blues and rock 'n' roll. In fact any skills I have in performance as a poet I've learnt from singers. From listening to Billie Holiday I've learnt that phrasing is crucial to both singing and poetry, but a lot of people don't seem to have any respect for the art of performance and reading, perhaps because for many poets it's all in the head and they don't seem to remember it's an art with a history that goes back a very long way. It can be a kind of arrogance thinking that you and your mates invented it.

pm I'm interested in your ideas about phrasing. Is this something you're aware of as you're actually writing?

dp It can be, yes. All sorts of different things happen when I'm writing. There are different speeds in the way things happen. For example, I can write some poems that are terrible, that are just a mood thing and might stay between me and another person, or as part of a journal or nothingness. Others are part of a big project. And some come from nowhere, and are good.

pm Are you aware of that differentiation before or while you're writing, or once you've finished something?

dp I think I write at my best when what I'm writing is part of a larger canvas, when I'm working on a tapestry. This might be a female thing, but it is a bit of a theme to the way I work, stitching away and aware of a bigger picture. I'm no longer much of a poet for feeling “Oh, I think I'll sit down today and write a poem.”

pm Is this something that has happened since *AKHENATEN*, engaging with the larger mythic stories?

dp Yes, I think so. I've just written four poems after I went to the Northern Territory, but even these were very much part of a larger canvas. I do try and write one-off poems, when I get the right mood or feeling or I hear or see something, but usually they're relatively mediocre, lyrical pieces. And I'm fascinated with myth. For example, I think that the Minoans are part of our unacknowledged heritage, and we have trouble coming to grips with this because they were so wild and irrational, sexual and female and amoral. But the Minoans were very realistic, because unlike us they

weren't particularly fazed by death. They didn't really feel there was much of a division between being alive and being dead.

pm How would you describe your interaction with that?

dp Basically it's a magnet. I get pulled towards those things, and I want to explore them and take them through my nervous system and see what happens.

pm Does the poetry arrive as an eruption on the boundaries of these ideas?

dp Sometimes it can start as an eruption, an emotional reaction or inspiration, but then it becomes much more intellectual for me. I feel great during the inspirational process. That's a kind of demonic writing, without any editing at first. I then I have to play with it. Like when I wrote 'Exuberance of Bloody Hands', the first poem of the second section of the 'Crete' sequence; it happens very quickly.

The 'Crete' sequence is quite demanding, in an intellectual sense, but it's suffused with feeling. It demands a lot of readers in that it requires

Martin R Johnson

"Some time, later,
we shall break the archive seals.
Sitting together then
we shall utter what has never been said before."

Steffen Mensching – Born in 1958 in East Berlin

Riight. And what a night we'd make of it, hey! You
with your never-meant-tos but hadta, you know. Me
likewise, only now with pally arms slung round each other's
necks, the urge to squeeze and choke gone from out our hearts.
Be something, wouldn't it, you and me, the curled-up corners
of the record pinned down by our forgiving fingers. I can
see it, man, the empty tube rolling over the edge of the table and
landing with that hollow pipe sound as it bounces on the hard
stone floor. Directs our laughing eyes to its noise. To its
growing silence. The o of its open end. The
emptiness within, the grins slipping from
our chins. You yelling, hey!
Let's crush it with
our boots.
Don't
stand in my way.

Riight, I say. But what a night we had, your nose
colliding with my fist. I guess it's not as simple as I'd
imagined, gambling on a perfect outcome like this, Steffen. So let's
leave the seals intact. To break them open is to unwrap
a bandage stuck to a scab.

Thuy On

Guava

let's just drive she said balmy night wanna do it outside outside the attack of air unconditioned
risk of suspicious eyes no walls to inhibit c'mon we're young decadent shameless remember
no strings attached fine whatever just get inside me outside Brighton beach beautiful yes
flickering amber lights fishermen patient watching stilled waters low murmur of ethnic radio
heavy rocks contrast to white yachts with poncy white upper middle class names yes isn't it
nice hand in hand like every other couple on the pier winding like the scream but I or we want
a fuck and this isn't it god too cold wet scratchy sandy exposed no blanket you wanted it like
this he accused deal with it I want my sheets pristine no sand in my jocks bloody wuss fine
let's just drive I don't know where anywhere drive no not in the car such a cliché cop out
where's the adventure in that outside Turner's elements sublime no awkward adolescent rockin
in the back seat I'm not scared dare you god it's getting late maybe we should give up no I
want to do it now only young once remember wanna be like Dorian Gray exquisite sensations
now don't care about consequences don't care no just drive Gen X who knows where the
spot is where x marks the spot directionless artistes you and me we're both bloody fruits
Guavas to be precise Grown Up and Vaguely Ambitious hey what about here under the West
Gate Bridge a grassy knoll cars speeding above us what a vantage point lights golden arch
across the sky brighter than stars hail civilisation how surreal like a bloody arty-farty flick in
pretentious boutique cinema past midnight now past one fuck the glass slipper I'm no
Cinderella you're no prince but that's okay who wants happy ever after anyway just the
moment presentness now postponed future love & lust what's the deal don't analyse it we're
so different I'm an Austen girl girly swot you're a laid back cyberboy no matter who cares
polars do connect will connect just get inside me outside.

background knowledge, and the poems make a lot of weird juxtapositions and jump and leap. They're clearly written, but I think it was one of the hardest books to write.

pm Which women poets would you see as antecedents to what you're doing now?

dp Definitely Emily Dickinson, who is one of those amazing, inexhaustible poets. Her range is fantastic, and the condensation in her language is almost like a form of nuclear energy. I find her a very challenging, almost scary poet.

pm It's interesting that you bring up the idea of condensation, because a lot of your language, and your use of the line, are very condensed.

dp My teachers there are eastern poets, but as I get older and crankier I don't have the patience anymore for bullshit. If someone asks me to wade through something difficult and obscure it better be worth it! Life's short. So if as a reader I can reduce a complex, self-indulgent rave into something that's basically very simple, I get quite angry.

pm Apart from Dickinson, what other sources might you be effected by?

dp Well, in *THE MONKEY'S MASK* there's a huge amount of Basho, which might sound extremely surprising, but he's important in that condensation of lines, that sense of the moment. He was in many ways the father of Zen in Japan, one of their pre-eminent poets. The title of my book comes from a late Basho haiku, and I got the idea of writing *THE MONKEY'S MASK* when I was doing creative writing workshops in prisons, in Long Bay gaol. I was teaching haiku, and one guy said "You could write a detective novel in haiku." At first I thought he was just taking the micky, but later I thought he was absolutely right! Those moments of revelation, in the present tense with the senses working moment to moment to moment, that acute awareness, are when detective fiction is at its most interesting. This is very close to poetry. Raymond Chandler was a failed poet who then went to crime fiction, and his books work much more on a poetic level than a pop level – their image, tone and mood, and his fantastic use of language. They're virtually prose poems in some ways. Of course I didn't attempt to write *THE MONKEY'S MASK* in haiku, although I think linked haiku can go on forever and do all sorts of things, but it gave me the idea that each poem could be very, very intense, and the reader would feel physically in a particular moment. So Basho is important to me.

Another writer would be Dorothy Parker, who wrote those sharp, short, bittersweet throwaway poems, which are fantastic. And Catullus, the Latin poet -- "I hate and I love."

pm That's a fascinating aesthetic you're describing. A lot of work since the seventies has elevated the elaboration of ideas, via an attraction to the poetics of 'the long poem', whereas you seem to be undercutting that approach on the level of each individual poem while placing them in extended series.

dp It's got a lot to do with me and my boredom threshold. The poems I enjoy cut to the chase. I want to write poems that I enjoy reading. I think poets should ask themselves whether they enjoy their own work, and if they don't, ask themselves: "Why not, am I boring myself as well as others?"

pm You appear to enjoy performing your work too.

dp Yes, I do. It's hard presenting new work, but when I have poems and I know how they click, it's like getting up and singing a song. It's a buzz.

pm To move on, can you tell me something of where your work is heading now?

dp One of the big themes of writing *THE MONKEY'S MASK* was Poetry, and one of the big themes in my next collection, *WHAT A PIECE OF WORK*, is The Artist. One of the main protagonists, a psychiatrist, sees himself as an artist with the ultimate materials, other people's brains and souls. He can make his own creations.

pm Why did you choose to write on someone like that?

dp On a coarse level, I have a certain Gothic, ghoulish interest in the madhouse and the people who

work in such places. On a more sophisticated level I'm interested in the mind as something material that can be played with. There's a wonderful line in Hamlet, when Hamlet's talking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and he says something like "you might fret me but you can't play me", meaning he is not a recorder they could play. This brings up both a sense of his integrity, and of how fragile a mind can be.

pm One of the main characters in *WHAT A PIECE OF WORK* is Frank. Where did he come from?

dp The starting point for Frank was Francis Webb, but I left him behind and have created an entirely fictional character. He's very little like Francis Webb.

pm But in a sense he is an ideal starting point for a critique of the assumptions built into the trope of tortured, romantic artist. He possesses a lot of credibility in Australian poetry, but also represents some of those traditional assumptions about poets and poetry.

dp Yes, the mad genius. My character Frank is a kind of deconstruction of the mad genius, and at the same time I've made him a human and sympathetic character. It's a very humanistic position, but I've not made him a sentimental character. I didn't want cute madness – he is really mad, and suffering, because he is mentally ill. In the early stages of the book the psychiatrist is genuinely trying to alleviate that, even though later on he doesn't care at all. And despite Frank's frailty, he also has strength and dignity. That's part of my creation; I've created a man who is gifted, mentally ill and in an institution where he is absolutely vulnerable.

pm This is a big shift from *THE MONKEY'S MASK*, where your representation of the body was situated in discourses of gender and sexuality. Frank's body is the subject of very different frames.

dp Yes, he has no control over what happens to him. In *THE MONKEY'S MASK* Jill suffers an extraordinary and very potent sexual infatuation. So does Mickey. But the point there was that one has a choice in such things, and it can be fun going to hell and back. Frank doesn't have that choice, while in *THE MONKEY'S MASK* they're embracing it. Frank's struggling to function, to write his poems and survive in a hideous environment, to negotiate to have his space and writing materials. In a psychiatric institution these things are privileges, not rights. His body is often subject to extraordinary therapies, not all of which he consents to.

pm So in many ways Frank's subjectivity is taken over, or blurred by discourses of medical knowledge and psychiatric practices. Is this unlike the representations of subjectivity you write into your earlier books?

dp Yes. His is not a sexual subjectivity. He's not in any way moved by sexual desire, and in fact he is entirely isolated from that. It's his mind and his tentative grasp on his art that counts.

pm Frank's persona is something very new to your oeuvre. Why are you using such a figure?

dp Well, I haven't really thought about this, so I'm thinking on my feet here. I've always been interested in poets and extremists, and I'm aware that poetry has become so comfortable, with no sense of urgency. A lot of poets live out all that false romantic bullshit. And the important thing about Frank is that he hasn't chosen some sort of groovy option or lifestyle, and yet he's writing poems.

PM 🐒

Poetry: can it be used to spruik beer, clothing or footwear? Will poetry make a difference in the 21st century?

CORDITE is interested in your views on the role of poetry in modern society.

Write us a letter, write us a poem – but remember: Only you can make a difference!

We didn't sit in a cafe and talk about our lives

Well I'd been out there and I'd done stuff, and I didn't meet anyone – or, if I did, we didn't sit in a cafe and talk about our lives, but then, maybe I didn't even go out, and maybe I didn't do anything – maybe *things* did things, or maybe nothing happened, or everything did – everything did everything, though not simultaneously, but at anytime, or out of time, so maybe I was here or there and things were happening, and other people and other things were doing things or not doing things – for instance, maybe I did something, and then I didn't, maybe I walked down the street and picked up a plate, then I stepped on a twig, and then someone in Holland – maybe one of my cousins – picked up a paint-brush and painted *nothing*, or painted a *trap*, or a *wing* or a *plate* – he might have picked up an acorn and eaten it – he might have chewed it till it became a fine mash, then spat it into his hand and squished it into a *hole in the wall*, or into a *bottle-top* or a *shell*. He might have broken off the end of that shell and put it into the mouth of a suckling kitten. Maybe things were exploding everywhere, or, maybe not exploding, but constantly and dramatically changing. I might have walked into the street, when suddenly the floor beneath me dropped twenty metres and the building across the road leapt into the air. Peter, the guy I work with, came up to me, and maybe I didn't even recognise him at first because his face had stretched and his mouth was still back at the cross-roads and it took a while for his words to reach me, but then he said let's sit in a cafe and talk about our lives, so we were in a cafe and I said yeah, well, this and that's been happening, and he said something about pillars – so many pillars in this cafe – but what about your life, I said, and he just laughed, he laughed and laughed – what was that funny something someone in the Gilbert and Sullivan Society said? oh yes, that's right, now I remember, but on the subject of his life, he said, yes, it is sometimes like that – a horrible thing, horrible, horrible, but it's also good 'cause that's how we like it.

Zoe V

Last Train Starring Fatigue Lady

Last train, starring fatigue lady
 . . . and don't fall down the aisle
 lady with peroxide
 and pearly peach nailed
 lady, your slumber won't cushion your fall
 lady, lady you're about to cut my
 midnight with your gold jewellery
 on the lino, lady,
 remember you're on a choo-choo clatter track, lady
 awake in your seedy train tartan boudoir
 lady, awake and fight that,
 fight that army of fatigue
 lady, on the way
 go home and water the night
 go home and watch the shadows grow,
 deep, dark and dense as flesh
 but don't fall!
 just don't fall down the aisle lady.

1998's Next Wave Festival is a shift into arts festival territory I have not undertaken before. The shift is in approach, in the conception of the idea of a festival, in the way myself and my Next Wave co-workers made/assembled/programmed the festival. This simple shift was: why distinguish between art forms?

This is a shift both brave and obvious. Brave, because it creates a whole new set of problems (How will the media react? Will they find the festival too difficult to

played a large part in Australian literary culture. It has a contemporary attitude and approach to literary work and ways of reading, and a lack of self-consciousness in accepting that Australian writing is part of a global culture. *CORDITE* has none of the desperate nationalism which founded some of Australia's oldest literary magazines.

Putting Writers

KERRY WATSON of the Next Wave Festival says some very nice things about *CORDITE* and Contemporary Writing

in Context

deal with? What if people don't know what to go to?). Obvious because it is so normal, so relevant, so appropriate, as first made apparent in the responses to the festival brief – that artists are thinking beyond art form, beyond genre, beyond the kinds of neat labels that might be suggested by funding guidelines, and they have been for a long time.

Having said that it is no longer appropriate to be obsessed with labelling one's principle area of art form practice, I put together the text program of this year's festival, which necessarily demands some kind of delineated boundaries. This issue of *CORDITE* is part of the text program, and has its own delineations, in that it has a commitment to poetry and poetics.



***CORDITE* has a fresh approach** towards design and editorial style. It has a focus on an area of writing which is currently in a strangely disempowered position as far as mainstream publishing is concerned. *CORDITE* has an attitude about it, a 'just do it' approach and creates both a space for poetry and a variety of discourses about poetry. And it does so without making a song and dance.

CORDITE's 1998 Next Wave Festival issue is the result of a recognition of the similarities between, and the different spaces occupied by, these two organisations. Next Wave and *CORDITE* demand similar standards and levels of artistic quality, and at the same time make it a priority that they enable artists to take risks. They also provide a space where questions, explorations and sometimes mistakes can happen. *CORDITE*'s editorial is young and fresh, and is thus in tune with the ethos of Next Wave, the shift into traditional spaces by emerging artists and those working in non-traditional forms.

This publication is different in many ways to the more established literary magazines and journals which have

One of the things that initially attracted me to *CORDITE* was its fresh editorial direction. Peter Minter and Adrian Wiggins have created a magazine with a conceivably substantial impact on the culture of literary journals in this country. *CORDITE* is a magazine which has a commitment to excellence and a very contemporary approach to literary publication whilst still operating within traditional spaces. There was no question of suggesting that *CORDITE* change its editorial direction, or the magazine's design, for its 1998 Next Wave issue.

CORDITE's refreshing approach to literary publishing is immediately obvious in its tabloid format. There are a number of writers in this issue who have never had works published in mainstream literary publications, and some whose works have never been published in print form at all.

This Next Wave Festival issue of *CORDITE* is a celebration of a relatively new publication which represents the quality and diversity of Australian writing. The purpose of the collaboration of Next Wave and *CORDITE* on this project is not to create a media splash and suggest a blank slate of artistic achievement in order to paint our efforts large. This issue is merely saying to readers, "look, this stuff is really good." Magazines such as *CORDITE* create a space for that work. They provide a context. As does a festival.

Next Wave is proud to present this issue of *CORDITE* to artists and to audiences of contemporary writing, and is most interested in watching the directions this artistically and culturally challenging publication takes in the future. May you enjoy both *CORDITE* and the Next Wave Festival.

Kerry Watson 

David Hornblow

Untitled

Children don't fall flat
but there he is
flat silent and broken
if he were awake
he would certainly move
into a more comfortable position

It's a weird world
morality is fluid
people get shot
people get fucked
extraordinary things happen constantly
then a young boy, alone
on a shop awning
is not so strange
it registered, though

From an open window
he walked towards the front of
the overhanging
looked down
chewing on nothing to get some spit
there were no cars directly below
so he went sideways –
a supporting rod lead from the building
to the edge of the awning
a large bolt fixed it solid
he lifted a leg over
where the bolt protruded
and looked down
misjudged
his weight was committed
and he fell

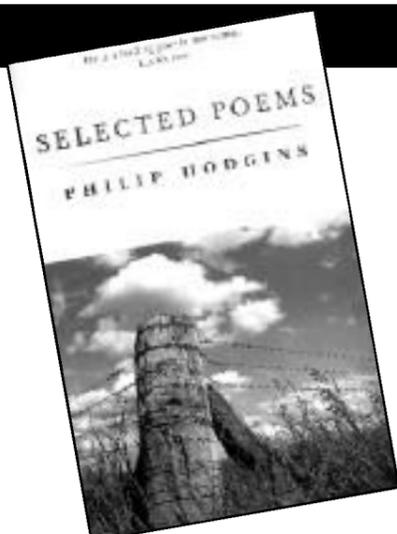
Straight
like an arrow
head first
arms stretched out in front
he was diving
there was no water
I closed my eyes

When I opened them, moments later,
I was surprised, confused
expecting to see him
stuck up to his waist in the road
and ripples in the asphalt

Selected Poems

PHILIP HODGINS

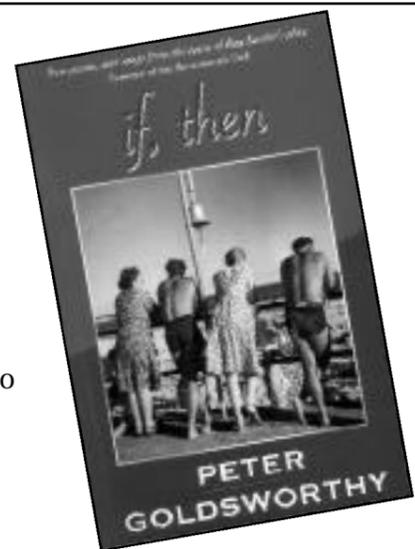
Two major preoccupations are interwoven through most of Philip Hodgins' work: the land and his impending early death. This volume, the poet's own selection, represents all his published books and includes the verse novella *Dispossessed*.



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.



Patricia Prime

Preparation

Wrapped in a heavy overcoat
of herringbone tweed, as if
freezing, he became a recluse.

He had forsaken painting
for drawing and was busy
filling sketchbooks in preparation.

Portrayal of the whores
caused him anguish.
The artist did everything

possible to give his image
the smell of cordite.
The charms of the horrible

intoxicated him. The menace
of his face derived, it seems,
from silent movies.

The strong gaze he turns
on us from his photographs
seduces, possesses and tries to shock.

Michael Farrell

fractured adonis

we are the dead hours of rain days in
the desert & like it alright compared to
breaking our bones over antarctic zones
shouldnt i be driven home tonight
whole as ever i wore glasses in the gardens
of pleasure or lifes little loves the ironies
so few accept im under a hot conception
waiting for the dawn dryeyed in the rain
theres trouble a police cordon & outofit
men collapse in the sand dont lose your cap
dont lose whats under it under a wire crown
this is where the queen came to sit & strip
someone else with a great chest modelled
for a bit of god the cigarettes are smoked

egypt

i reckon its egyptian when acolytes breathe in
banks sway & twelve black speakers come on stage
marigolds gleam in poems & protect us yes but
giant capes are more effective shoes that
leave no trace of me when picking through
the wrinkles & amazonia without podia posing
in ways that put supermodels to table i didnt
smoke dope yesterday & im not going to smoke
dope tomorrow because im going to be on the
triple j hot 100 with all the other symphony
players talking in the shadow of the valley &
hearing no evil in silent movies of menstrual
men the egyptian conniption is that beckettian
figure in white linen deciding our toilet breaks
the girls eating leaves with crackers in their hair

Tracy Ryan

Rain

for Michael

'Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain'
– GM Hopkins

1

You drive as the rain drives
now steady now squalling
a car full of storm and vespers

One voice in the mass
seeks you out and pierces
like those cruel frequencies
dogs keen at
unfelt by the rest of us

Another dimension, your pain,
the banks and brakes, the chervil
and the birds – the rain, even
invested and utterly private

Just for this moment I cross
into it, hurtling down
the relentless lane

2

To master hurt by sipping at it
to acquire the taste
or burn the lips senseless

Conversely to spit it out
like words a stroke wrote off
resurfacing

3

Stepping out
real rain can't touch you

Drought of another order
I have been there forgotten
Tell me again

It's a kind of home
you're guiding us through
we may miss some allusions but
will stick with you

The book continues, brilliant to the end,
and then, at midnight, the clock adds its applause.
Outside, the cat is chasing its own tail.

Kevin Hart 'Reading at Evening'

This will be imperfect. I want to say it now, get it out of the way from the point where I begin, and take the four or five implements I have before me and continue. I consciously accept this will be naive, if one can make such a gesture, and that having concluded with only Gyatry Spivak's 'Preface', and cast an eye over Anthony Lawrence's 'The Glance Returned', Maurice Blanchot in hand, I want to set out and force them into complicity for the duration of just one afternoon. In a café, opposite the Musée D'Orsay, a waiter delivers my drink and I press play on my walkman...

Returning The Glance

Michael
Brennan on
**ANTHONY
LAWRENCE**

One
We find the poet at seven years of age, in the back seat of the standard middle-class station wagon, at a moment of illumination – turning to face night, the nocturnal, the knowledge and first awareness of death. The poet at seven faces an essential nothingness, a rupture in the symbolic, the significance of words or objects, and so, by extension, also suffers a rupture in his experience of the 'real'. The poet at 39 returns to this space and rehearses the moment of anti-illumination through the action of the poem, and uses the transformation of the real into text as an attempt to close this rupture.

By the overly-catchy 'anti-illumination' I mean to emphasise Lawrence's inversion of the initial moment of illumination through the act of writing. By illumination one is suggesting the opening out of a

Mary Ruefle

Marked

Because I was not marked
Because I had neither fame
nor beauty nor inquisitiveness.
Because I did not ask.
Because I used my hands.
Because I ate potatoes in dirty jackets
fished from the rocks.
Because I used a pail at night.
Because when Betty C. explained
to Betty D. the nature of the problem
I did not understand.
Because I had no silver.
Because I was like my mother before me
and kept to myself mostly.
Because humanity used the footpath.
Because my backbone started to rot.
Because I finished my term on earth
and had no knowledge of either
fear nor care, no morning knowledge,
no knowledge of evening,
and those who came before
and those following after
had no more knowledge of me
than I had of them.

truth, an absolute, to the young poet's awareness. The knowledge of death constitutes for Lawrence both the endless opening of the text and the simultaneous irony of attempting to enclose the moment of closure within the text/life of the poem/poet. An impossible task. Following Jacques Derrida, via Spivak, one turns to the possibility that "We must learn to use and erase our language at the same time," while language, as does the poet in Lawrence's poem, seeks to enclose that which always leads away into the unknown, into the darkness of night, the Orphic space beyond language. Lawrence embraces Blanchot's 'nocturnal' vision, "Whoever devotes himself to the work is drawn by it towards the point where it undergoes impossibility. This experience is purely nocturnal, it is the very experience of night." This knowledge, the darkness the poet faces, is the face of death which always turns its face away from the living, from the possibility of illumination. The poet approaches an impossible task with the very tool that makes it impossible; based upon an 'originary non-

trace', language brings 'death' to the exploration, expression and so definition of the living.

Lawrence recalls his first moment of the recognition of death, of a finality which may not be, obscure in its profundity, caught within the white noise of existence: the car radio, the parents' tennis match, the smell of their sweat and cigarettes. Our poet's naive understanding of death appears within, interrupts, the material, the sensual; it exists as a rupture that persists for 32 years until the poem is itself written. Lawrence's sudden awareness of death creates a break in his experience of the hitherto seemingly timeless nature of reality, leaving existence moving towards a point of unknown departure. Its effect is not only to induce anxious recourse to death's counterpart, Eros ("you touch yourself under the blanket, carefully") but to, thereby, place the depth of this experience, all experience, under erasure. Death breaks the certainty of the text, folding it in on itself, so that the child-poet is unable to allow reality to continue in its previously structured and reliable guise as 'reality'.

Confronted by the paradox of death, of the end which may not be an end, of the final denial of a teleotic, or a preordained explanation of existence, Lawrence is also questioning language itself, which has shown itself to be flawed and has moved itself from depth to surface, opening into a discourse of absurd possibilities. Lawrence encounters the vertiginous knowledge that what is is provisional, tentative at best and held together by the simultaneous and enigmatic movement beyond the knowable, toward death, and paradoxically toward the space of 'writing'. Lawrence performs along the parallels of language and death, the two points that run off into the Euclidean distance appearing to meet but never possibly doing so. Blanchot explains, "no one is linked to death by real certitude. No one is sure of dying. No one doubts death, but no one can think of certain death except doubtfully." Lawrence appears at first to be naively certain of death, but extricates himself through the process of writing. He places the moment of illumination under writing as erasure, thus allowing death its due as textual possibility.

One would have to concede death is a "radical alterity", an absolute unknowable, or unknowable otherness. One cannot write death. In her discussion of Derrida's heritage, Spivak writes that Freud implies "the psyche is a sign-structure 'sous rature', for, like the sign, it is inhabited by a radical alterity." It is clear that Freud precipitates both Derrida and Lacan through the implications he draws around the unconscious. Freud states that this alterity is "the true psychical reality ... in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world by the communication of our senses."

Anthony Lawrence

The Glance Returned

When you are seven years old,
lying in the back of a station wagon
while your parents play night tennis;
when the knowledge that you are going
to die one day comes through
the rallies, players' voices,
and songs from a dashboard radio
left on like an audible night light;
you listen hard to the faultless
workings of your life: your heartbeat
muffled under a blanket; your breath,
painting cone-shaped plumes on the glass.
You trade sleep for the ache
of a nameless concept, and feel
the margins of your days begin to close.
You are not prepared for this.
You leave the car and look beyond
the capped, swinging court lights,
blurred by an attendant rain of moths
and flying ants, and you search
the sky for meaning. Linking stars
and smears of low, transparent cloud,
you find a wound in the side
of an overripe fig; a lizard,
its position on a stone betrayed
only when it blinks. But then
a tennis ball clears the fence,
a player laughs, and your parents return,
smelling of sweat and cigarettes.
When they ask why you're up so late;
what you're doing outside the car;
you've not the words for what you know.
On the way home, you lie down
and stare at the backs of their heads,
which are dark, then silver
in the lights of an overtaking lorry.
Your father turns the radio off.
Your mother turns to look at him.
They do not speak. You touch yourself
under the blanket, carefully,
and forget about death for awhile.
When the backs of their heads
flare again, you promise yourself
you'll remember that moment;
and you do, thirtytwo years later,
sitting up in bed, when your wife's face
is lit by a car pulling into the drive.
In the dark again, you sense her
glance at you. The glance returned,
you ask if she remembers
how old she was, or what she was doing
when her first thoughts of death arrived.
When she doesn't answer, you say
Star, fig, lizard, and wait for the lights
of another car to print
the shadows of your heads on the wall.

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Two

It is important to pause here and look more closely at the relationships between the unconscious, language and death, and the parts these might play in Lawrence's poem. Firstly, if one is to draw the senses into a parallel alignment with language, as Freud does by aligning the existential with the unconscious,

Continued on page 10

Hawke for Hawke

Hawke's grandparents for Hawke. Hawke's parents for Hawke.
 Hawke's special relationship with Hawke's mother (for Hawke).
 Hawke's special relationship with Hawke's father (for Hawke)
 & Hawke's father's special relationship with God (for Hawke).
MY WORD MY WORDS: THE COLLECTED SPEECHES OF A THREE YEAR OLD—
 Hawke's special offer of his picture book to any purchaser of
 ten or more copies of *THE HAWKE MEMOIRS* all signed by R J Hawke.
 Hawke's scholarships & Hawke's Rhodes Scholarship for Hawke &
 now the Robert James Lee Hawke Open Scholarship (for Hawke).
 Hawke's drinking. Hawke's drinking records. Hawke's drinking
 to anyone who'll drink to Hawke. Cheers. Bottoms up. To A A.
 Hawke as advocate for Hawke & the Australian Council of Trade Unions.
 Then Hawke as President of the ACTU for the ACTU (& for R J Hawke).
 Hawke's affairs that would have remained only Hawke's affair
 if Hawke hadn't cried about them in prime time to win votes.
 Bill Hayden as Minister for Foreign Affairs & Governor General—
 quite literally Bill Hayden for Bob Hawke as Prime Minister.
 Concensus for Hawke. Hawke at the centre of his own concensus.
 Hawke's special relationship with perms & hairdressers (& mirrors)
 & cricketers & yachtsmen & golfers & punters & tycoons (& mirrors).
 Hawke's special (if not *unique*) relationship with dinkum Aussies &
 his own signature & autograph books of all shapes & sizes (for Hawke).
 Hawke's special international relationship with The Greater Israel
 with Lebanon, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights &
 with Hawke's & Bush's U S of A & Hawke's & Gorby's old U S S of R
 & Hawke's very very special relationship with none other than Hawke
 in full frontal crying over Chinese tanks pulping Hawke's Chinese
 as Hawke would cry over spilt memoirs hawked, remaindered & pulped—
 Hawke morally outraged & Greatly moved by the morally outrageous &
 working himself up into a frenzy of rhetorical snot trailing down
 like the Red Flag hanging limp over the last of the Red Flags—
 that rendezvous with History if not with Destiny for Hawke
 & The Silver Bodgie & Old Silver & old R J if not J C Hawke
 old (Bob for no jobs) Robert James Lee Hawke (for Hawke).

Greg McLaren

Kurri sonnet

Chocolate on your breath at the bus-stop
 is instant forgetting. In five minutes
 Kurri will recede from bus back window.
 Maitland will loom too slowly. Hamilton,
 Teralba. Soon Redfern, Sydney Central.
 Now the 5:31 from Cessnock slides
 down the hill, and Rover Motors' motto
 could be Slessor's: "on time, all the time":
 so says the once-silver lettering now white,
 barely so. The shrinking town set atop
 two flat hills is a nasty surprise we
 no longer live in. We are going home.
 I kiss the taste in your mouth. Going home,
 away from dickhead rednecks, names unknown.



'Ave a Good Weekend Mr Hawke...

Pam Brown

A howling in favour of failures...

It's time to lay my
 zip-drive on the table –
 here is where we all
 washed up –
 the caffeine failed,
 the water pipes
 hammering,
 pink batts
 making it difficult
 to eavesdrop,
 April Fool's Day
 on its way,
 all the universities
 look the same,
 scornful undergraduates
 plastered, clinging
 to each new
 generic era,
 in every cloning
 an undercurrent
 insincerity –
 every taunt you make,
 our fond acquaintance,
 (courtroom opportunists
 losing
 their appeal),
 push a barrow
 or an envelope?
 many participants
 lining up
 for a career development
 workshop –
managing win/win goals
& situations
 this one's called

we will then stumble over and over the limiting nature of awareness itself – the faultlines of difference arising from the isolation of truth, as it is manifested as an absolute, into the subjective. Obviously so, and one might give a Derridean sigh of thanks for those faultlines. Freud names the radical alterity that exists within consciousness the ‘id’, the ‘it’, signifying the presence of the ‘other’. However, the other or the id, as radical alterity, are only the presence of an absence, and as ‘other’ are essentially unknowable to the stabilised, continuative or lineal function of the ‘ego’. As Lawrence points out it is a perfect imbalance, leading the poet towards the night, the other, the explication of the unknown. ‘It’ might make its presence known or ‘sensed’, but it simultaneously withdraws to become deferred, denied, and eluded knowledge.

Amid the near mathematical precision and the sensual presence of “the faultless /workings of your life”, the young poet discovers the alterity of death – the heartbeat “muffled under a blanket”, the “cone-shaped plumes on the glass” from his breath. This alterity, the awareness of it, casts a new light on reality, it heightens the symbolic and forces it to resonate with the possibility of unspeakable meaning. Unspeakable not in the strict sense of taboo, as with Sade or Bataille, but unspeakable in the sense of ineffable, being beyond the symbolic. Kristeva speaks of the semiotic, the voice of the ‘other’, that breaks through the symbolic in gaps and fissures, much as Derrida seeks it out through the same gaps and fissures of the text. It is this point of ‘awakening’ that commands the poet’s gaze, directs it through its endless resistance to the alterity and attendant unsatiable desire for knowledge of the ‘other’. Nietzsche writes, “The will to power can manifest itself only against resistances, therefore it seeks that which it resists.” Robert Adamson puts it eloquently enough, “There has to be a fight, /I can’t imagine anything, if I’m not up against a law.” (*SONNETS TO BE WRITTEN FROM PRISON*). The law here is the law of *différance*, whereby what is written is only done so as erased, that we must presume the knowledge of death is ineffable, yet still seek it out, reaching for an impossible point of junction between the parallels of the existential and Blanchot’s ‘nocturnal knowledge’. Lawrence shows us that we must sense what we can never possibly comprehend.

It is the very nature of desire that it seeks meaning through ‘union’ with the other and that, as awareness grows more radical in its discipline, it demands a shift away from the logos towards the margins of alterity. In an absurd gesture, Lawrence’s young poet looks “to the sky for meaning”, and by doing so invokes Nietzsche’s definition of truth by approaching through metaphor the alterity he senses:

Linking stars

and smears of low, transparent cloud,
you find a wound in the side
of an overripe fig; a lizard,
its position on a stone betrayed
only when it blinks.

Metaphor, as Nietzsche puts it, is an act of dissimulation. One seeks to establish meaning through the identification of unity and the equalisation of the dissimilar. Nietzsche sets down, “What, therefore, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms; ... truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions.” Truth, for Nietzsche, as for Lawrence in part, is a matter of figuration and forgetfulness, and is linked to the will to power, to the precept that consciousness is architectonic, seeking to render meaning within an otherwise pre-perceptively chaotic realm. It is perception that models and allows meaning, while absolute meaning, the disclosure of presence, is withheld by the very process of perception which seeks to grant it.

For the poet, the consciousness of absence is amplified in the work and, in the words of Blanchot, “Whatever he does, the work withdraws him from what he does and from what he can do”. One would be hard pressed not to note the theological aspect towards which these ruminations may tend. While discussing the imperfectly suicidal Kirilov, Blanchot is not melodramatic when he states, “God is, for him, the face of his death.” That said, Blanchot points out that for Kirilov it is not so

Peter Skrzynecki

Buddha, Birdbath, Hanging Plant

Three things stopped him in his stride
when he stepped out
into the garden – three things
under the great peppercorn
that he planted years ago:
the statue of a Buddha,
a birdbath and a plant in a basket
hanging from one of the peppercorn’s branches.

The Buddha pointed to the earth,
to the ‘here and now’.
The birdbath, filled with water,
reflected the tree above it.
The plant, a flowering hoya,
hung over the Buddha and birdbath like a crown.

His time of sorrow
vanished – as if pain and fear
had been nothing more than vapours
trailing through his imagination.
Somewhere, from out of an ancient past,
he heard a voice, “The centre of the universe
is a bellylaugh.”
The Buddha smiled; the water
in the birdbath rippled;
the hoya stirred
in a circular motion.

He stepped back, startled –
as if someone had pushed him.
Then he saw the great tree itself.

much God that is the issue, but more this nameless, fundamentally anonymous power, the same that the young poet confronts in Lawrence’s poem. Blanchot interrupts the theological association, levels it to the existential plight of our would-be suicide-hero, Kirilov:

Does it not make of him a nameless, powerless being, essentially cowardly and surrendered to dispersion?...How freely can I go into death, in full control of my freedom? Even when, with an ideal and heroic resolve, I decide to meet death, isn’t it still death that comes to meet me, and when I grasp it does it not grasp me? Does it not loosen all hold upon me, deliver me to the ungraspable? (p98)

Lawrence’s young poet does not make an interlocutor of the reader as Blanchot does, rather places the reader in the older poet’s moment of remembrance, the recollection of that first hint of infinite finality. Lawrence removes the author, “When you are seven years old...when the knowledge that you are going / to die one day comes through”, and so brings death into the forefront. The poem is wrought by an absence, by the lack of an “I”, the dispersion of subjectivity into an in-definition of the subject. And so there are two poets here, one of the forgotten past and one of the present moment of recollection, the moment of writing. The process of writing is thus heterogeneous, substantiated by the substanceless and transfiguring nature of memory, much as Nietzsche conceives of truth as the making equal of the dissimilar.

Part of Derrida’s project is to point out that word and thought never become one, that writing is always *sous*

ature, or ‘under erasure’. He draws on Nietzsche’s comment that “The intellect, as a means for the preservation of the individual, develops its chief power in dissimulation”. Lawrence is not far behind with the lyrical “you’ve not the words for what you know” and by his subsequent dissimulation of the knowledge of death at the poem’s end: “you say/ *Star, fig, lizard*”. Within writing we can have dying, but never death. Without the final compensation of death, its amplification through ‘dying’ may only ever function *sous rature*, the point of death never being reached in writing.

“To speak is essentially to transform the visible into the invisible; it is to enter a space which is not divisible, an intimacy which, however, exists outside oneself.” Lawrence reaches towards this, Blanchot’s idea of ‘death’s space’ where the will towards transformation is focussed in writing, in the ‘word’s space’. Faced by the ‘infinitely dead’, as Rilke would have it, Blanchot marks out the contradictory process Lawrence is himself engaged in. Death is ‘perceived’ and made graspable, transformed through metaphor into the tangible word – “*Star, fig, lizard*”. It is, in effect, a process transcendent in its tenor, as the absolute, the infinite is sublimated, or perhaps subsumed, by the “limits and affirmation of a homogenous space.” Meanwhile, however, the transformation is doubled over itself, as it similarly effects the transformation of the real into the imaginative, the metaphor open to inversion, backtracking, which effects a moment of dispossession. The metaphor is transformed, in the presence of death, into the ungraspable, and so dispossesses the poet/reader

of the moment of transformation, One might think of Nietzsche's Zarathustra at once biting the serpent that is biting his tongue.

Three

Death is in the poem, but only as an awareness that is indefinitely deferred as it never reveals itself as presence. Lawrence substitutes three metaphors, drawn from the sky, and so, as far as Nietzsche is concerned, invokes forgetting. The metaphors become the truths they obsfucate and thereby allow forgetting. By the poem's conclusion, "thirty two years later", Lawrence appears in a brooding moment, awoken by the illuminatory light of mimesis, "a car pulling into the drive", which takes him back to the night of his first nocturnal awareness. Death is with him as supplicant, not as an absolute but as the metaphors he has carried with him, and so it remains *sous rature*.

Not to miss the point, we would do well to finish looking at the glance returned, as this is the crux of the poem as far as can be seen. The poet, in a moment of Orphic expansion, senses death looking upon him and returns the glance. The poet faces death, looks back over the shoulder to the metaphoric Eurydice and so faces the loss of the absolute, the possibility obscured in death's space; through the glance returned, the poet is placed within the vertiginous movement towards an absolute that may never be present, that is always only a full absence, an absence of plenitude and meaning deferred, the metaphor become truth as truth becomes forgotten. The poetry, the poem itself, appears through this loss. The symbolic, therefore, does indeed present itself as alchemic. As Blanchot points out,

If the poem could become a poet, Orpheus would be the poem: he is the ideal and the emblem of poetic plenitude. Yet he is at the same time not the completed poem, but something more mysterious and more demanding: the origin of the poem, the sacrificial point which is no longer the reconciliation of the two domains, but the abyss of the lost god, the infinite trace of absence.

God is dead, long live god, just as Derrida manages to place the symbolic at the mercy of the semiotic, 'writing' as always under erasure, placing the abyss within the abyss, and the poet discovers a plenitude built from absence. Lawrence allows meaning to appear within the otherwise meaningless: the movement of the sky, the tentative nature of recollection and the play of association: the full absence of death. He mobilises possibility, and seeks to occupy death through writing. In Derrida's lexicon, via Spivak, writing is that gesture which both frees us from and grounds us within the enclosure of the metaphysical. Within Lawrence's remembrance one is left in the endless process of dying, a movement towards death, the dissemination of metaphors for death ("Star, fig, lizard" and "the shadows of your heads on the wall"), the continued return of the glance from the everted face of death, but never to find death. One must note the ambiguity of the glance returned, as it is returned through recollection of the past, a movement away from death, an evasion.

With this in mind, one may view the two faces, that of writing, that of death, turning from one another. The glance is always as evasive and evaded as it is penetrating and penetrated – when I grasp it does it not grasp me? Death, reading Lawrence through Blanchot, is the power of the poem, which enables 'writing' to be executed. It is the possibility of metamorphosis, the transformative path between absence and presence that may be inevitably circular, one signifying the other, but only under the principle of différance:

the signifier and signified are interchangeable; one is the difference of the other; the concept of the sign itself is no more than a legible yet effaced, unavoidable tool. Repetition leads to a simulacrum, not to the 'same'. (Spivak, lxiv)



As the rain starts to fall over the Musée D'Orsay, my hot chocolate finished and a voice on my walkman singing 'on a gathering storm comes a tall handsome man/ in a dusty black coat with a red right hand', I finish knowing that this is and has been provisional, that truth remains provisional as always, a detour via metaphors and fiction; creating a "truth"

In Memory of His Father, Don Rodrigo Manrique

Let the sleeping soul remember,
let the mind revive and wake
as it contemplates
how life wears by,
how death steals in
so quietly;
how soon is pleasure gone
becoming later painful
when recalled,
and how, from where we stand,
past times
were always better.
And since we are aware of how the present
at a certain point is gone
and ended,
if we judged wisely
we should deem what is to come
as gone already.
Let none be fooled, oh no,
into believing that that which is awaited
will last longer
than that which is no more,
for all things must surely go
down this same path.
Our lives are the rivers
that run into the sea,
which is death:
there go the lordships,
straight to their end
and waste;
there go the wealthy rivers,
there go the medium
and the smaller ones;
yet once arrived
they're all the same:
those who live from their own hands
and the rich.
This world is a road
into the next – an abode
devoid of thought;
yet good judgement is needed
to walk the journey
without fault.
We start off when we're born,
we walk while we live,
and we arrive
at the time of our death;
and so, when we die, we rest.

through metaphor ("Star, fig, lizard") which is not reducible and must be placed under erasure, and

as I have hinted before, deconstruction must also take into account the lack of sovereignty of the critic himself. Perhaps this "will to ignorance" is simply a matter of attitude, a realization that one's choice of evidence is provisional... "We must begin wherever we are and the thought of the trace... has already taught us it is impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely. Wherever we are; in a text where we already believe ourselves to be" (lxxv) (emphasis added)

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Paola Bilbrough

Bell Tongue

Shingle under sole, walking over
Silvermine shore with Shelley. She says
with sorrow: 'I'm not a detail person.'

Ferry to Lantau Island, each of us mistook
the time and destination yet we still meet. Beneath
fog thick as curds, the world's biggest Buddha.

Japanese tourists snapping approximations:
What may be a leg, the stone petals of a lotus.
Faces in the fog: scissor cuts in pale cloth.

Sightseeing thwarted, the sea gives grace
to a clumsy day, heaviness of stored tears
lifting as we lie in the sand, light receding.

Sky darkening at the edges, old parchment.
Shelley offers the word 'sonorous',
the soul's voice: bell tongue against sound-bow.

Evan Dando

X / incorrect

a ♂♀ was walking ~~at~~. the ♂♀ came upon a ♀♀
mailman home. mailman woman.

the ♂♀ was ~~at~~ at the ♀♀ W. it felt X.
mailman looking woman's breasts. incorrect.

it was X of the ♂♀ to ~~at~~ at the ♀♀ W.
incorrect mailman look woman's breasts.

the ♂♀ was ~~at~~. ♂ felt X. the ♀♀ was ~~at~~ about it.
mailman sad. he incorrect. woman sad

♀ told the ~~at~~ ♀.
she fisherman.

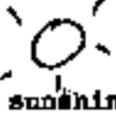
something was X. ~~at~~ were blotting out the 
wrong. dead fish sun.

the sky was white from their bones and black from their shadows.

they rained ↓ on the ♂♀. he was ~~at~~ he smelled
down mailman. sad.

X. the ~~at~~ found the ♂♀ and held him ↓.
bad. fisherman mailman down.

jabbed a ♀ in his ~~at~~.
fishhook penis.

and ~~at~~ he ~~at~~ with  and ~~at~~.
we'll happy sunshine Jesus.

Adam Aitken

The Lemons of Lands End

It was worth it, forty pence
for the *Cornish Express*.
(the broadsheet, not the bus) in a grocer shop
Lands End way.

And the wait, so long; for the bus
would never come they said,
no one here had seen it.

A ghost in the drizzle machine.

We gypsied on through fog
that kept us hypothermic,
but did not listen, and sung
that name, Lands End

which drew us on, what we headed for.
Unknown residue of North Atlantic light
not far from here. As west as you could go.

Meanwhile we'd wait, get dry, that sour shopkeeper's
rather-sell-you-nothing face
not big on trust; but did relent, and sold us
what we never knew we missed -
lemons, half a pound; the acid
scurvy cure: citrus six pack,
imports in a battered mildewed box
going nowhere else,
thick and bubbly skinned
desiccated by iridescent spore,
coral bloom behind a stack of Daily Telegraphs.
Warming in our hands.
What they were
what they had always been, sweeter
than they looked.

Jacques Prévert
translated by Michael Brennan

Despair seated on a bench

In a square on a bench
There is a man who calls to you when you pass
He has *pince-nez* an old grey suit
He smokes a little cigar he is seated
And he calls you when you pass
Or he simply gestures to you
You must not look at him
You must not listen to him
You must pass by
Make as though you have not seen him
As though someone awaits you
You must pass by quickly
If you look at him
If you listen to him
He will gesture to you and nothing
Can stop you then from going and sitting next to him
So he looks at you and smiles
And you suffer terribly
And the man continues to smile
And you smile the same smile
Perfectly
The more you smile the more you suffer
Terribly
The more you suffer the more you smile
Irremediably
And you rest there
Seated bound
Smiling on the bench
Of children playing very close to you
Of passers-by passing by
Calmly
Of birds taking flight
Leaving a tree
For another
And you rest there
On the bench
And you know you know
That never again will you play
Like those children
You know that never again will you pass by
Calmly
Like those passers-by
That never again will you take flight
Leaving one tree for another
Like these birds.

Tom Ball



Andrew Zawacki

Somniloquy

This is how I know: because summer kept escaping
from the wine, and people were left behind
with no explanation; because it's hours

until the paperboy leaves, or the beekeeper
wakes from his dreams of a beekeeper waking
to clean out the combs; because wind spent the night

in all the great houses, turning the corner onto familiar
streets; because a neighbor watered her lawn so someone
could look for someone else, and lose again; because waves

and nothing to stop them; because of unwritten letters;
because windows where light got trapped for a moment
and was overheard past midnight, promising you.

Michael Grane

Bed-Sitting Room

**A poem about pizza, anchovies
and serial numbers**

I'm sitting in a dingy room,
with a woman I don't love
eating take-away pizza
and I want to tell the world
that she knows I hate anchovies.

She tells me that all writers
are losers wearing their hearts
on their sleeves and how proud
she is of her son who's in jail
for murder how he's going down
swinging and then she squats on the floor,
pisses into a green Tupperware container
serial number 387. JJ KK M.O.P. 382.

I look around the room and see
second hand feathers on the bed,
red plastic roses with blue stems,
and shining in the moonlight
one gold and black vibrator,
serial number F.A.D. 8564.006
And I want to tell the world
that the following morning
I got the hell out of her room.

Editorial

This issue of *CORDITE* is dedicated to the memory of John Forbes (1950–98).

The involvement of the Next Wave Festival with this issue of *CORDITE* is the pleasing result of an approach made to *CORDITE* by Kerry Watson, text coordinator of the Festival. This joint venture has brought to readers of *CORDITE* new writing that we would not have been in a position to solicit. For the Next Wave Festival it has meant that young and emerging writers involved with the Festival appear in a national poetry review. See page 8 for Kerry's piece focussing on the Festival.

Four writers in this issue refer to the apparent parlous state of poetry publishing in Australia. Elsewhere, many point to the closing down of the poetry lists of major publishers like UQP and Harper Collins over the last few years as a sign that poetry publishing in Australia is in decline. Are we really the mourners by the grave, or are we the small and flighty community looking for portents of the gloomy fizzling end of poetry in the millenarian sky. Perhaps neither – as Martin Harrison once pointed out, the so-called major publishers were always, where poetry was concerned, only small publishers. To preserve the distinction for a moment, volumes of poetry in small, highly-subsidised print languishing in the wake of small-scale marketing campaigns are common to both large and small houses. So where UQP or Harper Collins closes its doors, in has stepped more devoted publishers like Polonious Press, Black Pepper and Cerberus to take their place alongside stayers Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Spinifex Press, Wakefield Press and Five Islands Press. One could be left with the impression that poetry publishing is alive, thriving and possibly doing as well as ever.

Perhaps there is a sense of nervousness when a major publisher turns its back on poetry. Has poetry, as Lauren Williams notes, become a high artform too concerned with its own unfolding rhetoric to address a large audience? Are poets, starved of their audience, spiralling off into a clinical and reflexive communion with themselves? Are poets a cabal of secret agents speaking in code? Of course, the challenge to poets has always been both to communicate and to invent. However, having risen to the challenge of invention down the decades of this century, have poets neglected the 'nicety' of communication, and lost their audience along the way. Are we, as John Bird suggests, a long way from the punters.

Where today, for example, is the poetry of ribald complaint, pungent opinion and invective. It has been a pleasure to publish in this issue 'Hawke for Hawke' by Graham Rowland, 'Wanker's Chair' by Bird and 'Serial Numbers' by John Tranter. However, reading the poetry sent to *CORDITE* in general, an editor could get the distinct impression that poets are politically asleep; and at such a tumultuous period of social and political upheaval. And this may be precisely because they are, as Lauren points out, aiming for highly-stylised Australian strand of art-poetry. It's not that *CORDITE* would argue for propaganda in verse – but well-written worldly comment from the poet-citizen is rare. This being said, hopefully readers have gathered that *CORDITE* is published with a jaunty whistle, a timely wink, a keen ear and a pluralistic heart.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *CORDITE*. Margie Cronin and Jennie Kremmer have recently joined our editorial team, and we hope you join us in welcoming them to *CORDITE*. With their help *CORDITE* will keep growing and improving, and the future is, we believe, very promising indeed. Make sure you're involved – send letters and poems, and pass *CORDITE* on to your friends and have them subscribe.

Finally we would like to thank the Australia Council for the Arts and the NSW Ministry for the Arts for expressing their confidence in our project in the forms, respectively, of a Foundation Grant and a grant for payment of contributors. With the benefit of these grants we will be able to publish *CORDITE* quarterly. We would also like to thank the Next Wave Festival for their financial support for this special issue.



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CORDITE gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Australia Council for the Arts, the NSW Ministry for the Arts and the Next Wave Festival.

Letters

Flipping the Bird

Wanker's chair

... problematic approaches to the lyric leads to argumentative closure, ironically confessional ...

Meanjin, Five Bells, Cordite – who cares
all we need to know is
whose turn in the chair
and who's to ask the questions,
and keep a dead straight face
while he's stripping bare?

... emphatic presence of inalienable landscapes, lacking political edge and infused with address to linearity of ...

See the splash turn her on
and watch her conjure up
answers from her looking glass,
to the questions he might have asked
had he not forgotten
the subject of the class.

... academic rhetoric obscuring collective performative experience, honestly manifested in space by linguistic ...

They stake their place as literati
play effete parlour games,
posing as trend leaders,
far from the gritty world
where the punters live
and talk without proofreaders.

'See – in the window there – they won't come to harm playing with themselves and that funny chair.'

John Bird Ocean Beach

John, thank you for your comments in verse!! They make one reflect. My proofreader and I live in Newtown, a formerly squalid suburb positively strewn with intellectuals guffing on in a fairly unabashed way, lavishing scores of words on subjects a more circumspect and worldly pundit might preemptorily dispense with in half-a-dozen humphs and a beery wink. You're quite right – people will say the funniest things, and journals will publish them in a very un-gritty manner. Actually, I was only saying to my proofreader the other day (I relate this without wishing to complain), just how gritty our little patch is becoming. Living as I do under the domestic flight path, beside the Parramatta line, a boutique-beer-bottle throw from the Prince's Highway (King St), some days I consider myself just a little gritty, though probably not in the robust way you have in mind. As for parlour games, we play Scrabble, Word Boggle and whist. I think Scrabble's on the way back, and I'm pleased to be a leader in this trend – we're currently working on a joint venture with Milton Bradley for the next issue. When I'm feeling a little creative on the Scrabble board, I ask my proofreader to leave the room – anyway, I'm sure she knows that I cheat. Finally however, I concede your point; publishing a poetry review is an abuse of the self. I won't presume to comment on the pastimes of the editors of *MEANJIN* or *FIVE BELLS*.

AW

Confessing to a domestic

I write in response to a comment made in the interview between Peter Minter and Philip Salom (*CORDITE* N°2): "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*."

On reading this my jaw dropped. Permit me to demur. 'Domestic' means 'of or involving the home or family'. For some reason it is considered to be a typically feminine poetic domain, a strange assumption given that every human, male or female, spends much of their life in this environment. No doubt this association between the domestic and the feminine (whether conscious or unconscious) is one of the reasons why many male poets consider the domestic to be an inferior subject for

poetry, certainly nowhere as worthy as that eternal external, the landscape.

Let us remember that the domestic contains within it the gamut of human experience, from birth to death and every drama and passion in between. It is as eternal and universal as any landscape. The extraordinarily moving poetry of Sharon Olds is almost exclusively based on the domestic, but the term falls well short of conveying the power, skill and universality of her work.

'Confessional' is a term used to describe the work of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and other (usually female) poets whose writings explore their own inner landscapes, or psychescapes. 'Confessional' is a dismissive, patronising term, loaded with its baggage of sin, secrecy and the dark little box in Catholic churches (all female-associated images). The best so-called 'confessional' poetry, far from being an outpouring of private peccadillos, is a privileged glimpse into the netherworld of what it is to be human. It takes personal courage to explore and illuminate the dark reaches of the psyche, and great artistry to translate that knowledge into good poetry.

In Minter's choice, paring and dismissal of the 'domestic confessional' (D&C, dilation and curettage?) I detect the stale odour of unconscious mysogyny. And a blindspot – surely Philip Salom's 'The Rome Air Naked', with its first person, present tense style and emotional, personal subject matter, fits the confessional cage?

As to disparaging *The Poet's Inner Life* as subject matter, this is akin to cursing your own Muse. The inner life is what makes us individual, it is the place where we make sense of the external, it is where life largely happens to us. It is a shared phenomenon, yet utterly singular, and for that reason, fascinating (at least I find it so). The tired old male/female dichotomy is at work again here – emotions, the private, inner life being perceived as female, whereas the outer public life of action and observation is viewed as male. Interestingly, the intellect, although ostensibly internal, is claimed as 'male'. It is not surprising then, that again the 'female' realm is devalued, but it is certainly disappointing. How much longer must this completely ridiculous and discriminatory mindset persist?

For some time yet it seems. Poetry's ruling class continue to uphold the external as the superior poetic domain. One only has to peruse the bulk of prize-winning poems and collections to realise that it is not the domestic/personal that has the ascendancy in Australian poetry, but the good old mountain-paddock-tree-silo-river-sky-bird-gone fishin' poem. A poet is not considered 'legit' unless s/he has produced at least one collection's worth of landscape. And, by the way, where does the equation 'domestic/confessional equals easy-to-digest' come from? Since when does subject automatically determine degree of difficulty?

Minter's complaint about the prevalence of D&C and its alleged ease of digestion must arise from his readings of literary magazines I haven't seen. No doubt some editors, somewhere, are choosing to publish personal poetry that communicates easily (an effect harder to achieve than Minter may think). But... too easily? Poisonous? Do I detect the fusty stench of elitism here? That if a poem is easily understood/enjoyed (ie: by *anybody*, shudder) it perforce can't be 'quality, cutting-edge poetry' (ie: stuff you need a doctorate to appreciate)? And worse, that if this kind of 'easy' poetry gains a toehold in Australian letters it will poison the art and lower standards?

All I can do is note that the so-called 'high standards' of Australian poetry have led four out of five major poetry publishers to cease publishing poetry, because it doesn't sell. 1997 was a black year for this reason, and the blame can't be laid at the feet of personal, openly communicative poetry, which rarely gets a look-in when it comes to the big prizes, grants and publishers.

Ironically, the very poetry that could touch a wider audience (and secure a publishing base for specialist poetries in doing so) is trivialised and/or ignored by the power brokers of poetry, so busy following fashions and guarding the bastions of high art that they can't see the foundations are crumbling.

Letters are continued on page 23

Bread

A slice – I'll take it neat. I'll take it
as a treat for the brethren, a tidy morsel
for their tedious mouths, who tried to tame me
with a stick. Poled (the outboard motor
broken down) for hours through a swamp,
the Okefenokee, surprise party, was it
my birthday? – festoons of snakes, dead friends
materialising from mist, how was it
that I came upon dervishes, that cemetery
on the outskirts of Khartoum? – dust wheel, trance
gyre, a pile of shoes in its center, at the entrance
to a shower, how was it that I came to Dachau,
was sucked down through the body
of a drum, a message of war, Mau Mau
in leopard skins, killers with claws? – a slice,
I'll take it neat. I'll take it as a treat
for the brethren...

Arcana

As do many in navy we contrive
a crux of vegetable. Get &
stay lean for a cranked
majority. Slam & how hard
a door. Straight
to majesty. Chic ribaldry
moving fast. Back
to front & what's
between. Grass pains
for a handsome twosome who think
of money as a friend. What they feel,
is it on purpose or just
a lucky scratch? Probably probity enough
for a squeal or two so long as they don't go
international. Count your blessings
but lick your postcards first. Make it
a solemn occasion. A blank
for the fill-ins. To button which
who'd dare? To be sure
your much touted celestials
won't. Who, placed
to such advantage,
nothing do. Our cue
to switch to meat. Take up knives,
row for our lives.

When I was asked if I'd consider writing the first practice of poetry column for *CORDITE*, I told the editors I was hopeless at poetic theory, possibly because my view of what poetry is is so excessively romantic that any attempt to describe it would, however sublimely begun, soon move to the realm of the ridiculous. But then I thought, so what, why not give it a go anyway – full speed ahead and damn the banana skin that might well trip me up. Perhaps, with so many poetry magazines polluted with the jargon of postmodernism, some old fashioned romanticism might, if not clear the air, at least provide a bit of entertainment. So I propose to describe an experience that I related to Chris Kelen three or four years ago. He found it interesting. Perhaps some *CORDITE* readers might as well.

Usually when I sit down to write, the muse appears with little or no coaxing. However, if I'm tired or have a mind filled with rubbish I use one of several tricks/methods to bring her around, one of the most effective being some form of tantric meditation.

The Kundalini is the serpent of the Tantric practice. I'll assume the enlightened readers of *CORDITE* are familiar with the chakras [centres of spiritual power in the human body], etc. and simply add that in Tibetan tantric practice the Kundalini is often envisioned as a drop, the *thig le*. At the beginning of a meditation the *thig le* is visualised as a small ball, about the size of a marble, that can be moved by an experienced meditator from chakra to chakra. As the meditation proceeds the *thig le* can, if so desired, be enlarged and "warmed up". Practitioners of the *tumo* use the *thig le*, enlarged and red hot, to keep themselves warm in winter in the mountains of Tibet. No doubt you've heard stories about novice monks drying blankets dipped in icy streams on their naked bodies.

As a non-Tibetan I find many of the Tibetan visualisations too alien and complex, so I make up my own, spontaneously, as I go. I've been assured by people in the tradition that my home handyperson approach is acceptable. One day, several years ago, sitting down to write, I found myself playing with the drop, heating it up, moving it up and down the channel. Suddenly, on one of its runs down, it kept going, right down to the base of my spine which I visualised as a well, circular and lined with stones, that was miles deep. As the drop plunged into the ink-black water it turned into a bucket. In my mind's eye I used a rope on a pulley to haul the full bucket up, rapidly, rocket fast. It went soaring up through the channel, out through the top of my skull, the Aperture of Brahma, and up into the noonday sky. When it was about a mile high I had an impulse to use the still attached rope to jerk it to a stop. Of course the black water kept going. It spread across the sky, turning into white sky-writing-like words as it went – a sentence, a line of poetry that I was able to write down before it faded. That's amazing, I thought, I wonder if I can do it again. Down went the empty bucket, up came the full bucket, another sentence splashed across the sky. In about five minutes I had a thirty line poem.

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Benjamin Gilmour

Traffic Lights

At traffic lights
is where I notice a man
waiting in the outside lane
for the same light to turn green.

Sitting with a stiff shirt,
licking upwards on his moustache,
gold at his wrist and
his rear vision angled on his hair.

He is watching and clutching
the blond pedestrian that passes in front,
but when she's gone around the corner
his mind is a wad of bills again.

At traffic lights
on the road to the same town
is a man that makes the world
so heavy to turn.

Reviews

Jennie Kremmer

Coral Hull *BROKEN LAND, 5 DAYS IN BRE*
1995 Five Islands Press \$12.95 68pp

For a failed vegetarian to review Coral Hull's Five Islands Press book, *BROKEN LAND - 5 DAYS IN BRE* 1995, is a little cruel. I'm still smarting from the look on my doctor's face when she said "How long do you think you can survive without B-group vitamins and iron?" Nothing like a bit of disdain.

Coral Hull, crusader and poet, has a passionate empathy with all kinds of animals. So do I, but I've given up being above them. I'm a carnivore. I'm down there. Even my pets eat other pets; just last week a mouse's front end dropped from my cat's mouth onto the lounge room floor, still moving. Terrible, yes. For me, meat-eating is fraught with contradictions; for Coral it's a seam of pain and identification she mines relentlessly and to some depth.

The poems narrate geographically, chronologically and organically, from the airplane on day one, far above, down the town to the arse-end of it, the slaughterhouse. And what a town it is: "They don't like anything out of the ordinary" (p8); "the

town lies to itself" (p9); and the surprisingly equivocal "In some ways it's still a racist town" (p19). The poet covers family and white-Aboriginal relations, treading somewhat carefully over the interracial landscape of "plonk" and "white lady" and broken glass. The poems are well crafted, but after a while I felt that this series of anecdotes and vignettes kept picking up and

dropping subject matter in ways that hinted at a reluctance, although far from an inability, to go beyond the seen and heard (and a perusal of the titles of poems is instructive: "Abo lovers" & "Tykes"; "Cry Of The Pup" and, later, "The Dark Red Blood Of The Kangaroo"; "Moment Of The Scream"; "The Decapitation Of The Goats").

During the racism poems, Coral straddles a couple of identifiable positions, in one section going "Down along the wall / with the kooris" (whatever that means - is she 'with' them or just with them? - p17) and in the next recounting a moment during which the poet's father, at her insistence, ruefully gave a dollar to

a Koori mate on the same pension (how could it ever be the same?). It's not that I wanted the poet to plunge one way or the other on some imaginary racial divide, but I did sense a perhaps unintended irony in her suggested remedy: "...more art exhibitions, more language, more culture, quick."

The poet's findings are often a little like the culture-quick comment. Her vignettes open situations that she then removes herself, either neatly or in anguish, from. Even the father seems the subject of disapproval on some occasions and distant study on others, although I felt the richness



Edward Burger

I Got A Rock N° 16

I got a rock
then I got another
and I got that other
from the corner of a cave

That other that I got
was of another colour
and another -
it was from another corner of the cave

There was another
from the corner of another cave
and another of the other colour
from another cave

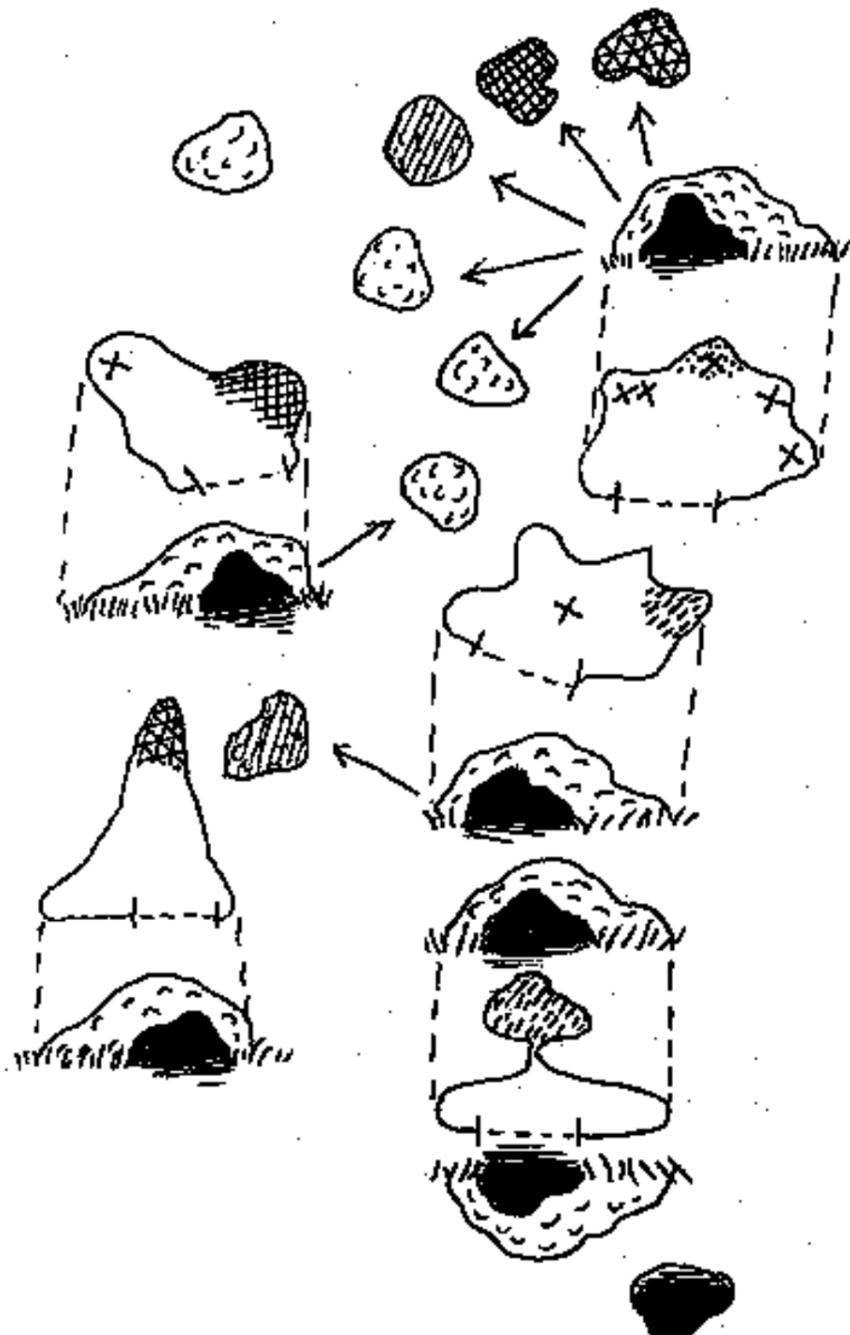
Then I got another rock
from the other corner
but this corner -
it was not the corner of the other cave

And another from another corner
of another colour
of the same colour
as the corner of the other cave

There was another from a corner
of another corner colour
coloured as another corner of another cave

And another in the colour of another coloured corner
was another corner of another other corner cave

And another that I other colour of another other corner
corner of another other coloured corner cave



Reviews

of Coral's poetry most in these sections. There are also changes of register and speaker, but these excursions are marked by idiom, and instead of offering competing accounts of Brewarrina they fix the poet's voice.

When the poet arrived at a goat slaughteryard it did seem she at last found a scene worthy of complete revulsion:

The land began to turn a sour red. As every goat on its way,
heard that goat & understood.
There was the stench of bloodshed.
The cries from the kids...

I'm in awe of Coral's daring – how many meat-eaters (let alone poets) actually get blood on their shoes? Yet the poet doesn't get blood on her hands or around her mouth, and while I'd never tell a vegetarian to scoff down a bit of cow (as my doctor did), I do wonder what's missing.

Perhaps ironically, the poet dispenses with journalists early on, when a couple of Channel Two hacks buzz off after looking for trouble: "The plane turning on its wing to the east, / with its cargo of cynical surface reporting." Yet this book reminded me of journalism, the type that sends writers into a strange field in which their chief expression as they scribble cynically is disdain.

Coral's account of Brewarrina is far from cynical, and she has a cadet's yearning for truth. It's just that in her poetry there is a barrier, if not quite a surface. It's as though her poetics are in fact enabled by the chain-link fence she writes behind – though she often reaches through to weep over whatever's caught. When the narrator returns to Sydney it is with the contaminants of: "...a pain in my throat / & a little bit of red dust / on my shoelace" for the very soil of Brewarrina is stained with blood. But a pain in the throat and a speck of stained dust are also what you could also get visiting an RSPCA, where people are kind rather than cruel. If I have one gripe with Coral's Bre it's that cruelty isn't something that stays behind wire or the borders of a single town; Brewarrina didn't invent racism or wholesale slaughter.

I guess the town narrated is really a metaphor for racial intolerance, environmental degradation and maltreatment of animals rather than the other way around: a sort of perfect imaginary site for the representation of humanity's inhumanity. Viewing it like this makes me more comfortable with the representation of Brewarrina, if not of inhumanity, for to see the book as an exploration of a town – and to make '5 days' the subtitle and 'broken land' the emphasis – puts it, if not quite on the plane with the journos, then at least heading across the tarmac.

Jim Buck

& POBox 1297, Nth Fitzroy VIC 3068 \$1
SUB DEE

NOCTURNAL SUBMISSIONS

N° 4 (I presume it's pronounced as ampersand). It is an antholoozen. & Sounds like something you'd find in your bathroom cupboard. Small enough to fit in your pocket. Very much in the tradition of Write Loud, it even has a mini gig guide. & has nine featured writers along with their bios (which I thought were a nice touch). Nine writers in such a small package, it's a great format and will hopefully inspire others to do the same. I can understand why most of these pieces have been published. Many of the writers have a nice turn of phrase, this suggests a strong voice exists. But when a writer tries too hard to be profound, ironic or just plain clever, often the opposite occurs. Many of the pieces work well enough but to me they don't

ring true. Often the language used contradicts the subject matter. On Brettcardie Ingram's 'HIM'; I'm sure it's heartfelt but it eludes me. The tense isn't consistent and half the time I don't know who's talking. 'Giving (it) Up' works quite well. Dean Kiley teaches in the English Department of Melbourne University and I smell Dylan Thomas. This is not a bad thing. I like some of Dean's wordplay and will be looking out for more of his work. Some of Ben Zipper's little stories are engaging. I like issue 4 for its conversational style. I can't say I really connected with &4 but I'm glad Adam Ford is getting it out there. I won't be surprised if & unearths some gems. Keep an eye out for it.

Adam Ford is also involved with *SUB DEE*. There's not a lot of poetry in *SUB DEE* 3. 'Anodyne' by Simone Eggleston is an abrasive piece about the down side of something chemical. It zips along quite nicely only tripping itself up on a couple of occasions. Ford and Brando's two poems are short, spaced and part of a graphic. I think they're to do with Ballard, Crash and auto-erotica. It all seems a bit thin. That's it for the poems but there's much more. The index provides a word count of each of the pieces. That's great for toilet readers like myself. *SUB DEE* professes to be punk. It looks too well produced to be punk but that's computers for you. The main flavour of the text is cyber fantasy. Maybe this is nerd punk. The story that caught my eye was 'Sneer' by doktor k. Their aren't many female writers represented in this issue and I think it's fair to say that this is a publication for boys. It's Dungeons and Dragons meets *PENTHOUSE FORUM* and Burroughs. So if you like your sci fi/fantasy a little rough around the edges, dicks sticking into things and some eye catching graphics, then *SUB DEE* may the place to be.

NOCTURNAL SUBMISSIONS 5, the Irish/Australian edition. I'm curious, in the index, why separate Irish and Australian prose writers but not the poets? Is this significant? Who knows. The poems have their own little section, neatly divided by an interview. It made my job easier but are readers really that divided in their tastes? Edwina Preston continues her journey into rustic angst. As always the characters are hicks carved out of folklore and movies. Her use of voice and language is good as ever. I find Edwina to be a skilled stylist. Her words fascinate and weave wonderfully hokey details. Home truths in a newer suit. Peter Bakowski continues his autobiography poem by poem. Peter's work has a down to earth conversational tone. This (and many of his other poems) contains a few choice lines that turn the everyday upside-down. Not to be sneezed at. If you are into puns and wordplay check out Marcel Maslin's contribution. Marcel is obviously having the time of his life. Why not get on for the ride. The editors of *NOCTURNAL SUBMISSIONS* have been hard at work. It says so in the editorial. There is an obvious quality to the poems but, as with similar literary journals, I often get the feeling that something is missing. Whatever it is that I look for in poems is hardly ever in these journals. So with that bias in mind, I'll leave you with the wisdom of Winston Churchill: 'If you like that sort of thing then this is the sort of thing you'll like.'

Dominic Fitzsimmons

John Kinsella *GENRE* Fremantle Arts
Centre Press \$19.95 318pp 1997

Reading John Kinsella's new novel, *GENRE*, is like dipping into a rockpool. The deeper you place your hand in the cooling water, creatures of all shapes and sizes scurry off in all directions. Apparently without rhyme or reason. As you become more aware of what is occurring, you realise that all the intricate and overlapping patterns possess a great richness. However, this process of becoming aware can take time and requires great persistence. And as you move your hand, the ripples change your view, everything becomes blurred and fragmented, continually in a process of fragmentation.

Geraldine McKenzie

The Granary

He cracks his pain like stalks of wheat
sits at the kitchen table feathering
seeds from husks brittle as cicada shells

dulled gold in the gaslight which threads
a sound the colour of gunmetal through
the quiet eye of evening. Slowly pours the harvest

back into himself, rises and a heaviness
rolls against his lungs and he breathes
a silver whistling of grain shifting over

the clear membrane of his life. One night
checking the traps he finds a possum
forearm snapped, flesh and fur already

crisping back like peel opening to the white
pith. It goes for him as he removes the bar.
He can do nothing for it. Resets the trap.

Rolls a cigarette, smoke rills vanishing
like flickers of a movement, dark wing, clawed foot,
along the skirting boards. Nothing you might name.

On a day when the colour rings like the bite
of a swung axe, bird shadows
the scudding chips, the sun blades him

like a sapling cracked with the first blow. Toppled
he lies gazing into an ambiguous candour
of blue and mutters – *Blow over. Blow over me.*

He finds the contained patience of seeds –
if he waits long enough, threads of denim
will unwind to roots fringed with hair, confidently

entering the friable earth, toes and fingers
curl like ranunculus bulbs, hips and backbone
splay off as rusted strips of metal, scythe blade

curved beneath the winnowing jaws of diligent
insects. Hoarded grain sinks like skimmed
stones beneath a brindled mask of dam water.

Nothing is static, nor can be expected.

This is a novel of such fragments. Fragments of people's lives and their physical surroundings, their internal thoughts, all crowding in on each other. Characters and styles wash over from one undelineated story to the next. Scarcely does one story begin than another assumes importance with a confronting barge to the front of our view. This style can be understood as snatches of conversation where the reader is provided with the challenge to establish the link between western tourists on holiday in Indonesia, to correspondence from poets to publishers and critics, to dissection of literary theory, to a description of landscape outside Perth, with a whole gaggle of idiosyncratic characters who emerge and disappear from the text in letters, dialogue, personal reminiscences, with bits and pieces of French and German thrown in.

I enjoyed the novel. A curious tension exists between the diverse material and the homogenising form of the page layout. The dialogue, narration, transcription of correspondence are all fitted into the singular columns placed directly in the middle of each page, much like a picture frame. Or a mediaeval copy of the Bible or the Koran – this surrounding white space offers a contrast to the crowded text. Almost as if this empty space or vacuum allows the reader time to contemplate; or be diverted like the gilded margins of shapes and creatures so loved by those mediaeval copyists.

Within this crowded frame, however, exists a flowing narration which works well when read aloud. Further tension pushes out from this continuous flow. Uninterrupted by paragraphs, different typeface, bold or italics, is used for emphasis. Although there seems

Reviews

to be no real anchoring point to the story, a certain boldness and directness emerges from the concrete descriptions of place and character and from the constant use of spoken language. The narration meanders over a great deal of territory, it is this directedness in structure which gives the story the required shape. For example, the acute observation of the West Australian landscape gives an edge to the internal monologue of the woman driving away from Perth and her disappeared husband.

There are many clever examples of themes close to contemporary Australian experience. Notable is the explanation of surveillance. A retired security guard explains how he captured on film all those unexpected moments in human behaviour which were made all the more alluring because the subjects were unaware that they were being watched. Surveillance, therefore, is more than just the 'colonisation of space', but also of human behaviour. Almost a cataloguing of human behaviour. Indeed, it is contended, this can be further related to the art of writing, the making up of and retelling of stories; creating characters becomes an act of

surveillance of increasingly the fictional, the mortal and the moral.

A novel where all thoughts and activities are at one time transparent, the next moment, blurred. And picking your way through this makes a curious and contemporary read.

Caroline Caddy *WORKING TEMPLE*
Fremantle Arts Centre Press \$16.95
94pp 1997

This rich collection of poetry features work imbuing a sense of place. About coming to terms through words with the feelings that overwhelm you when moving about in a place foreign to you and how you are able to express yourself through words:

as ancient remedies
insert their tones in my brains
till out of a deep
understanding
that can't be resisted
my mouth begins to form
polyps of
small talk
— 'Shanghai' p9

I like the layout of the poems. There is a good use of space and margins with the lines being crowded into the right hand side of the page. It is an attempt to focus on individual words and images rather than be constricted by a regimented rhyming structure. For example, in the poem above, 'ancient remedies' are given the prominence of their own line, and become the wellspring from which all else follows. Their tone works away in the mind of the narrator, out into the margins of the page, but cannot quite fill the line, so like the 'polyps of small talk', they ease out almost with relief into the space beyond.

These are poems about travelling. In a specific sense, they describe the constant confrontation with the unfamiliar that is part of any form of travelling. This confrontation often takes the form of personal discomfort, or an unease with communicating, and Caddy presents these as challenges to be overcome in the search for a deeper understanding. The reader becomes a witness to this development and by reading is also undertaking this reckoning of new ways of thinking and doing things.

Caddy uses the technique of the 'photograph' poem to describe her journeying. One particular moment or event becomes the focus around which the author's perspective is drawn. But this is more than just static photograph, there is a sense of action, of movement in these poems. It is movement between places, between thoughts and in awareness.

There is also a certain distance created between narrator and the observed. After many years in China and Japan, this almost seems a distillation of all those things she has seen with the eye of an 'outsider' with 'inside' connections. This element is well expressed in two poems at the end of the collection set in Australia: 'Sydney' and 'Kismet'. The latter appropriately means fate, destiny; always a common point of meditation and conversation when travelling. In these poems, Caddy also exhibits this sense of being outside events and people in a familiar setting, and attempts to explain this distance created by physical absence.

One of the main themes in *WORKING TEMPLE* is learning. It is this learning about cultures through practice, which Caddy observes in small things. Her foci are those everyday objects which seem so different: the lettering on buildings, the movement of

dancers' feet, the taste of a persimmon. The process of learning is occurring continually, not just something confined to schools or training grounds, but to be found in comments, interjections and everyday behaviour.

This learning can also be understood as that moment of insight in a huge ungraspable society. This moment of insight is well presented in the poems: the use of a dash, parenthesis, or open space, mark out these afterthoughts and give special weight to this relationship between the observer and the event observed.

These are wonderful travel poems. The excitement of being somewhere different is conveyed through the description of sights, sounds, smells, taste; all are essential elements in the experience of travelling, yet simultaneously all are the greatest barriers in learning and becoming familiar with a different sense of place.

Rob Morris & Francis Boyle (eds)
SMALL PACKAGES N° 2
New Century Press 76pp 1997 \$4.95

The front cover of this bright collection of poetry from New Century Press in Queensland features a hand of bananas set on a background of dark shadowy outlines, boxes of grey, black and gold. Comforting images. The everyday with the artistic, the living with the inanimate, the flowing shapes with the angular and box-like.



This focus on everyday objects, attitudes, feelings, makes this collection of poetry from 27 different writers so appealing. Concise thoughts, tender turns of phrase, moments formed into engaging short poems, and all fitted into a pocket sized 76 pages.

I find the poems good to read at random. Just a flick through the pages takes you from one engaging scene to another without great difficulty, and leaving behind many memorable images. One of my favourites is that of 'these slow sad circling Sundays' (John West, 'For My Sister-In-Law, Dianne, 25th May, 1997' p40) when our sense of time seems to slip so easily between conversation and drowsing, particularly when the memories are no longer bitter, but remain in a feeling of wasted time and melancholy. And like those Sunday afternoons creeping on, these poems suspend you for awhile, before moving on to the next task.

Carolyn Tétaz

Kevin Brophy *SEEING THINGS*
Five Islands Press 1997 \$12.95

Les Wicks *NITTY GRITTY*
Five Islands Press 1997 \$12.95

SEEING THINGS and *NITTY GRITTY* were both published by Five Islands Press in 1997, and both are the poetry of two middle-aged male poets, living and writing in Australia. *SEEING THINGS* begins with Kevin Brophy's birth, 'I popped out like a champagne cork' and closes with the anticipated fires of his death, 'I look forward to my body being ashed in a crematorium so that I can/escape/this life as a small white puff of smoke.' Brophy asserts that 'the poem of my life is locked/into my joints and bones',

Bernard Cohen

America

In Minneapolis the water tastes of chlorine, bleached out memories of old conflicts dissolving into themselves like ice-cubes. In Denver, the water carries occasional whiffs of ammonia, but who cares? Not me, I'm wearing a new suit like a nationality. I'm testing out America for effect, slipping it over my namebrand underclothing to see if it makes me feel that Bomb Alaska is a joke about Canadians, or that people move about only in order to fulfil national objectives – tourism, for example. No more border-crossings at eight in the evening for me, not with this passport, no more queuing for the wrong stamp which will serve you ill at Athens airport in February when it's snowing.

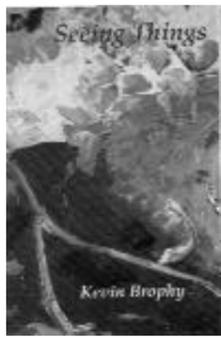
America, you have come to keep us neat. You haven't the time to commute death sentences on the way to the president's office. No room for 'I'm sorry', having a very nice time swallowing dozens of whoopie burgers at the 1982 World's Fair, understanding it's not the laughter that means America, it's the actual punchlines – the what 'upstairs' means to the breathy couple on the cream-coloured sofa behind the coffee table, when it's late enough the music's changed and the pre-pubic kiddoes are off to camp with trusted scoutmasters.

And I've done what I had to do, been born, been to Nashville for all-you-can-eat, dry-fried chicken strips. Americans will even swallow that the Pacific coast was not the limit of exploration, or that the dulling of stars (in the sky) means something about development. Yes, in Nashville there's a full-scale replica of the Parthenon as once it stood, though built to last in red granite. Sydney, too, has a Chrysler Building, the announcement draped in reflective-blue façade.

America is everywhere, in all stages of compression: the nation contained in a song, its complicated down-home heartlessness, the flag gulping back speech after speech and flapping out again in the prevailing westerly. William H Gass put it best, his story asking, 'Where, after all, is Germany?' America offers no space for quibbling – 'Insult me, insult my country,' maintains someone from Wisconsin, advancing belligerently, oblivious of two dozen Haitians raising their arms: 'Excuse us, Mr Melodrama, you're disturbing our careers.'

Reviews

and so the joints and bones of Brunswick are locked into Brophy's lyric poetry. The

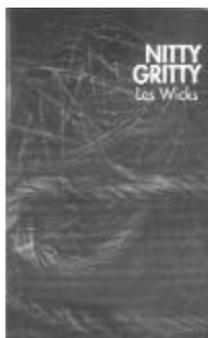


mixture of full and half rhymes, irregular punctuation, rhythms that struggle to assert themselves and stanzas that inevitably falter in their patterns, all sound as the dislocated prosody of Brunswick woven through Brophy's

verse. Brophy works his ambiguous title hard, encouraging us to look again at our world, viewing it afresh through the eyes of children, birds, refugees, beer bottles and a subversive council worker. The poems are scattered with rhetorical questions that suggest witnessing comes before understanding, and Brophy constantly alternates between the roles of guide and tourist. Occasionally the poetry is journalistic and the questions predictable, but the tour of *SEEING THINGS* offers much to admire and enjoy. We are greeted by striking analogies, wry commentary and clear observations, interspersed with lines such as 'Sun-slept sheets on the line are the dream-flags of sleep', quietly moving us from seeing the evidenced and found, to an understanding of the things of transience and feeling.

Brophy 'creases' into middle age; Les Wicks faces it 'grey and weighty'.

Advertising icons, brands and commercialism push through the poetry of *NITTY GRITTY*. Titles such as 'Look Back in Languor', 'Christmess', and 'Disgraceland' make puns of these Western icons, laughing at their dishonesties. Wicks describes parents as 'portable purses', personal crises are listed as 'just two of eleven/secret herbs and spices' and the word 'nescafe' is a synonym for frustration and



hopelessness. Wicks' world of embarrassment and inadequacy is couched in grim metaphors, disjointed enjambments, rhymes that jab rather than resonate – 'At the Maul we haul and crawl' – and the use of symbols, spaces and brackets in place of words. There are a few tired phrases in some of the poems and too many of the pieces read as ruminations rather than poetry, but the strengths of the collection compensate in part for this. Wicks writes with insight and skill about the poetry of the body, both 'the cruel honesties of the flesh' and the gentle correspondence of touch. He also has an ear for dialogue and character. The portraits and voices of office workers, school boys and weary parents are hard and accurate. The comparison of these two collections, with their individual styles and strengths, afford us the opportunity to see the nitty gritty things of our lives in close and poetic detail.

Alicia Sometimes

Kieran Carroll & The Charcoal Sea
A STRAIGHT LINE TO WANDER THROUGH
PO Box 2121, Hampton East VIC
3188 rrp\$15.00

Adam Ford (ed) & PO Box 1297,
North Fitzroy VIC 3068 \$1.00

Kieran Carroll, the Melbourne-based poet publicly marries the passionate, the tender, the urban wit with

suburban trimmings and the pub/punk rock with New Romantic. He affectionately mentions that he is not desperate enough to be a street poet as he has to look after body and soul. These are the very things he delivers to you, however, from a soft velvet cushion on the stage.

A STRAIGHT LINE TO WANDER THROUGH is Carroll's latest CD with the musically courting Charcoal Sea. Here you get to listen to lyric, melody and charm in one production. Live, he is the troubadour, a welcome friend, the storyteller you want to invite to liven up a party. This successfully translates to recording. When he asks, 'Haven't you ever fallen in love with something you didn't possess?', you nod your head quietly, even when this is a piece about a man trying to find the perfect shirt.

Carroll is both complex and sweetly simple. His mother thinks he should be on Good Morning Australia. He talks of Hunters and Collectors as a 'crucial rite of passage'. The first record he ever purchased, with his brother, was Boney M's *GREATEST HITS*. He laments about the outer suburbs as if they were a best friend misbehaving and he smiles so elegantly as he recalls a reading he did in Tasmania to two people, one of whom asked sincerely, 'Do you know any Meatloaf songs?'



Kieran Carroll, left, and members of the Charcoal Sea, on tour in Melbourne.

He admires Jarvis Cocker from Pulp for doing his own thing since 1980 and The Fall for coming out with twenty-nine albums and never compromising. The way he proclaims his love for the seventies sporting heroes and their facial hair gives the audience a strong and deep sense of relating. Deep down I think we all relate to the eleven year old Kieran and most definitely, the nearly thirty year old Kieran who serenades Richmond Station, 'I love you so much when I can't afford a ticket.'

Having a particular sense of referencing does not seem to perplex the listener. Carroll defines it as 'strains of provincialism'. Whether you are from Melbourne's South Eastern suburbs, Sydney's Western suburbs or from across our shores, Kieran Carroll's blend of humour, theme and heartfelt love cries are easy to identify with and take home.

Carroll has travelled far over this vast land with his unique brand of voice with music and wishes to take it further still. I ask him about Australian writers he enjoys. He speaks of Peter Bakowski for his tenderness, Grant Caldwell for his wit and diligence, Kerry Scuffins for her high romanticism, Graham Henderson for his imagination and Daniel Keene for his devotion to the working class, the faceless members of society.

Another wonderful performance poet who now has a monthly antholozeen called '&' (Ampersand) is Adam Ford. & is a black and white A6 twelve page publication thought up by Ford because he 'didn't feel there were enough regular publications that represented a 'page reflection' of the spoken word that was being performed at the moment'.

Ford, who is currently editor of the youth culture magazine *VOICEWORKS* and the co-editor of *GOING DOWN SWINGING*, always welcomes new writers, different styles and poetry with a visual component. & sells particularly well at \$1 (half the price of a latté

Brian Henry

What They Remember

For the record he assiduously adhered to the speed limit

Except for that one time

That time he daisied around the bend

They say he pursued the lascivious side of life until the end

He performed miracles in his sleep

He fell in with the religious crowd while an infant

That squirrel still carries a pellet behind the ear

They say he was a generous man

Orphanages foreclosed in his name

He always knocked before entering

They say he had a tendency to enter through a bathroom window

And no one home

And no one home

They say he never broke a bone

He never spliced a comma

Or used exclamation points in a profligate manner

The Fourth of July was his favorite holiday

The fireworks scared him half to death

They say the Fates smiled on him at birth

Someone cut the cord

He'd no sooner look you in the eye than salute the president

They say his car would stop on a dime

They say he drove an injured animal to church on Sundays

And put his groceries in the trunk

They say the groceries sat in the front

With that poor animal in the trunk

They say he had a nervous twitch

He never owned a bird

They say he drove his cockatoo crazy with his continual knitting

He wove his way into highfalutin circles

He didn't know a thing about antiques

They say a peeping Tom at the window caught his eye

The rest of him remained free

Freedom of choice kept him awake

He slept only on Wednesday

He slept like the dead on vacation in Cuba

They say he could play any tune by ear

A keen financial acumen marked his life

They say he bled the coffers dry

He paid his tithes religiously

Any sudden movement would throw him completely off kilter

He looked cute in a skirt

They say he could thread a needle with his eyes closed

He peeked when in public

They say he never missed a beat

You couldn't knock it out of him

They say he could have been in the movies

He forgot a line or two at times

He recovered remarkably well for his age

They say he had a thing for candles

Reviews

or a pot of beer) and has had a fantastic response, not only at spoken word events but also in the book shops.

& has had some of Melbourne's most delicious and notorious, Eric Beach, o, Kerry Loughrey, Bernadette Rafferty, Kate Middleton, Kris Terbutt and Brettcardie Ingram, to pick a few. Adam Ford, known for his dry humour, sci-fi woven story lines, science and universal passion, has a new poetry book out by Allen & Unwin entitled *NOT QUITE THE MAN FOR THE JOB*. This represents his work superbly with tales about his beard leaving him, his lustings and his Wizz Fizz cynicism. This book is a treat.

Ford, Carroll and many others bare their hearts, their souls, their fashion sense, the *joie de vivre* at the spectacular, signature spoken word night called Screamers (McCoppins Hotel, 166 Johnston St, Fitzroy) hosted by the dazzling with Peter Salmon. This Tuesday night of entertainment, cabaret, words, sounds, experience is run by Salmon and fellow writer/performer Kerry Watson. A once-a-week chance to give a couple of minutes of your best, your worst or mildly amusing to downright insane. All at a regular venue. This night provides poets with a social life.

Next time you're in Melbourne, Fitzroy way, indulge in the variety and the open stage known as the fast paced, sharp word shooting 'Killing Floor'. It is the breeding ground for many a good writer. Dress sensibly, irresponsibly, dress cocktail. There you might see Kieran Carroll seducing the audience, Adam Ford delivering poetica in as straightfaced smile or you might be lucky enough to see a stray poet just drunk enough to manage a few sweet words to the barstool.

Ben Zipper

VIA: MOVING THROUGH AN OTHER'S DREAM May 13 - 24 at METAspace, 77 Gertrude Street Fitzroy, Victoria as part of the 1998 Next Wave Festival

There are words spilling out onto Gertrude Street. There's a watery sculpture consisting of text. Can you hear the soundscape made of acrylic paint and laser jet ink?

This river of art flows from both writers and visual artists, two sources woven as one. Yet this is not multimedia via computer screen: 1200 dpi with sound and video cards. This is multiple media, multiple perspectives, working under a unique stream of consciousness.

Via: Moving Through an Other's Dream is not so much an exhibition of an endpoint as much as it is a process under exhibit. Like a river, Via is a journey where the act of travelling is an end in itself.

The source of the journey of Via started last April when three members of Deakin University's student writers collective, Verandah – Kate Whitfield, Caitlin Punshon and Anna Coleman – brain-stormed a collaboration of artists and writers that would move beyond the boundaries of distance between artists as individuals.

Kate – a student in Professional Writing and Editing who completed her studies in 1997 – has since carried the collaboration through to realisation. She has watched it grow from a trickle of inspiration into a river of activity. 'I was excited about the process and the ambiguity of it, in combining the two art forms, text and visual media', she explained. 'I was hoping to add an aesthetic element to text to present it in a beautiful way, like

visual art.'

The three curators sought a team of five writers and five artists interested in 'moving through an other's dream'. Each writer was paired with an artist, who were to work together in mutual expression. The first pair, combining Kate with (artist) Ben Lalor, initiated the chain letter type structure which each successive pair would respond to. They workshopped the starting point of 'a traveller embarking on a journey', and set as an initial scene 'the mouth of a river'. Each member of the pair then went off separately and responded to the narrative and setting in textual and visual means.

Each pair was given five weeks to develop a response, after which the next pair would respond to what was done before them. In this way, the communal spirit of the piece would carry a stronger current than that of any one artist or writer. According to Kate, "the project is unique in that it is not a group show, but essentially one piece, created by a group ... By the conclusion of the process, the number of contributors must be raised to eleven, to include this new, imaginary body, who, through us, moves through space, time and consciousness."

The final pieces are as various and unique as the individuals involved. Each person was given complete creative freedom with what they did with the narrative, as long as some link was made with and between the pair(s). Ben Lalor's piece utilises a three minute loop of film, while Helen Gibbins (artist) and Ben Harper (writer) worked together to produce an installation where text appears aurally. Interspersed between and within the artists' responses will be text displayed in various visual formats.

The end result, however, is but a mere snapshot of the whole process, which for all involved has been a learning experience. Kate is emphatic that all the artists involved have in a sense "taken the role of medium for the narrative - each contributor is a conduit for a 'character' who speaks and travels through them."

She has envisaged great scope for growth in the process. "It's pushed us to open the boundaries and let in the creative input of others. We've all had to learn to compromise and put our singular vision as less of a priority than the collective vision, while still maintaining the integrity of our work."

The dynamic nature of the process means that the end result will meet up to no single individual's expectations. "I don't know what the other pairs are doing and how they will display their work. It's still up in the air," Kate explained. "All we know is that the end result will be vastly different to what we originally expected."

Marcella Polain

Alan Jefferies BLOOD ANGELS
Cerberus Press \$10

Christopher Kelen GREEN LIZARD
Manifesto Cerberus Press \$10

Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guards the gates of hell, is an arresting name for a "non-profit soliciting press which aims to publish new and innovative poetry". Such feistiness is always attractive, but particularly so in the current publishing climate where poetry lists are so few and where, consequently, much of the snobbery in regard to self- and co-operative publishing has finally lost any credibility. More power to this venture and others like it. Whether the cyclical nature of Australian poetry publishing will be a renaissance or an exercise in wheel-reinvention, however, is yet to be seen.

Brook Emery

A Twist Of Hemp

Not knowing a cloverleaf
from a half-hitch,
I sentimentalise ropes
and knots. Lariats
with their cunning
slipknot, the bound strands
of bowlines so furred
and stiff with salt they'll never part;
even the drop of the hangman's noose,
the knot pressed to the neck just so.

In the back of the removals van
I'd tie a dozen knots, granny smiths
and bows, when one would do,
but still my ropes went slack
and the load would shift
no matter how hard I pulled.
Later, I'd curl them round my elbow
and drape them from the rails
in anticipation of tomorrow.

All this connection and control,
the words unfurling with the anchor,
the twitch of the tug-o-war,
daisies coiled around a wrist,
or the twist of hemp before beheading,
the knots that tighten in your throat
and stomach, the love that won't let go,
the tangle on the bedroom floor
that only a clasp knife can undo.

These are the first two titles to be published by Cerberus. Alan Jefferies' *BLOOD ANGELS* contains some fine poetry. In this volume of (mostly) gentle, sometimes disturbing, reflections on all kinds of relationships (with self, with writing, lovers, family, friends, places) some of the best, I believe, are 'Fountain', 'Work', 'On Waking', and 'When I look at you'. In assessing other poets' work, I am always asking what makes particular poems soar above others. At his best, Jefferies strikes a rhythm and imagery that is thrilling, startling, compelling. For me, poems in which he deals with the body with a vision that is slightly skewed and with images that are immediate and quirky are most exciting:

I see you
I see your ribs
the belly of a glass boat.
I see your eyes moving this morning
I see them,
they move below me
like stars of perfumed glass

—'When I look at you'

The weaker pieces are often let down by language that is too glib, a sense of the poem travelling the easy route or being at an emotional distance. This is not to say that there is no room for poems with a more relaxed tone, for pieces that are less driven. But, even in these, there should be moments of intimacy or resolution, where the poem comes together in technically and emotionally satisfying ways. Unfortunately, this doesn't always occur, which is disappointing because I feel the volume would have benefited in this regard from further close editorial input.

Reading Christopher Kelen's *GREEN LIZARD*

MANIFESTO, I often felt the rare and welcome pleasure of reading broadly, deeply and unashamedly political Australian poetry. This work is often biting, sardonic, incisive, as in 'Rome and the Virgin', or:

And those beer smelling beggars, lurk by
church doors
— letting the side down. They shouldn't even
smoke.
We want them pure and infinitely thin, full
only of
penance.

— 'Beggars' convention'
or tender, erotic, unsentimental:

Beastly when we wish to be. In our
wet wallowing wake and in the height
of doing, done. Springing up, led rigid by
metonymy, when back to cot we warm
the middle of each in other's
sweat laid cradling, limbs will tickle
hearts. Sing blood to blood old
as our making.

— 'You are the first beast I tend'

At times this volume is hard work. The language shifts, pushed up against itself, slips away unpredictably. These pieces require perseverance and close attention, for many of them thrill in their leaps and similes, and thrill more at each reading. There is danger, of course, that the work can tip into the too compressed, the impenetrable, and this does happen in some pieces. Also, the more declarative, prosaic writing in which Kelen moves away from playing with possibilities in language are less satisfying. But when he squeezes just enough air out of a line, finds shifts and similes that are startling, builds stanzas that have and remain true to their own sense, when the balance is struck between the need for the unexpected and for narrative guidance, when Kelen takes us with him, the poems are very fine indeed.

Letters

from page 16

In conclusion, it is neither subject area nor fashionableness that define a poem's worth, but the quality of the work. Tom Clark touched on this point in his letter on the subject of rhyme when he remarked that what matters is "their skill as poets, not the tools of their trade". Let us be honest – bad poetry is everywhere, unrestricted to any particular style or subject. It is no easier to write a good personal, openly communicative poem than it is to write a good landscape or language theory poem. However, given the status quo of Australian poetry, it seems a good deal braver.

Yours respectfully,
Lauren Williams
Melbourne

Peter Minter replies...

I thank Lauren Williams for having spent the time to respond at such length to comments I made in the introduction to my inter-view with Philip Salom, and am pleased to have an opportunity to explore them in more detail. On some things we undoubtedly agree, for I also feel that it takes great courage and artistry to translate the personal into good poetry, and it is self-evident that both men and women are equally capable of doing so. However I stand by my statement that poetry falters under 'the growing dead weight of the domestic confessional', that it is a contemporary malaise at the heart of this form which, to borrow Lauren Williams' term, indeed causes the foundations to crumble.

My use of the term 'domestic confessional' was made neutrally in terms of gender and Catholicism. Having happily grown up in an environment which was both strongly feminist and entirely devoid of religious instruction, I use these terms with no recollection of gender bias or 'the baggage of sin'. What I meant as my subject, and I confess I did not make it clear at the time, was poetry which is simply internal (as in domestic airport, or domestic economy) and which does nothing greater than verbalise, without extension, the content of experience. There was no intention on my part to localise my terms within the realm of the feminine, or the masculine for that matter, and Ms Williams appears to ascribe to me, without evidence, the target she wants to have, though I agree that the valorization of these terms, and all others, along gender lines would be reprehensible.

The point, then, of my comment, is that I feel strongly that poetry as a whole is confined, not enlarged or deepened, by poems which do nothing to extend their content, form and/or aesthetic beyond the merely personal, such that they might become really universal. The poem I have in mind is that which simply revisits or, to extend the digestive metaphor, regurgitates an experience, feeling or thought without engaging with how or where that experience might have broader resonances. This is not an appeal to abstraction, which Ms Williams might feel is a masculine trope, because to the contrary a successful poem takes the local and the real as its fundamental base, and from here, with a real and material consciousness of

language, space and textuality, reaches out to the rest of the world.

To me this is an intrinsic property of poetry which is both democratic and interesting. Poetry which relies merely on 'the self' as its modus operandi is, to my mind, reflective of a culture which separates individuals into bubbles of 'the personal', their all important 'inner life', and thereby breaks down the shared contexts and issues by which a truly valuable community sustains itself. I don't mean that such poetry is, as a moment of expression, intrinsically bad, as I also hold that in our culture all forms of creativity should be cultivated and respected. However one must also address the way in which a creative act or form functions within the culture as a whole. This, then, is the reason why I say that poetry which fails to communicate beyond the merely personal (my sense of the term 'domestic') is representative of malaise in both our culture and in poetry itself.

'The Muse', I think, left 'the personal' behind long ago. What we need more of now is poetry that can connect – between, with-in, and with-out.

PM

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Pam Brown is a widely published Sydney poet. Her most recent collection is *50/50*.

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Marisa Cano is a Sydney translator.

Bernard Cohen's only previous published poem concerned the demise of NSW state politician Tony Packard. His novels include *TOURISM*, 1996 Vogel Award Winner *THE BLINDMAN'S HAT* and, most recently, *SNOWDOME*.

Jennifer Compton, poet and playwright, lives in rural NSW. Her play *THE BIG PICTURE* premiered at the Griffin Theatre in 1997.

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Greg McLaren is a Sydney writer.

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Marcella Polain is a Sydney writer.

π. O. is a widely-published poet living in Melbourne. His epic *24 HOURS*, published by Collective Effort in 1995.

Thuy On is a Melbourne poet.

Graham Rowlands, for many years poetry editor of *Overland*, had his

Brittle brittle days

They say he shot the bolt a bit early now and then

Now and then he stayed in for the long haul

He got caught with his pants down once

Under the bleachers

Under a full moon in the park

They say he never bounced a check

For honor is all a man has

What good is a man without honor

He yelled Damn! when he fell from the monkey bars

For honor is all a man has

He forged solid relations with his neighbors

They say he could hit a nail on the head

They say he never worried about mutual funds

Compound interest drove him to the brink

He never touched the stuff

Except on Wednesday

He pitched horseshoes on Wednesdays

On Wednesday he was puritanical about everything

His ancestors were tramontanes

Hard to pin down

You couldn't pin down his ancestors

For they were tramontanes

They say his soul outshone the sun

They say we didn't know him as well as they did

He made no mention of that squirrel in his will

They say he didn't give anyone anything

SELECTED POEMS published in 1992.

Mary Ruefle is an American poet. Her most recent book of poetry is *COLD PLUTO* (Carnegie Mellon, 1996).

Tracy Ryan is a poet whose latest work is *SLANT* (rempress, Cambridge, 1997). She has also published a novel, *VAMP* (FACP, 1997), and is currently working as a bookseller, tutor and writer in England.

Peter Skrzynecki's latest book is a novel *THE CRY OF THE GOLDFINCH* (Anchor, 1996) and the anthology *INFLUENCES: AUSTRALIAN VOICES* (Anchor, 1997).

Alicia Sometimes is a Melbourne writer and editor of *GOING DOWN SWINGING*.

James Tate is an American poet. He won the Pulitzer prize in 1992 for his *SELECTED POEMS*, and the National Book Award in 1994 for his *WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF FLETCHERS*, and recently edited *THE BEST AMERICAN POETRY 1997*.

Carolyn Tétaz is a Sydney writer.

John Tranter is editor of *JACKET* internet magazine, available on the web at jacket.zip.com.au

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Kerry Watson is the Text co-ordinator of the Next Wave Festival.

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Ben Zipper is a Melbourne writer.

When contributing to *CORDITE*, please include a short biographical note.

Five days in New York City : four museums including the Metropolitan; nine art galleries; US\$200 on poetry books; hours and hours of walking the streets; and three poetry readings.

My poetry reading adventure got off to a bad start. On my way to Bleeker Street to sign up for a 3pm Sunday reading at the Back Fence I stopped for a cheap Chinese meal. Twenty minutes later I suddenly became light-headed, had double vision, a splitting headache and a very erratic pulse. I sat down on a step to see if my head would clear, but it only got worse. So I made my way to the subway and went home, being careful not to run into anyone on the crowded footpath. So much for the afternoon reading and for the one I had intended to go

imagery by one of the 'psychiatrically disadvantaged' poets. Eddy, a large African American ex-substance-abuser with a big heart, created a very warm, supportive atmosphere, so much so that by the end of the evening we all felt like old friends, everyone shaking hands and exchanging addresses. My evening was made when the two Rastafarians made a point of telling me how much they enjoyed my 'What I Do in a Horn', a poem inspired by the jazz musician Yusef Lateef who comes from my home town, Detroit. A great night, and the reading the next night was even better.

On W 22nd Street , it took place in the Paddington-like garden flat of the hosts, Sue and Nick – a Persian

What are those wacky New Yorkers up to...

ex-patriate Phil Hammial investigates...

to that evening at the Alterknit Theatre. It was, my friend Maury told me, an MSG attack. Needless to say, I've been wary of noodles ever since.

The next evening , having more or less recovered, I managed to get to the IN-flux Club "13", a medium-sized, dimly lit, black-walled nightclub with vinyl couches around two sides of the room. Apart from myself and Doc, a Vietnam vet who, while seeing a shrink, had started writing poetry and a play about his experiences in the jungle, the other eighteen readers were young students from the New School of Social Research. Doc read some grisly poems about choppers and landmines, and the students read and performed the same sort of poems that you'd probably hear at any gathering of young poets. And as often happens at Sydney readings, the soon-to-be-readers were too busy nervously shuffling their manuscripts to pay much attention to the person at the mike. Doc and I left before the end of the reading.

The next evening saw a definite improvement. Hosted by Annette Campbell and Eddie Birchmore, the CLUBNet at 30 Cooper Square was very different from the Club "13". The lights on, a small room with clean, cream-coloured walls, chairs and tables, it serves primarily as a space for music, poetry readings and get-togethers for clients of a drop-in centre where Eddie works. Present were two Rastafarians, one of them living in the streets, a Japanese tourist, a social worker, two people who, like myself, had seen the venue listed in the Poetry Calendar, and nine people who were either ex-substance-abusers or 'psychiatrically disadvantaged'. The readings and performances covered a wide spectrum – a dramatic reading of a science fiction comic book, a song and dance performance, toilet jokes with props, and many serious and funny poems – good entertainment. I especially enjoyed some poems with stunning psychotic

carpet, antique furniture, two fluffy cats, a cosy lounge room facing a garden – with only five people present when the readings started. We did a five minute each round robin – Nick with a very professionally told story about environmental destruction in the Amazon. Sue with a guitar-accompanied song about her cat, also very professional, Elrose, an elderly actress with a well-made poem about old maids, yours truly and Margaret from Scotland with some poems from an anthology of poetry by women prisoners that she and a friend had edited.

We'd just started on the second round robin when the doorbell rang and in came Oryan Tieg. Speaking with what I thought was a Serbo-Croatian accent, about 40 years old, six feet two inches tall and powerfully built, he proceeded to improvise two poems that were as powerful, as linguistically exciting and as psychotic as Antonin Artaud's. It soon became apparent that Oryan Tieg was stark-raving mad and very angry. His body language was extremely aggressive (remember that we were in a small cosy lounge room) and the subject of his recitations was ultra-violent, the second a very graphic description of a disembowelment of Hillary Clinton with dull razor blades. We were all wondering if we were going to get out alive, really. Was he going to pull one of the weapons he was so vividly describing – knives, razors, cudgels – and get stuck in? He could have torn us apart with his bare hands. But when Sue told him forcefully that his time was up he stopped in mid-sentence and sat down, and ten minutes later we left peacefully, an early end to the evening. We got out alive. Looking back from the security of sleepy Oz, Mr Tieg's performance was incomparable, the most exciting I've ever had the 'pleasure' to witness.

Philip Hammial

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