

N°5 1999 ISSN 1328-2107

cordite

poetry & poetics review



JANICE PAUL Giraffe Lady

Felicity Holland on **Ted Hughes** **New Section** on **Performance Poetry**

INSIDE: **Ken Bolton** & **Pam Brown** look back on the '70s • **David Prater** on **Mallarmé in Melbourne** • **Jennifer Compton** on **Walcott's OMEROS & Murray's FREDY NEPTUNE** • **Mal Morgan** and **Peter Skrzynecki** on cancer • **Todd Swift** on **Slam Poetry** . . .

\$5

ESSAYS & REVIEWS

Jennifer Compton	Not a review Derek Walcott's <i>Omeros</i> & Les Murray's <i>Fredy Neptune</i>	10
Felicity Holland	Laureate Ted and The Big Striptease Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath	3
Wednesday Kennedy	Trials and Collaborations	15
David Prater	The Mallarmé Writer's Event	8
Todd Swift	The Hungry Art of the Slam Poet	14
<hr/>		
Michelle Carter	WEDNESDAY KENNEDY <i>Post Romantic</i>	23
Tricia Dearborn	CATHERINE BATESON <i>The Vigilant Heart</i>	17
Brian Henry	JAMES TATE <i>Shroud of the Gnome</i>	20
Charlotte Jones	JEAN KENT <i>The Satin Bowerbird</i>	21
Rebecca Jones	PETER BAKOWSKI <i>The Heart at 3am</i>	21
David Kelly	IAN MCBRYDE <i>Flank</i>	16
Geraldine McKenzie	FRANK KUPPNER <i>Second Best Moments in Chinese History</i>	21
Phil Norton	ALISTAIR STEWART <i>Frankston 281</i>	22
Pi O	<i>Going Down Swinging, Hobo, & Red Lamp, Textbase, rHino, Spur</i>	23
Brian Purcell	FOOTLOOSE PRODUCTIONS <i>So Be It</i>	18
Michelle Taylor	JUDY JOHNSON <i>Wing Corrections</i>	19

POEMS

Emily Ballou	Enter	4
Mary Jo Bang	When the Weather Changes to Warm, the Boys Drive Shirtless	16
Judith Beveridge	Woman in a Street Stall	19
Ken Bolton	Happy Accidents	12
Alain Bosquet	In a sex shop	6
—translated by Rae Sexton	Scene in a town	6
Pam Brown	At the Ian Burn show	11
	In Surry Hills	17
	In Ultimo in '98	11
Kathielyn Job	Change	22
August Kleinzahler	Someone Named Gutierrez: A Dream, A Western	3
Stephen J Lacey	revolving restaurant	16
Deb Matthews	Red	5
Mal Morgan	I'll Leave a Poem or Two	18
	The Man in a Poem	18
	The Verb Mourir	19
Michelle Morgan	So let me get this straight	14
Pi O	Everything Poem, part 4	7
Dorothy Porter	Disaster	21
David Prater	Xanana's Dog	10
Patricia Prime	Pregnant Woman in Red	5
Matthew Rohrer	Dreamocracy	9
	Precision German Craftsmanship	9
Philip Salom	Acupuncturist; Under the Needles	20
Peter Skryznecki	Day Stay	17
Elizabeth Treadwell	Pro Model Tells Story	6
Dara Weir	Apology for and Further Explanation of an Attempt to Divert Accusations of Equivocation	10
Jane Williams	the lodger	18
Mijanou Zigane	Yesterday's Solution	5

SITES

Contributors	24
Editorial	7
Letters	7
Performance	14
Reviews	16

CORDITE

Poetry and Poetics Review

A review of Australian poetry

Editor Adrian Wiggins

Performance Editor Phil Norton

Review Editor Dominic Fitzsimmons

Interview Editor Bruce Williams

Picture Editor Sue Bower

Contributing Editor David Prater

Assistant Editors Britta Deuschle,
Margie CroninSpecial Thanks Rowena Lennox,
Arabella LeeFounding Editors Adrian Wiggins,
Peter Minter, 1997

Production Adrian Wiggins

Printer Marrickville Newspapers
18-22 Murray St, Marrickville NSW 2204

Publisher CORDITE PRESS INC

Subscription

You can receive four issues of *CORDITE* at
only \$19 for humans or \$40 for institu-
tions. Send a cheque or money order
payable to CORDITE PRESS INC.

Contribution

Contributions should include a short bio-
graphical note, and can be sent to:

The Editors
CORDITE
PO Box A273
Sydney South NSW 1235
AUSTRALIA

We can only respond to materials that are
accompanied by a stamped self-addressed
envelope. Simultaneous submissions or
previously published material will not be
accepted.

Minimum Payment

Poems	\$50
Illustrations, photographs	\$50
Articles, essays, reviews	\$50

Contributors will also receive a compli-
mentary copy of the issue of *CORDITE* in
which their work appears.

Copyright

Copyright of each work published in
CORDITE reverts to its author upon publi-
cation. Except for the purposes of fair deal-
ing and research no part of this publication
may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval
system or transmitted in any form or by
any means without the prior permission of
the author and the publisher.

Disclaimer

Reviews and articles published in *CORDITE*
are accepted for publication on the under-
standing that they do not necessarily reflect
the opinions of the editors or the publisher
unless otherwise stated, and on the under-
standing that they represent and promote
fair discussion and commentary on
Australian poetry.

This project has been made possible
with assistance from the
New South Wales Government
through the Ministry for the Arts

CORDITE PRESS INC acknowledges the
assistance of the Australia Council for the
Arts in the form of a Foundation Grant,
and the New South Wales Government
Ministry for the Arts for funding to pay
contributors.

Felicity Holland

Laureate Ted and The Big Striptease

The peanut-crunching crowd
Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot –
The big strip tease.

—Sylvia Plath, 'Lady Lazarus'

In January this year, a lavishly produced collection of poems by British poet laureate Ted Hughes was published. *BIRTHDAY LETTERS'* confessional poem sequence charts the meeting, marriage and separation of Hughes and Sylvia Plath. The publication of the sequence followed, or so the myth goes, nearly thirty-five years' silence on Hughes' part, about Plath and his marriage to her. Despite the near-prohibitive \$36 price tag, a peanut-crunching, poetry-reading crowd of unprecedented size shoved in to purchase this collection, which has so far sold over 100,000 copies in Britain alone. What sort of literary voyeurism does this involve?

Earlier in the year, in my capacity as a 'Plath scholar' I was interviewed on radio ABC 2CN for my views on the book. When I suggested that no account contains a full truth, and that it was no easier nor more morally appropriate to comment on the Hughes/Plath marriage than it was to offer any definitive comment on our friends' relationships, I knew that I was regarded as something of a disappointment—the academic equivalent of a stripper who won't get the gear off. The script and role I imagine I was meant to inhabit was that tired old clown-suit, inflated with vitriol, the caricature-feminist's rage against the patriarchal machine, Hughes, which destroyed the fragile Plath. Yet how that enfeebles Plath, and grasps backwards into the defunct literary critical model which seeks solace from the wiliness and fire of a text in the safe arms of authorial intention. What other responses are there to *BIRTHDAY LETTERS'*? How appropriate is Plath's own prophetic metaphor of the strip tease to describe the readerly, and possibly writerly, impulses at work here?

August Kleinzahler

Someone Named Gutierrez: A Dream, A Western

Outside the cantina
with you in the backseat of a ruined DeSoto,
torn upholstery, vinyl mange
and the big old radio's static frying
what could only be a Dixie Cups tune.
Things had gone terribly bad,
and Slim, who drove us the whole long way
through the chaparral and dust,
was in there now, with them,
asking for the money he had no right to,
had no right to even ten years back
when the fire was, or so he says.
They nearly killed him then,
the fool, the braggart, the Suicide Kid,
just itching after a good old-timey
late afternoon cowboy send-off,
blood and gold and glinting side arms,

with us stuck back there yet, hove-to
in the back seat like two kids
waiting for Dad.

When you touched me,
the lightest of touches, the most unforeseen,
carelessly along the wrist.
I nearly came unglued.
I mean, I knew about Ramone,
that lovely boy—and for so long,
the two of you. I cherish that photo still,
your white tam-o'-shanter, his red TransAm.
Then I became water.
Then, from what had once been my chest,
a plant made of light effloresced.
Thus, our adventure began, our slow-motion
free-fall through the vapours and oils.
I stammered at your white flesh.

And that,
that's when the shooting began.

Holland on Hughes. . .

Ted Hughes died in Devon as I was grappling with *BIRTHDAY LETTERS* for this article. It's easy to see in retrospect the drive for completion which runs through this collection: the sense of taking an opportunity to put one's case. Before Hughes' death, and before public knowledge of the fact that he has been suffering from cancer for the last eighteen months, the question of the text's timing was puzzling. Its abandonment and clarity make sense in the light of the writer's understanding of his impending death, and the freeing up that attends a courageous accep-

tance of this. Yet though the impulse may be admirable, to what extent is the desire to state one's case so finally an illusory and impossible goal? 'It is' after all, 'only a story', the speaker of 'Visit' reminds himself, his reader, and the 'you' to whom the poems are addressed, 'Your story. My story.'

Part of the answer to this question about the reason for this poetic 'story' lies in an examination of the lineage from which this text springs. The collection reminds me, in structural terms, of Dorothy Porter's *THE MONKEY'S MASK*—self-contained lyric poems marching together to pound out a fast story. As in *THE MONKEY'S MASK* and John Tranter's poem

sequence *THE FLOOR OF HEAVEN*, the narrative drive and pulse in *BIRTHDAY LETTERS* is strong, and like those two similar weddings of the short story and poetry, it is interesting for its hybridity and for what it demands in terms of reading. There are counterpointing poetic energies at work in each case: the velocity born of linearity, clarity and narrative, and the slow kaleidoscopic effects of the lyric's honing in on details, and its compatibility with impressionistic portraiture. In each case a narrative is built from shards of light and illuminated moments, which in each case function also as 'clues'.

It interests me that Porter's shifting of the lesbian detective novel genre into the arena of poetry involves her focusing on the search for a young woman's killer, and a literal and psychological forensics aimed at locating those slippery animals: responsibility, guilt and innocence. To some extent, a relatively occluded version of these detective and forensic impulses occurs in Hughes' work. There is a sense of evidence being garnered and scrutinised, and there is a sense in which the reader, like the reader of a detective story, becomes the judge of the assembled clues. There is also a sense of forensic inquiry, as the mythologised figure of Sylvia Plath is exhumed for the scrutiny of the poems' 'I', and for the reader's interest. All of this makes Plath's famous dramatic monologue, 'Lady Lazarus' oddly prophetic, with its dramatised return from the dead of a speaker who wryly observes that "Dying | is an art, like everything else. | I do it exceptionally well." The piece can be read as a cautionary tale for biographers, especially in the light of its mantric repetition of the single word 'beware', and perhaps Hughes might have considered the speaker's warning that all endeavours to reconstruct her after death will prove futile:

Ash, ash –
You poke and stir.
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there –

A cake of soap,
A wedding ring,
A gold filling.

The closest model for Hughes' sequence, though, is probably found in that first great birth in what was to become the confessional tradition, Robert Lowell's *LIFE STUDIES*. Like *LIFE STUDIES*, *BIRTHDAY LETTERS* entails a sort of stream-of-consciousness grappling with key concerns. The discourses of confessionalism and psychotherapy are often melded, and the analogy strikes me as appropriate for the dogged worrying – in both senses – that provides, in each case, with any luck, some sort of epiphany and insight. *BIRTHDAY LETTERS* is not Hughes' first attempt in this mode, though, contrary to the puffery of 'stunning departure' and 'radical innovation' surrounding its publication. Hughes' collection *CROW* is another such sequence, perhaps not recognised as such since the figure of 'crow' eclipses – or gives the appearance of eclipsing – any confessional illusion of access to an 'I'. *CROW* contains an element of allegorical autotherapy, yet its ventriloquism through the ragged and wild body of crow seeks to disabuse readers of any belief in, or search for an authorial presence. Yet Hughes, whose poetic reputation rests heavily on his depiction of the animal kingdom, is no mere sketcher of 'beasties for beasties' – or for sketching's – sake. His oeuvre is often more animated than it is peopled, but these animals are mythic embodiments of traits and attitudes, rather than slavishly observed natural subjects. Thought fox, for example, is the protagonist in a myth about making, and about inspiration, and hawk's nobility and independence suggests an idealised projection of aspects of an 'I'.

In *BIRTHDAY LETTERS* there is certainly an 'I', and one which seems, like the avenging phoenix in Plath's 'Lady Lazarus' to seek justice through the revelation of the truth in all its nakedness and fearfulness. Yet throughout Hughes' sequence, far more powerful is the poems' 'you', Sylvia Plath, and we

Emily Ballou

Enter

You will find the house with a bee for a heart,
a sprinkle of stars on the leaves, my bees, a confetti
of light that swarms the hot honeycomb on the picket fence,
the stems of purple dahlias strewn with damp hay.

Pull the dusk after you, leave your clouds behind.

Chase away the crimson dark, the cold, the alone with fire.
Split gum tree stacked along the mossy wall, inside
logs tumble from the stove, ash and flame
dancing the Tibetan prayer-flags that hang
over the cracked mantle, scorching the bricks with black chalk.

Blue buckets, charred with smoke, waxy buttons
mapping the wooden table, the history of darkness
draining hot like rain to the floor.

The room is yellow. It has to be.

Three candles and you can write. Barely.
Four candles to read. One candle to illuminate
a fraction of what you need to see, to live by.

Clutches of old trees in your hair.
The possums send them through the roof with their scratching.
Pools of lemon-scented gum leaves are their beds above you,
all night their teeth chew at your dreams, the dust
washing over the tepee of your silk bed the dog gets tangled in.

When it storms, the old house cracks its bones
beneath you. You know you would not live
if they broke, but that does not stop you from living there,
in the butter-light, in the tea-dust, in the cosmos blood, in the blue
flame under the teapot, the soap by the sink
pink and edge-laced with teeth. Some nights the mice
manage to carry it away altogether, nights when the rooms shudder
with all the restless life you cannot see.

Wake up touched by rain.
Travel back the way you came, by puddle, by ladder,
you almost fell once, boot slipping through the rung
the fast wax like sticky tape wound around your hand.
Peel it off. It is like skin.

You do the same when you come in, and when you go.

My house of honey.
For a bead of this I would guard the entrance,
I would mend the light.

Mijanou Zigane

Yesterday's Solution

ACROSS: 1 Teardrop, 7 lady, 8 Flamingo, 9 Unison, 10 Gyrate, 11 eye, 12 lease, 14 Yeast, 16 set, 18 bandit, 20 Option, 22 Apostles, 23 Ewer, 24 Asbestos. DOWN: 1 trainee, 2 Abyss, 3 Define, 4 Orange, 5, 15, light showers, 6 Fierce, 13 Sadism, 15 see 5, 16 stylus, 17 tousle, 19 Apple, 21 Treat, 25 Burn, 26 Finish.

Holland on Hughes. . .

see far more of 'you' than we do of 'I', who seems to skulk in the shadows just beyond the dazzling (American) brightness of 'you'. 'You' is a disconcerting word to be pelted with, as a reader. "You bowed at your desk and you wept" ('The God'); "You took root, you flourished" ('Remission'); "I walked beside you | As if seeing you for the first time" ('Moonwalk'); poems entitled 'You hated Spain', 'Your Paris' and 'The Dogs are Eating Your Mother'. Virginia Woolf brilliantly illustrates the dangers of 'I' in 'A Room of One's Own':

after reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter T. One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it... why was I bored? Partly because of the dominance of the letter T and the aridity, which, like the giant beech tree, it casts within its shade.¹

The 'I' of the Birthday Letters poems seems well aware of these traps, and might say of itself what one of the speakers in Plath's 'Three Women' does: "And I have no face... I have wanted to efface myself". The 'you' in Hughes' poems, on the other hand, is omnipresent: perhaps never before has 'you' appeared in writing in all its toxicity and power.

It might seem likely that to write a sequence all about 'you' must at some level be a sort of imaginative homage. Yet the portrait which emerges here is in no way hagiographical, or even especially loving. In 'Caryatids (2)' 'I' mentions doing something "More to reach you | Than to reproach you", and this may provide some insight into the poems' rationale. In the mythology which runs through Plath's own writing, death becomes a uterine space in which new selves can create themselves. Poetry is the vital source pouring itself out: "the blood jet is poetry" ('Kindness'), creating through cataclysm, destroying false selves and living dolls, sloughing off 'dead hands, dead stringencies' ('Ariel') to enable the emergence of some more glorious identity. Hughes' Poetry is as eroticised a figure as Plath's Death. In 'Flounders' she is the dark sister, wicked and indulgent, of a good goddess who warns the poem's subjects off Poetry:

It was a visit from the goddess, the beauty
Who was poetry's sister—she had come
To tell poetry she was spoiling us.
Poetry listened, maybe, but we heard nothing
And poetry did not tell us. And we
Only did what poetry told us to do.

From a dangerous liaison with poetry might be born a new self. If this is true of *BIRTHDAY LETTERS*, and the title's intertextual rhyme with Plath's death-and-resurrection sequence *Poem For A Birthday* tends to reinforce this suggestion, the 'you' who emerges is a Plath who is surely 'more terrible than she ever was' (Plath, 'Stings'). This is not a new experience for the posthumously written Plath, who has been the subject of six full biographies which reel from demonising (Plath had to embrace the 'bitch goddess' within, according to Edward Butscher; she was a talentless shrew

according to the lemon-mouthed Anne Stevenson) to hagiographical. Some are dogged, others the work of biographers who have fallen in love with their subject (witness the jacket image of biographer Paul Alexander, posing as courtly lover/ Byronic hero in billowy white shirt.). There are enough ways of telling the story of any life, arguably, to fill the space of innumerable biographies, and indeed enough different stories in any person's life to construct quite different versions of the same 'self'.

BIRTHDAY LETTERS is in some ways yet another biography of Plath, at least as far as the life charted is linked with Hughes' own. In 'Visit' we see 'I' meeting 'you': "Not knowing I was being auditioned | For the male lead in your drama", then in 'A Pink Wool Knitted Dress' we inhabit an oddly anaesthetised 'I' marrying 'you':

Deb Matthews

Red

The day her boyfriend came home from gaol
She spilled out onto the quiet street
In a sheer red dress
Which showed her flattened breasts,
Her bones.
And the mad edge of her laughter
Held itself to the neighbour's throats.

They wished she would go back inside—
Lie on her bed with a bottle of gin;
Sit, in a haze, on the lounge-room floor
Flicking her lighter at a pack of burning cards.

The street could not contain
The riot of her voice;
Her stumbling red shape;
Her bare white feet on their bitumen road.

They preferred the hysteria of her screams
Bouncing off inner walls
Of crushed and shattered plasterboard.
There a fist or two,
There the crater of a skull.
A whole panel gone
Where her pushed her body through.

Their ecstasy lasted a day or two.

Then, at night,
They howled in the yard
Like a pair of ill-matched cats
Tearing at cloth; at hair; at skin,
Drawing each other's animal blood.

Patricia Prime

Pregnant Woman in Red

—Egon Schiele

Most of the flesh a harsh red,
heightening the expressiveness
of the figure with its black
outlines and setting it off
against the background colour
of the paper.

The woman's mask-like,
raised face appears as an afterthought.
Far more important is the shape
of her body—the hefty thighs
and the swollen belly—round
as an apple.

Her distended body, thigh, and arm
are altogether believable. The left half
is less convincing, for here only
an outline is provided, then
filled in with a brush
to match the other arm.

The artist has omitted
the table or chair
supporting the figure:
the pregnant woman
on an elevated surface
hangs in space.

You shook, you sobbed with joy, you were ocean
depth
Brimming with God.
You said you saw the heavens open
And slow riches, ready to drop on us.
Levitated beside you, I stood subjected
To a strange tense: the future spellbound.

'You' and 'I' go on a Spanish honeymoon ('You Hated Spain'), have tiffs during car trips to the coast: "You refused to get out. | You sat behind your mask, inaccessible— | Staring towards the ocean that had failed you" ('The Beach'); reconcile sufficiently to produce babies and poems: "You were weeping | Your biggest, purest joy" ('The Afterbirth'). 'I' seems to have terrible trouble with 'you', whose flaws are crystallised in a recurrent metonymy: America as 'you'. One early example of this is also on of the collection's least wonderful moments: "It seemed your long, perfect, American legs | Simply went on up" ('St Bodolph's'). Early in the collection, America is celebrated for a moment, in full colonising fervour: "You were a new world. My new world. | So this is America. I marvelled. | Beautiful, beautiful America" ('18 Rugby Street'). Soon the celebration becomes ambivalent. 'You' is laughed at by a taxi driver, amazed to see "an American girl being so American" ('Fate Playing'). Things get worse, with 'you' morphing rapidly into someone "Alien to me as a window model, | American, airport-hopping super-product" ('The Chipmunk') and "Empty, horrible, archaic – America" ('The Badlands').

'I' starts to exhibit a delicious and ambivalent fear of the occult nature of 'you' and of "Vast, bristling darkness | Of America" ('The 59th Bear'). This poem re-writes one of Plath's sto-

Alain Bosquet

translated by Rae Sexton

In a sex shop

The assistant, surrounded by obscene photos,
is no less romantic for it. A phallus
has a fair chance of menacing her—
with its blue mushroom featured on the poster.

She dreams of chaste kisses in the shade
of an orchard. The devouring vaginas opening
on the walls don't know how to corrupt her:
for her spirit is virgin, unmoved by these sperm,

these testicles, these clients who lose
their spectacles under her skirt. Heartily she laughs
while offering spare anuses, chokers

or magical pomade. She waits, an innocent
despite so much ugliness—even dispersed
by her—for some prince lacking genital organs.

Holland on Hughes...

ries, in which a couple camping in a national park
are hunted by a bear. Hughes' bear breaks into the
car belonging to 'you', and rummages through
everything. 'You' responds with terror, as though
the bear metaphorises some evaded aspect of the self,
while 'I' feels "a strange pride | To have been so
chosen and ego-raked | By the deliberations of that
beast" ("The 59th Bear"), though this is not untinged
by a frisson of terror. 'I' feels some affinity with the
bear, as he does later with the fox in 'Epiphany'. In
this poem, someone wants to sell 'I', the new father,
a baby fox, for a pound. 'I' wonders "What would
we do with an unpredictable, | Powerful, bounding
fox? | The long-mouthed, flashing temperament"
with its "vast hunger for everything beyond us". Not
buying the fox, he thinks:

...If I had paid,

Alain Bosquet

translated by Rae Sexton

Scene in a Town

The skull is split on the footpath: red currants
or blood? Against the wall a lip has slid
like an old snail. The pulse of each brick
has begun to beat with fury. It was necessary

to torture, one by one, the dozen streetlights,
accomplices in the murder. This evening
the kidneys of the statue are blocked. In the metro
they've found an island of blind lemon-trees.

The vagabond moon has broken its jaw.
The bitumen has refused to give help to children
without knees. It's rained blue gloves,

green gloves and black, and later a thousand hands
on the sleeping park. In front of the Law Courts
they must have dismissed all eyes without charge.

If I had paid that pound and turned back
To you, with that armful of fox –

If I had grasped that whatever comes with a
fox

Is what tests a marriage and proves it a mar-
riage –

I would not have failed the test. Would you
have failed it? But I failed. Our marriage had
failed.

The fox is proleptic: soon 'our marriage'
meets another test, embodied in a crea-
ture also described through a discourse
of the wild and exotic, which culmi-
nates in extraordinary ambivalence:

She sat there, in her soot-wet mascara,

In flame-orange silks, in gold bracelets,

Slightly filthy with erotic mystery –

A German

Russian Israeli with the gaze of a demon

Between curtains of black Mongolian hair.

—'Dreamers'

The fox starts to look decidedly unde-
manding and pleasant, in the face of the
efforts of this smutty alien, the 'she'
who appears solely responsible for punc-
turing the dialogue of 'you' and 'I', and
fatally triangulating the marriage, after
"sniffing us out". It is 'you' who courts
her: "Warily you cultivated her". The
next thing you know, there's an affair,
but it's not between 'she' and 'I', or even between
'she' and 'you'. It's between 'you' and a death-
beholden hungry Ogre: "You went off, a flare of
hair and a plunge | Into the abyss. | Every night.
Your Ogre lover... You cried out | Your love-sick-
ness for that Ogre, | Your groaning appeal" ('Fairy
Tale').

'You' is by now pretty well stark naked. In her book
*THE SILENT WOMAN: SYLVIA PLATH AND TED
HUGHES*, Janet Malcolm defines as voyeuristic the
desire to read biographies. She handles metaphors of
biographer as burglar and biographer as Peeping
Tom in her examination of the basis of biography
writing and reading:

The voyeurism and busybodyism that impel writers
and readers of biographies are obscured by an appa-
ratus of scholarship designed to give the whole enter-
prise an appearance of almost banklike blandness and
solidity...

The transgressive nature of biography is rarely
acknowledged, but it is the only explanation for the
biography's status as a popular genre... a
kind of collusion [exists] between [the
reader] and the biographer in an excitingly-
forbidden undertaking: tiptoeing down the
corridor together, to stand in front of the
bedroom door and try to peep through the
keyhole.²

If *BIRTHDAY LETTERS* can be read as a
life study in the confessional tradition: a
poem sequence biography and domestic
history, the reader and 'I' can be read as
Malcolm's busybodies, colluding in the
transgression of the peep show through
the keyhole of the bedroom of 'you'.
Yet if 'you', as I have argued, unfailingly
gives the reader a jolt, as though we
were being addressed at some level, then
are we peeping through the keyhole of
our own bedrooms? If the 'big strip
tease' is 'you', where do you look? In
the text's innovative melding of psy-
chotherapeutic quest, detective genre
and life study, the reader is implicated in
the overarching question of guilt and
innocence in a way which gives us no
escape from the invective of Plath's Lady
Lazarus' resonating 'charge': "There is a
charge | For the eyeing of my scars,
there is a charge | For the hearing of my
heart... | And there is a charge, a very
large charge | For word or a touch | Or

Elizabeth Treadwell

Pro Model Tells Story

it's not like i'm attached
to all these camel-
coats, long, short &
floppy (big buttons),
short & tight (big
buttons): i mean i would give them just
give them
to any girl off the bus,
stairs tar black corduroy
and the driver, her relaxed
hair, wide-wheels through left
turn signals in deep, slovenly
rain, i'd give her one.

it's just when i get stuck across
town in the rain by that fish
shop overlooking the ocean,
whole rows of these
fish shops and it's raining, then
i do need a coat as i wait like
my pig-tailed chewing lips debated
for mother to pick up but
it's so far away and there's
nothing worse than your
teenager having some
job where you hafta go
fetch her half across

but when you get a large green
news-smelly plush, well you still
don't want to be at the
beck-&-call of some teenage

& your progeny's buying a little sportscar
like a girl in a film, even a
European
& she just wonders, mother

Victoria, oh Victoria!—the map of
where i was,
please

He gave narrative, tenderness,
solicitude & doubt. photos of the two
of us labelled everywhere. I walk through
shelves and streets of

a bit of blood". Readers of *BIRTHDAY LETTERS* in
their stampeding charge, their fix of voyeuristic
energy, and their implication on the crimes the text's
narrative charts, are indeed very much part of the
inexorable charge which is part of the myth of Sylvia
Plath.

References

1 Virginia Woolf, 'A Room of One's Own', (Oxford: World's
Classics, 1992) p.130.

2 Janet Malcolm, *THE SILENT WOMAN: SYLVIA PLATH AND TED
HUGHES* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994) p.9.

This article was made possible
in part by a grant for contribu-
tors from the New South
Wales Ministry for the Arts.



This project has been made possible
with assistance from the
New South Wales Government
through the Ministry for the Arts

Editorial

That Prime Minister John Howard saw the need to involve a poet in the writing of his draft constitutional preamble (purportedly an 'aspirational document', but interpretations vary) is, on the face of it, a good thing. This suggests that in moments of perceived national need for meaning, a politician will reach for a poet, the arch maker of new meaning. However the truly disappointing nature of the resulting preamble only points a certain disingenuousness on Howard's part. He tried to use poetry to invest a debased document with the trappings of a credibility he clearly never meant it to have.

In which case, Howard's preamble, in short, could be seen as a low point for public poetry. That Les Murray subsequently distanced himself from his client and virtually disowned Howard's bastardisation comes as no surprise.

Those of you troubled by the irregularity of CORDITE's appearance (thank you for your calls) may be pleased to know that we've dropped the pretense of claiming to be quarterly. Journal production is exacting and time-consuming work, and the order simply too tall with our current resources. We publish, like most poetry journals, as often as humanly possible. CORDITE will come out at least twice a year, but probably not four times a year. Subscriptions will still cover four issues.

The light on the hill just got a little brighter. Congratulations to the Poets Union for establishing the Australian Poetry Centre in the precinct of the Balmain Library.

Adrian Wiggins

Letters

Young poet cranky at unfavourable review

I'm still laughing and so is Kevin Pearson who just rang me to read me Jennifer Kremmer's attempt to review my book, *FILTH* [see CORDITE N°4]. I'm sure she has no idea just how many books such a pathetic attempt at a slam will sell. She might be pleased though to know that the blurb on my impending title *POINT ORMOND, SHIPLESS* will almost certainly include:

"'The Prince of Darkness'—CORDITE".

If I could just stop laughing long enough to note that in two hilariously bad reviews, *FILTH* has suffered from the lack of any classical education among younger poets essaying reviews while still wet behind the ears. Both have attacked *UNFAITHFUL TRANSLATIONS* without giving any indication that these are translations. It may indeed come as a shock to Ms Kremmer to know that John Forbes praised the modesty of my quote from him on the blurb. Among other things he had said in a reader's report recommending publication by A&R, were "Hugh Tolhurst has a big future" and, "His translations from the Latin of Catullus include some of the finest translations of the 20th century".

It's a pity I can't ring John to tell him that Penguin UK are soon to publish *CATULLUS IN ENGLISH* and Professor Julia Gaiser of the Department of Latin, Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, has informed me that she will include no less than three [no more than three, either?—ED] poems from *UNFAITHFUL TRANSLATIONS*. This, of course, being subject to final editing by the series editor, Christopher Ricks. He'd have liked that, just as he liked the way that

—continued on page 23, column 1

Pi O

Everything Poem, part 4

There are
455 active volcanoes in the World
and blood completes
a circuit of the body
every 23 seconds,
but you weigh
40 times as much as your brain
and it's impossible
to describe a spiral-staircase [without using
a finger]
so watch with one eye
and listen with the other, i'm about to attempt
a handstand
using one finger!

In 1665
Robert Hooke
drew a picture of a [*] snowflake, hung it Up
on a wall
and marvelled on the workings [and
the Glory]
of God:—
"There are 36 letters
in the Russian alphabet
and rhubarb
originated in Tibet, but Miles Davis was
a diabetic
and an oral culture

has no
Text!"
/
[Now]
I may
or "may-Not" know what i'm
saying [cos
4/5ths of everything living on this planet
is under the sea, and baritones resonate
better in the bathroom]
but if you
stick an elephant in a refrigerator, it'll explode
an' there'll be nothing but
smoke
pickle
and spinach
so don't try and understand all this
in English:
"Sleep
is an alert process
designed to prevent the brain from going into
a coma"
/
Picture this:—
You're in the middle of an argument
so you get-Up
to get yourself a Brandy
but the Thermometer BURSTS (like
a pimple!) (cos it's thirsty!)
you turn round to "laugh"

—continued on page 9, column 3

CORDITE is one of Australia's most exciting and innovative poetry publications. We publish the work of approximately 30 writers in each issue. We give priority to contemporary Australian poets, but also publish international work we believe to be of interest to our readers.

Counted amongst our many contributors are some of the most important Australian poets of our time, and some of the most important writers of the future. Our reviewers are practitioners, our essayists are experts in their poetic field.

So we're different to your usual commercial magazine.

Each subscription helps us publish. Subscribe today! Subscribe and share CORDITE with a friend—on us. A four issue subscription is now only \$19. We'll send two issues to your friend

You

Name

Address

.....
.....

Your friend

Name

Address

.....
.....

Stéphane Mallarmé is dead. Long may his absence linger. Long may the horrifying abyss of the white (and black) pages confound we poets, prattlers and plagiarists. And long may we question the substance of our languages, the correspondences between organic, sys-

unanswered question, however: is this glorification of Mallarmé appropriate today, or is it merely our millennial musings that cause us to look back on his works in such a favourable light?

Martin Harrison, John Hawke and Kris Hemensley opened proceedings with a spirited discussion of the inadequacy of critical responses to 20th century Australian Modernism (or, as Martin

restricted to recitations of bush balladry, acts of larrikinism and various other shenanigans the validity of which lies, unfortunately, outside the scope of this review. May I simply say, the fact that there was, of all things, French poetry in our midst during those pre-Federation years is reason enough for a conference in itself.

favour of more personal poetic visions. Macauley's Catholicism, for instance, led him to substitute "the ultimate symbol", Jesus Christ for what, in his earlier work, can only be described as an occultist fascination with sign and symbol.

After an interpretation of the poem 'L'Après Midi d'un Faune' by dance students from Monash University, Robert Adamson joined Martin Harrison in conversation, recalling his first reading of Mallarmé in the late 1960s. Listening to his casual responses to Harrison's questions, I got the impression that, for Adamson at least, Mallarmé is still around, like a good friend: "He was an amazing guy". Adamson also shared some humorous anecdotes, such as his avid reading of Dylan Thomas in the mistaken belief that the Welsh poet was in some way related to Bob Dylan. He even went so far as to claim that, had he not seen the word 'Rimbaud' on one of Dylan's album sleeves, he might never have got into the Symbolistes at all. Some would argue that this illustrates well the fact that, in many ways, pop culture supplies writers and artists of post-war generations (or, should I say, writers and artists steeped in 'Postmodernities') with what are supposedly literary influences. Think also of Patti Smith's insistent "Go, Rimbaud, Rimbaud, Rimbaud!"

Speaking of pop culture, it was encouraging to see younger writers and artists featured on the programme at this Event. Dmetri Kakmi examined sexual metaphor in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, referring to the current trend in Gothic horror movies and fiction. Textbase (an art and writing collective based in Melbourne) launched its 3rd issue (devoted, fittingly, to 'chance') as part of the Event. At the launch, the editorial collective gave a simultaneous performance of their textual contributions, a cacophonous and often amusing babel of noise, voice, sound byte and silence.

Another boundary-pushing writer whose work was featured at the event is Javant Biarujia, who has spent the last twenty years constructing his own language, Tenaic. Only Biarujia and one other person speak this clever and engaging dialect. Notwithstanding translation problems, a piece incorporating Tenaic, English, French and Greek was performed for the baffled audience. I found it a highly entertaining take on Dadaist techniques, with the creator of the language absent, a reading from inside a pink box and memorable phrases such as "Genet-sait-quoi?" and "L'Après-midi du toc tudieu" (trans: "dog turd afternoon").

The evening session on Thursday was devoted to readings, with Rosemary Lloyd in the chair. First up was Michael Deguy, who was visiting from France for the Australian Divagations conference held at the Australian Centre earlier in the week. It was a delight to hear him speak, even as a non-French speaker. Robert Adamson (who also cannot speak French, though his poetry has been translated into that language) read from his new collection of poetry, his take on Mallarmé's 'Tomb for Anatole' drawing a quiet

—continued on page 24, column 2

David Prater

Mallarmé Writers' Event

Alliance Française de Melbourne

8th—9th October 1998

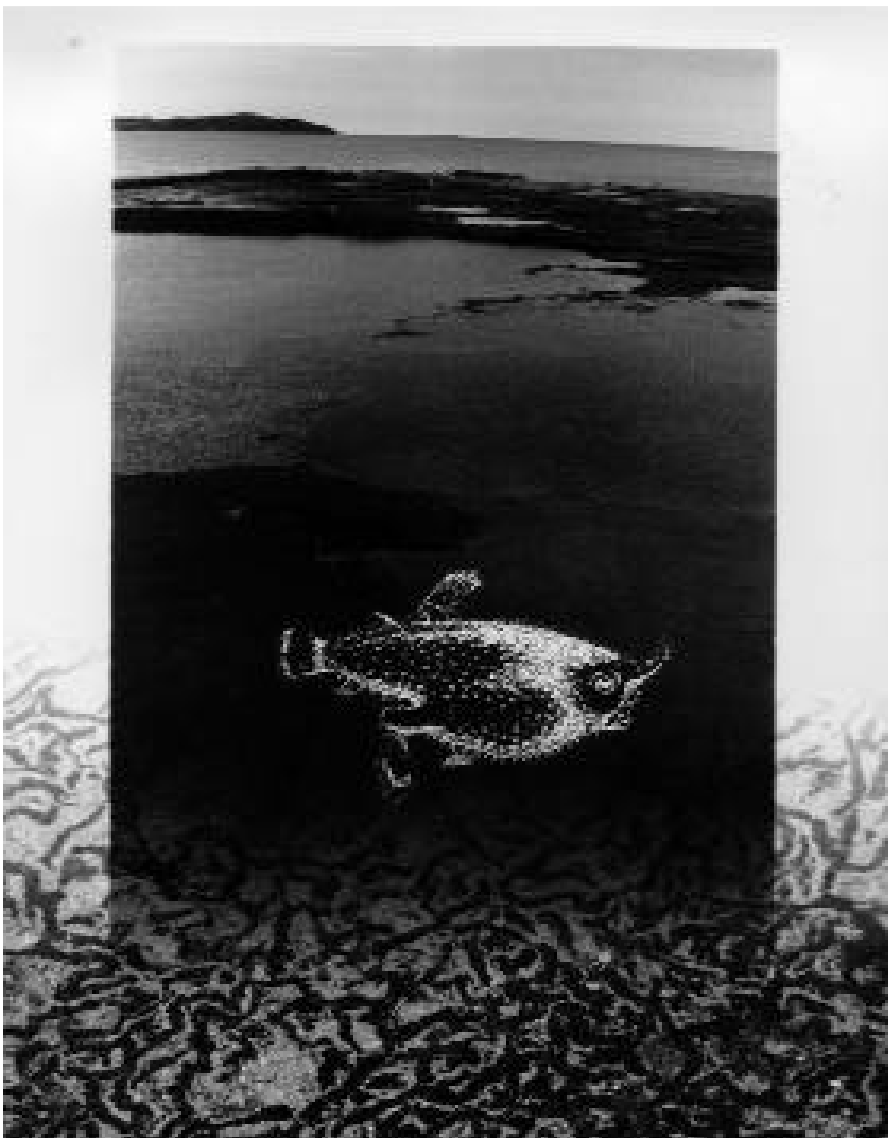
temic lifeforms and the unstoppable progress of symbols: numbers, letters, marks, voids. . .

One hundred years have passed since the death of one of France's most enigmatic and curious poets. And yet for one hundred chaotic and turbulent years editors and publishers all over the world have surveyed poems, articles, essays and stories stamped with Mallarmé's indelible influence, brushed with his unmistakable reverie. In the same way, his paradoxical presence could be felt at this small-scale but intense event held last year, a celebration as much of Australian writings and writers as of Mallarmé himself.

Who was this man? What does he mean to us in Australia as we approach a new millennium (this timeless excuse for reflection, this milestone we potentially pass each day and yet, like all true symbols, this number celebrated as much for its mystique as its significance in fact)? Where is Mallarmé—is he present in these rhetorical questions? Is he behind my eyelids, guiding my thoughts as I touch type? Or is he in the air we both breathe, ineffable as a gnat, unquestionable as a virus, trenchant as an offensive rumour?

Ironically, the spirit of Mallarmé's oeuvre can be said to have influenced writers far more than any general, widespread knowledge of his works. Particular attention was paid during this conference to the ways in which Australian writers have been influenced by Mallarmé's poetic theories, and the works of the French Symbolistes (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine et al) in general. Despite this, the overwhelming impression I received from the Event was that when Mallarmé was not mentioned at all, the question of his influence became more fascinating. Therein lies both the charm of his legacy and the frustration of attempting to write anything substantial on the subject.

The strong impression I was left with is of the number of contemporary Australian writers whose work, though defying categorisation, can be analysed constructively in the light of Mallarmé's writing, thus positing him as an inspirational figure, even demi-god, in certain writing circles. An



NANCY LIM *Washed Ashore*

Harrison preferred to phrase it, 'Modernities'). Of particular interest was John Hawke's examination of Symbolism's parallel influence on Australian letters, from the first critical responses to Mallarmé's work in the *Bulletin* in the 1890s, to the more recent writings of Judith Wright, Kenneth Slessor and Patrick White.

It was a revelation to hear of writings on Mallarmé in the 1890s *BULLETIN* and was initially surprised that his works should have appeared alongside those of fallen Aust. Lit. 101 icons Steele Rudd and Henry Lawson. I also had to admit to a certain sense of relief that, in the 1890s at least, Australian literature was not quite as provincial and ignorant as we have all been led to believe. Perhaps this is just a symptom of Ye Olde Cultural Cringe. The fact remains however that our appreciation of that time period is, in many respects,

The correspondence between Mallarmé and Christopher Brennan (the first Australian poet to appreciate Symboliste writers, as shown by his Sydney University lectures in 1904) lends weight to Hawke's insistence on a wider and more appreciative reading of Australian writers and their responses to international trends and movements. His research was thorough and thought provoking, offering solid evidence of Mallarmé's influence where, at times, others have been content to ponder the apparent insubstantiality of 'originality', 'inspiration' and 'uniqueness' in Australian verse.

His examination of James Macauley and A.D. Hope, two poets traditionally regarded as conservative, was a case in point. Hawke showed that they had come under the spell of the Symbolistes during their formative years, only to reject them later in life in

Matthew Rohrer

Precision German Craftsmanship

It was a good day and I was about to do something important
and good, but then I unscrewed the pen I was using
to see the ink. Precision German craftsmanship.
The Germans are so persnickety and precise,
they wash their driveways. Their mountains and streams
dance around each other in a clockwork, courtly imitation
of spring. They built the Panzer tank, out of rakes
hoses and garden gnomes; they built me.
And I've seated myself above an avenue on the brink
of mystery, always just on the lip, with my toes over the lip
but my bowels behind.

When I replaced the ink the sky was socked in,
only one window of blue open in the north, directly over someone.
But that person was reading about Rosicrucians in the laundromat,
he was unaware as the blue window closed above him.
The rest of us are limp and damp,
I see a button in front of us that says "spin cycle."
I'm going to push it.

Matthew Rohrer

Dreamocracy

The most terrifying sound—
an ice cream truck
in the middle of the night.

I'm perfectly flat
feeling my fingerprints.
It occurs to me that
the answer to our childhood questions is:
we're being tortured.

When I'm with my thoughts finally
I'm someone else, I am
driving an ice cream truck though the night
with no lights, pulling on the string that rings the bell.
I am the unwholesome whippoorwill trilling in the moonlight.
I am awake late defending the campsite against elves.
I am tortured in a sandbox at the army base.
I am throwing sand in a little boy's eyes.
I am getting very sleepy.

but it's . . . disappointing
you Wake-Up
and wonder Why
you're swimming
/
never trust anyone
who sez: "I'm from the Government and
i've come to help" [the vertical-groove
in the middle-portion of the upper-lip
is called a philtrum
and Pandemonium, is the Capital
of Hell]

Consider this

[if you like]:—

Karl Marx was a journalist
Asparagus was mentioned by the Egyptians
Shakespeare signed his name 4 different ways
and a face-lift takes
4½ hours
/

[Now]

i don't know
what kind of problem Shakespeare [or
anyone else] had
but it takes 20 seconds for a solution of
oil + vinegar [in a glass
of water] to separate
and IBM's motto is THINK [so
THINK!] make it Up!
according to
the Copenhagen Interpretation:
"Something's there
if something's there to say it's there [even if
it isn't]!"
/

what i'm
trying to get at is this: This is This
That is That
and This'n That is . . . That
not —————> That!
so don't suffer the "cause"
according to the manual
it'll take you another 12 hours to clean a 1,000
bricks [by
hand] and 3 days
to learn how to use
an artificial-leg
/
so you
may want to keep this in mind
a "raindrop"
travelling at 25mph is about
a 5th of an inch wide
and the last thing
a Pilot does
before the plane goes down
is
"whistle"

Dara Weir

**Apology for and Further Explanation
of an Attempt to Divert Accusations
of Equivocation**

In my hometown, it was like January,
like January in Oaxaca, in Fortin

de las Flores, like Fortin
in the mid-forties, like the 40s

in December, like December
on the river, a forest of willows

half in, half out of water,
like the river in the picture,

like the picture above your bureau,
like your bureau filled to overflowing

with feathers every colour of the spectrum
feathers blown through vowels,

through curtains of bougainvillea, going
on forever, forever as it formerly was,

in the lustre of a loved one's luggage,
baggage to carry lightly or solemnly

toss-off into the Bay of Fundy.
Thank you for four golden mice

who never wake me up at night,
for the pocket-size surveillance device,

for books which tell me nothing's unakin.
In January it was like my hometown

in the 1940s in the middle of December,
December a cool glass of water at noon

in the summer, a clinking of cowbells
to signal it's evening. I was seven

four, eight, eleven, still unborn,
brother to my younger sister,

sister to my mother, father like a twin,
twins like vapour trails on clear nights

in October. You were my shadow
I dared not step into. You stood by

my shoulder, champion, angel, faithful
companion I dare not look in the eye.

What was it like for you?

Were you about to step into your skin,

like water poured from a pitcher,
like an ant into amber, like molten gold?

Was the gold like someone's fortune
or folly, folly a moving picture you'd get
into for a quarter, when a quarter meant
more than a dollar, a dollar a bit

of a future you'd be expected to furnish,
I'd be with you to finish,

of a finish wearing the date of your birth,
polished with everyone's hopes,

polished with everyone's dreams
lost in a basket of keepsakes.

When I love
a person, a place, an object, I don't see
what there is to argue about.

—Norman MacCaig 'Ineducable Me'

A friend sent me a copy of *OMEROS* by
Derek Walcott because he liked it so
much. He quoted to me—"A girl
smells better than the world's libraries." I
found that faintly offensive without being
able to put my finger on it or wishing to get
on my high horse out of context.

When *OMEROS* ("0-meros," she laughed. "That's
what we call him in Greek.") arrived by mail I made
an attempt to read it. I began to feel as if I was sick-
ening for something or perhaps overtired. It seemed
to me a dull plod through a place of no attachment.

I found the lines my friend had underlined—"Both
of them wept | the forgiving rain of those who have
truly loved"; and "In God We Trust. | But then we
all trust in Him, and that's why we know | the peace
of a wandering heart when it is housed."

The man who wrote the book is obviously a poet—a
good poet? A great poet? Poet is enough. There are
poets and then there are the people who are not
poets. Derek Walcott is obviously a poet.

But his book *OMEROS* isn't doing the business on me.

It must be my fault. My eyes have always
glazed over when I've had a chance to
learn about Greek Gods and Goddesses. I
don't want them cluttering up my brain.
In a similar fashion I have rejected fairy
tales, clowns and the skill of driving a car.
So as *OMEROS* is a transposition of myth-
ic Greeks, Achille and Philocrete, to the
Caribbean, I'm starting out behind the
eight ball. Helen is wandering around
there too, getting the washing in etc, but
she is not, apparently, a protagonist.

But I still should be able to get a handle
on the story. I know nothing about the
Caribbean but I'm prepared to learn. I
don't reject the idea of the Caribbean out
of hand. But I couldn't get a sense of the
spirit of the place. I couldn't get the
smells or the colours or the kinship
dynamics. I didn't know who was who
or why. The poet eluded me. His motive
stood downwind from me. The move-
ment of the narrative was veiled. The
whole shebang teetered somewhere in
between anything I could come to grips
with. And maybe that is the *raison d'être*
of the book. For it is, according to the
blurb, fashioned from the suffering of the
individual in exile. And the exile (I
know) is never truly anywhere.

I dropped down onto what I found
offensive.

The concept of women as vases—"Your
name in her throat's white vase sent me
to find You." | "Good. A girl smells bet-
ter than the world's libraries." —perme-
ated the book. And into these vessels
pours the poet's appropriating libation. A
girl may be better than a book but she
can be read.

Look. I'm no vase. (I'm no girl either but
I took that to be idiomatic.) I'm as full as
a boot with my own ideas.

It's odd than some of the most believable
women I've read are written by a play-
wright who knew that these women
would be played by male actors.

Jennifer Compton

Not a review. . .

Rosalind, Beatrice, Lady Macbeth. And the fair
Ophelia. Oh and not to forget Tolstoy's Anna
Karenina. He is gentleman enough to admit that he is
not privy to her and writes her from the outside as
best he may so I get a good picture of what it looks
like—from outside looking in. That perspective is
welcome because I spend my whole life on the inside
looking out.

Perhaps the trick is to write women like men—and
then put in reason and accountability.

Flaubert said "Emma Bovary, c'est moi!"

Incidentally, Tolstoy draws a truly realistic portrait of
the English Thoroughbred mare, Frou-Frou, whose
death prefigures that of Anna.

All of the above is the longest preamble to sitting to
read *FREDY NEPTUNE* by Les Murray. A handsome
book, but I sat to it with some trepidation because of
comments ranging from dismissive to downright ugly
from people I know and—shall I say, curiously inter-
esting reviews. I haven't seen all of them but I
thought Andrew Riemer made a fair fist of it. And
from a standing start in, I think, four hundred words.

What if I didn't like *FREDY NEPTUNE*? What if I
thought it was ghastly? How could I make it a no go
area—such a large book, such a lot of work? I think
Les'd see past the old theatrical dodge of "Good was-
n't the word!"

David Prater

Xanana's Dog

You can call me Xanana's dog but
You can't run from my lapping tongue; please
Say a prayer for Xanana's dog but
Don't you dare tell them where I am.

They can't find Xanana Gusmao, though
They search the church for him, crying:
"Where did he go, where is Xanana?" So
They arrest me, because I'm Xanana's little dog.

Set me free! Asleep at night forget,
In the day remember, asleep at night forget me but
In the day remember that I am Xanana's dog.
Free Xanana!

They chain me up, but I'm Xanana's little dog;
They set me on fire, but I'm Xanana's little dog;
They call me names, but I'm Xanana's little dog;
They beat me and try to make me speak
but I am only a little dog.

Set me free! Asleep at night forget,
In the day remember, asleep at night forget and
In the day remember.

Trouble comes for Xanana's little dog;
Java comes for Xanana's little dog;
East Timor says goodbye to Xanana's little dog—
"Goodbye, Xanana's little dog!"

Xanana, Xanana, Xanana Gusmao!
Please help me, I am only a little dog!

I surfaced from *FREDY NEPTUNE* three nights later (and it's not as if I didn't have other work to do) exhausted and somehow transformed by gods and goddesses who have always lived next door to me and myths that I have had a hand in. I think it is always a transforming experience to enter a language that you are already in. The language and the purpose of the language that is already heard, that has always been available to you, but never so well. It was as if I had been reading something that had always existed.

I had the same experience reading *THE BONE PEOPLE* by Keri Hulme. At last—something good in my own language.

In spite of the narrative greed that consumed me *FREDY NEPTUNE* was an exhausting read. I didn't know who would exhaust first—me or the poet. One of us was going to have to cry quits. In the end it was inexhaustible. Whenever I thought I'd headed off the poet he came round the side of the hill on a fresh horse and hunted me from cover. As it were. I thought I knew the ending, the last couple of pages, but cunning Les hadn't read me the last line and although I like the last line most of all the lines in the

Pam Brown

At the Ian Burn show

MCA 1997

at the Ian Burn show

there's a badly recorded
b&w video of Ian Burn
& colleagues performing
anti-authoritarian art spiels—
drumkit, keyboards, guitar, voice—
it's the 'Art & Language' days,
the mid-seventies—recorded

most likely, on a Sony portapak
(I set one up—a tripod
in the lounge room
of our communal house

& let it run full twenty-minute
brackets to film quotidian comings
& goings).

ah—here's Terry Smith

with plenty of hair—a stringy beard
&, possibly, an Afro—singing along
in the refrain—

“...ee...gal-it-tar-i-an...ism...!”
gustily.

I'm chuckling now—this is
amazingly cheering—I feel
it's my culture—or was—&, easily
could become
karaoke!

as it contains, for me,
equivalent nostalgia.

ingenuous, idealistic
and schismatic!

direct-action practising populist artists
(anti-institutional-intellectual-academy)

vs

theoretical conceptual post-object artists
(yet not always nor certainly pro-academic)

it was my schism too, our exegesis,
“artists think”? well, maybe—

they did, for a decade
all under the same

tin roof

book I will not quote it. (Forget I mentioned it. Read and enjoy.) I do like it when the poet confesses the book need not have been written and could not be written and, in fact, the book was not written. That I, the reader, shall have to make it up as it goes along.

While I was reading, or perhaps I was being read, it was hard to tell—pulled willy-nilly from shattering climax to transcendent bathos—I found myself a girl-child again, back on the lawn listening to my father and uncles and uncles-by-gift yarning around the half-gallon flagons, and I said out loud “It's just a yarn.” And I wondered at the odd reviewer who'd made heavy weather of it. Hadn't they had a father? Or uncles of any complexion? Weren't they the keepers of the old language? Had they never heard it or had they forgotten it?

And yet I forgive them because it's hard to know what *FREDY NEPTUNE* is. I don't know what it is. It batted me around from arsehole to breakfast time and I wanted to write a review of it but I couldn't write a review of it. I take the easy way out.

One thing I do know is that *FREDY NEPTUNE* is a film. It is already a film and I want to be the one who puts her name on the screenplay and says she wrote it.

There is a suggestive misprint which pleased me. The quote from *THE ARMENIAN OF SIAMANTO* which fuels the book is attributed to Atom Egoyan. 1878—1915. Must be the grandfather of that film director Margaret and David rave on about—I reasoned to myself. But it's simpler than that. It's a misprint, a dyslexic transposition, that resisted at least one attempt to right it. It puts me in my mind of a poem by Aaron Fogel called ‘The Printer's Error’ and I quote—

I hold that all three
sorts of errors,
errors by chance,
errors by worker's protest,
and errors by
God's work,
are in practise the
same and indistinguishable.

It's not Atom Egoyan. It's Atom Yarjanian.

And, oddly, I kept putting my nose up over the edge of *FREDY NEPTUNE* and muttering—“This isn't like *OMEROS*. This is better than *OMEROS*. I'm glad Yaron sent me *OMEROS*.”

I rang Les to say “Good was the word!” but as I specialize in preamble launched into “I've just tried to read *OMEROS* but I couldn't come to grips with it” and he replied “*FREDY* was written as a reaction to *OMEROS*. When I read it I thought ‘You're wasting your time transposing an existing myth. You're better off making up a new one.’”

In the same way the play I'm working on is a reaction to *EQUUS* by Peter Shaffer. The hoof pick is a handy metaphor (although I think he's thinking of the icepick that killed Trotsky) but in my opinion, and the opinion of horsemen I have consulted with, it would be impossible to blind horses with a hoof pick. They wouldn't stand for it. It is not the tool for it. Audiences accept it but maybe not many of them have ever handled a hoof pick. Or a horse.

As a postscript to my preamble I had a phone call from MayBritt of the ANPC asking if they could put my old, old play *CROSSFIRE* (formerly *NO MAN'S LAND*) in their Fertile Grounds readings in Melbourne. Premiered at the Nimrod Theatre in 1975. So I pulled out my copy to read it and see if I could iron out the inevitable gaucheries. And I found myself touched by this piece of work I don't remember writing. The missing ingredient by which I could understand what I was hammering on about all those years ago was now available to me. The future had become the present. What was extraneous and ephemeral had fallen away.

What engrossed me was the two hours traffic on the

!
but if you
insist [and persist]
on being a BAD EGG
and on
getting yourself “exiled” [to an Arab country
... like
Ireland]
just remember:-----
Paper
is always strongest at the perforations
and
any Fool
can start a sentence.

If you're
listening to this
the only thing you'll need to know is
some people
“do”
play the piano better
with their
elbows

stage. The way the people passed by each other, looked through each other, almost became aware of each other, almost touched. The way the past infects the present which becomes the future. I followed the movement of the manuscript (which is the focus of the play) from hand to hand as it passed backwards and forwards across time. The play lives in its machinery not by all the things that I thought I was saying. Some things don't change but the way you perceive them does.

So give me twenty years (please God) and I will write a review of *FREDY NEPTUNE*. And reading it now in all its inchoate glory is what will enable me to write that review.

Pam Brown

In Ultimo in '98

I maximise my traipsing
round the district—

at the end of Bay Street
Bert Flugelman's silver shish-kebab
lies abandoned
in the Sydney City Council yard
behind the garbage trucks garage
(“*Living City*”
say the
t-shirts)

Ken Bolton

Happy Accidents

D.U.I. in the 1970s

for Gary Oliver

Are you, perhaps, a
'Reader of Books' ?
—John Jenkins

I had been reading some poets before,
who were supposed to be good

And I suppose they were
but it was on

first reading John Forbes'
'To The Bobbydazzlers'

my eyes opened.
There did I breathe John's

'intense inane' & the way
you felt for them

I felt for you, John: as though
I sat, saluting—

& stonkered—

facing an horizon

—blue sky,
blue sea—

empty
of all but admiration,

cheered, in-touch
at last,

silent, on a kitchen chair,
in Glebe,

upon a beach, in my imagination.

#

Another time I was sitting
On a firm kitchen chair. The poems
Were Laurie Duggan's. Then did I breathe in
A speck of muesli I was having—
But did I choke? I didn't—these poems
Gave much to live for,
In particular a sort of infinite 'Quiet Moment'
In which things were 'in their place',
'Attended to'... Etcetera. I cleared my throat,
vowing
To continue in this knowledge.

#

I think I stood up. It seemed too odd
To be sitting, the poem was so great—
Yet, a short one, it was over. I moved
From the brown, cracked, wood table I was
reading at

& walked to the door, Pam Brown's poems
Still in my hand—& stood awhile,
Reading them in the doorway,
Breathing in, breathing out, looking

At the view, that you saw—if you
Stood straight—just above the tin.
The cat used to hang about me when I stood there
—Pots of mint & things, at my feet—

On the step, looking over the fence—the Iron

Bridge,
And the city with its back to you

#

One of the first poems that did it for me
Was 'Tricks For Danko'. By Robyn Ravlich.
Graceful, & clear, and actual.
Another was O'Hara's 'For Grace,
After A Party'. And there were Berrigan's *THE*
SONNETS,

the poem where "Terry's spit
Narrowly missed the Prime Minister," leaving a mark
On the TV. (A poem of Laurie's.) Later
a poem I loved was Anna Couani's
'The Bomb Plot'. John was writing poems

That pretended to be advertising. A different
John. Who became a best friend.

Remember Rae—reading 'The Deadshits'?

The way we used to shout various lines
From various poets, over & over, for being
Too ridiculously full of portent? "Head first
Into the beautiful accident!" "White horses.
White horses."

#

Things we said: "Ah, Bin 33!" "Je suis
Mr Tarzan!" *This is the life*. Crash or crash thru.
"Grandmother divided by monkey
. . . (equals 'Outer Space!')" Is that
a baby or a shirt factory—(No one can tell
In *this* weather). One false moof and I die you!
There's no accounting for taste. *I em,*
a sophiss-ticated
Euro-Pean! (slight Austrian accent) This is the life.
Head first into the beautiful accident. *Ah, Bin 33!*
Another
Bin 33?

Then we said them all again.

No one said It's a great life if you don't
weaken or Get this into you, though we must've
urged
something similar. I can remember the songs we
danced to—
but that is life, which is the important thing—
but not important here.

#

I first saw Alan Wearne coming down
the banister at a party singing a methodist hymn
wearing a little conical hat or something suggesting
deshabille.

I met him first actually at the Adelaide Festival
in '76—he told me something weird about another
poet.

Carol Novack had big eyes & beautiful hair & when
she played pool her hands shook almost
mesmerizingly.

Sometimes the balls went in. Anna's pool was
better—
& her writing, for a kind of intelligent mobility.
Carol took up Law. The party I saw Alan at
was for Brandon Cavalier, a person I have never
heard of

or seen since. His shirt had full sleeves
like a pirate's. (He was a poet.)

#

"Poetry—it'll be bigger than tennis,"
was a line already part of poetry folklore
when I joined the team. I never saw or met the man
who uttered it. (*Similarly*, when I came to Adelaide,
I was introduced to Ian de Gruchy—& well after
I'd heard his "The ambience is all around us"—

as either
forewarning, or characterization. He was an
artist, not a poet.) At some level, I think, young
poets know
what they let themselves in for—an economic &
social reality they allude to with crossed fingers &
humour. Some of course get real jobs or train
properly
for something. My friend John lucked his way into
journalism
hardly expecting his charade to work. The profession
took him to its bosom, suffocatingly, tho not too
suffocatingly. None I knew
became doctors. Laurie's made a late well-timed run
at academia. Most of us have shit jobs. "Headfirst
into the beautiful accident." (Tranter must have
come in to some money. The line works differently
for him.)

#

Kris Hemensley's poems—'Rocky Mountains &
Tired Indians'
& one about some biscuits—I liked a lot, though
I couldn't emulate them. Their domesticity
reminded me
of a happy little band of Melbourne poets whom I
assumed mirrored ours in Glebe, Newtown &
Balmain—the
Westgarth/Merri Creek/Brunswick gang: Kris,
Robert,
Walter, Retta. Letters from them were cheering & I
wrote back on happenings here—one, in which
Adders
attacked everybody at a reading, casting aspersions on
the Soul,
Potency, Alcoholism of his major rival (also on the
bill), who did
his own equivalent of the same, while a performance-
artist friend
tried to stage her nervous breakdown (over her
husband's
infidelity)—& which intuited the interest
& coming intervention
of David Bowie into her life. She made a lot of
repeated noise—
to the puzzlement of the audience,
who did not realize its import,
and anyway had the poets' dark mutterings
to work on.
We took her away, sedated or placated her (I
can't remember). John & Laurie read, finally,
attacking no one just reading great poems: it was
a total
fucking gas, Terry's spit narrowly missing the Prime
Minister
etcetera

#

I wrote some poems just by going through my
note books circling all the good bits still
unused—from poems, letters, notes & quotations—
& typing them up in the order they came
adding new stuff wherever I felt like it. I still
do these occasionally. People don't understand them
but *I* feel exhilarated. Laurie's poems
had introduced me to Philip Whalen's (& these
I liked). Philip Hammial introduced me to the poems
of Tony Towle—whom I knew & liked
only by one or two things
in anthologies. *AUTOBIOGRAPHY & OTHER POEMS*
was a great book.

Years later

my inexpert emulation of it
enabled me to write *NOTES FOR POEMS*—a book
critics at the time ignored, or disliked.
As they do still, for all I know.
I remember the early Alan Wearne poem I liked
had Jesus Christ or John the Baptist running up
some stairs.

#

That's how it was when I started. Earlier I'd read Creeley & Olson & earlier still Larkin & Davie. But really what I found exciting were the ideas I entertained about Johns & Rauschenberg & the aesthetic jockeying for ideological position of Greenberg, Fried, Stella & the Minimalists, the ideas of Kuhn, the dreaminess of Marguerite Duras & the steel & irony of Robbe-Grillet, the look of 'key works' by Rivers ('key works?') & the erased de Kooning, the nervousness of Gorky; Tony Tuckson; Joan Mitchell.

'Bean Spasms', when I read it, & 'Tambourine Life', fell on fertile ground. Apart from the R n B I played mostly, I also played John Coltrane—all of this a cliché or at any rate 'of its time'. The sober brain of Donald Brook, internalized in mine—where it nowhere resembled very closely Brook's big brain—looked on. The English Department was dull. Anna introduced me to my own mind as 'Curious Stranger'—(to be 'analysed'). It has grown curiouser & curiouser, & I have learned to watch it closely. *Watch it, watch it!* A favourite phrase—spoken as by a removalist backing up a piano or something large. I was never a removalist like other poets. I became a poet when a flatmate kept showing me his poems, for evaluation, & any demurrals of mine met with *Well, you wouldn't know—as you're not a poet.* I could do better, I thought, & so I began—doing better, if not doing actually 'well', till around 1976, the point at which this tale began.

#

When I first met Johnny J his grant had run out. He used describe himself as a *grifter*—which word he enjoyed for its hokey, 1930s arcane quality. If it was a specific job description it might have been John's: for example, Colin, another friend, claimed the shoes John wore were his. John had had them for a year but, caught out, handed them over (fairly cheerfully). Colin shook his head. I loaned John my thongs & he walked home. Those days I was on a higher degree scholarship, though I did nothing but read & write poetry—more intensely than anyone ever did an M.A. Laurie for a time wrote movies, though he did not earn a lot by it. He used don his dark glasses & say emphatically *Think 'Mogul'*. Mostly he did the dole—as we were all about to do—or worked in the library setting out to prove, I think, just how many sick days could be achieved before redundancy. Pam worked screenprinting for an American hippie employer who turned gradually straight capitalist exploiter. Pam had once been a nurse. Now she did the dole, taught film. And works now in a library—taking probably the maximum number of sick days (that 'envelope' first tested by Laurie). John Forbes worked in a tinsel factory, &, one time, I was surprised to see him in a lottery ticket-&-snacks type booth, like a large Punch & Judy, outside Museum railway station; then he went in for removing, which built him up considerably. Big, but never boofy. Most of the poets I knew in the late 70s worked briefly sorting mail—at Redfern Mail Exchange,

constituting a militant facet of its productivity problem: Steve took a large supply of dope that he & others smoked on the roof at lunchtime & on numerous breaks after & before. In toilets, wash rooms, stairwells & broom cupboards. Anna worked with him, & Alan Jefferies. ('Good-o Goodooga!') Steve became a public servant eventually & wrote speeches for Keating, but took so much time off he returned at last from the U.S. to find himself in charge of the photocopy paper, with a lone desk—alone—in the storeroom. He resigned. His great book then was *TO THE HEART OF THE WORLD'S ELECTRICITY* which I loved: intemperate—exasperated—lush. Sal, with whom I lived in Redfern, would catch the bus down Chalmers Street, past the exchange, to the station—a book rep, a job she was good at but hated. Anna & Rae became teachers. (In fact Rae became mayor of a difficult inner city council.) Nigel, also a teacher. Denis Gallagher a captain of industry. Did he ever sort mail? I don't remember.

#

'The European Shoe' by Michael Benedikt I liked a lot though not so much his other poems & I wrote a poem, 'The Mysteries', because of it, with other influences in there too: quotations, bits 'in the manner of' & 'reminiscent of'. (Of whom? O'Hara, Ashbery, Robbe-Grillet.) Kenneth Koch I read a lot then. ('The Circus', 'The Departure From Hydra', 'The Railway Stationery', 'Fresh Air', & later *THE ART OF LOVE & OTHER POEMS*). Alan Wearne early recommended to me Schuyler's poem about a man mowing the lawn, in which, I think, Hugo Winterhalter & other composers & conductors are in the sky. Or are those two poems? It was very good but I did not begin reading Schuyler as a fan until later— & it was his later poems, too. John Tranter's 'Rimbaud & the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy' in an early form I liked though it puzzled me, but I liked its sense of a determined ambition—a major work, like an Historical Painting. Ron Padgett's poem, in which God "runs off giggling" I liked, for the graceful mystery of its perfection—'Some Things For Anne', was it called? 'Ruth Etting's Tears' I liked but that was later—there were other Schjeldahl poems I liked then—his version of 'Life Studies', & 'Hullo America'—the attack on Robert Lowell & Bob Dylan. There were fabulous poems in *STRANGE DAYS AHEAD*, too. John liked Kenward Elmslie as I remember. Anne Waldman's first book, *GIANT NIGHT*, I liked. I also liked *GREAT BALLS OF FIRE, I REMEMBER*, Edwin Denby. . . & Lewis Warsh I found curiously comforting. (*LONG DISTANCE*, & one that was a diary.) Pam liked Tom Clark & various Frenchmen and Patti Smith. Others liked Duncan—but I

couldn't see it.

Some German poets I liked—Bisinger et al—but I have not kept up, & then it was the 80s & another poem.

Notes

Gary Oliver, poet & carouser. We drank the mythical Bin 33.
 'To The Bobbydazzlers'—see John Forbes, *NEW & SELECTED POEMS*, A & R
 Laurie Duggan—see *NEW & SELECTED POEMS*, UQP
 Pam Brown—see *NEW & SELECTED POEMS*, Women's Redress Press; *THIS WORLD, THIS PLACE*, UQP & 50-50, Little Esther Books
 'Tricks For Danko'—Robyn Ravlich, see *APPLESTEALERS* anthology
 "Terry's spit . . ." see Laurie Duggan, "Cheerio" in *SELECTED POEMS*, UQP
 'The Bomb Plot' Anna Couani, see *ITALY*, Rigmarole of the Hours Press
 "A different John"—i.e., John Jenkins—see *BLIND SPOT*, Gargoyle
 'The Deadshits'—see Rae Desmond Jones, *ORPHEUS WITH A TUBA*, Gargoyle Poets
 "White Horses, White Horses"—actually "Wet horses" was the phrase: see Pi O, *FITZROY BROTHEL*, Fitzrot publications
 "Crash or Crash Through"—Gough Whitlam
 "Grandmother divided etc"—Ron Padgett &/or Ted Berrigan
 "Is that a baby . . ."—John Forbes
 "One false moof"—Kenneth Koch
 "Austrian accent"—indicates Rudi Kraussmann
 I don't think it was Bin 33—I think it was Bin 26!
 "Poetry, it'll be bigger than tennis!"—Paul Desney, legend has it.
 "Headfirst into the beautiful accident"—John Tranter, *THE BLAST AREA*, Gargoyle Poets
 'Rocky Mountains & Tired Indians'—a book of the same name from Stingy Artist Press
 Robert Kenny, Walter Billeter, Retta Hemensley "attacked everybody at a reading"—supposedly top of the bill was a visiting American poet everyone regarded as dull, a turkey. He never knew what was going on. A domestic argument that was probably not explained to him.
AUTOBIOGRAPHY & OTHER POEMS—Tony Towle, Coach House South/Sun Books
NOTES FOR POEMS—Ken Bolton, Shocking Looking Books
 John the Baptist—see Alan Wearne, *PUBLIC RELATIONS*, Gargoyle
 'Bean Spasms' & 'Tambourine Life'—see Ted Berrigan *SELECTED POEMS*, Penguin
 "spoken as by a removalist"—this is an evasion, right?
 Johnny J—John Jenkins
 Colin Mitchell, bon vivant
 Museum Railway Station—maybe, in fact, Kings Cross Railway Station
 Steve K Kelen
 "Good-o-Goodooga"—a line from one of the mnemonic paragraphs the mail exchange memorized so as to identify postcodes in their mail sorting.
 Paul Keating, Prime Minister
TO THE HEART OF THE WORLD'S ELECTRICITY—Steve Kelen, Senor Press
 Sal Brereton—*IDEAL CONDITIONS*, Magic Sam/EAF; *OTIS RUSH* magazine # 12/13
 Denis Gallagher—see *COUNTRY, COUNTRY*, Island Press & *MAKING DO*, Club 80 Press
 Nigel Roberts, see *IN CASABLANCA FOR THE WATERS*, Wild & Woolley
 Michael Benedikt, *THE BODY*, Wesleyan Uni Press
 "Rimbaud & the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy"—John Tranter: early version in *NEW POETRY* magazine; a later version in *SELECTED POEMS*, Hale & Iremonger
 Strange Days Ahead—Michael Brownstein, Z Press
 "John (Forbes) liked Kenward Elmslie"
GIANT NIGHT—Anne Waldman, Corinth
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE—Ron Padgett, Holt Rinehart & Winston, later reissued by Coffee House
I REMEMBER—Joe Brainard, Full Court Press, later Penguin
 Edwin Denby—see *COLLECTED POEMS*, Uni of California
LONG DISTANCE—Lewis Warsh, Ferry Press, & *PART OF MY HISTORY*, Coachhouse Press
 Tom Clark—see *WHEN THINGS GET TOUGH ON EASY STREET*, Black Sparrow
 Patti Smith—*HA HA HOUDINI*, City Lights
 "others liked Duncan"—Robert Duncan
 Gerard Bisinger

Performance

edited by Phil Norton

It's satisfying—or perhaps just easy—to know that the recent art of “slamming” poetry that has swept North America has a definite origin. It just so happens that one man, Marc Smith, running a venue called the Green Mill Lounge in Chicago in the early 80s, decided that the best way to spice up his moribund open-mike poetry evenings was to introduce an element of jeopardy (as in the game show) to the readings.

There's a long and short of what a slam is, but the shorter is closer to the soul of slamming itself, so: the slam is an event where a small group of poets performing their own work compete against each other

ken word anthology Poetry Nation with coeditor Regie Cabico, a Nuyorican poet, it was impossible not to notice the ways the slam had shaped the imaginations of those working within its libertine constraints. As surely as the sonnet keeps the poet to fourteen lines and a certain scheme of rhyme, slamming makes the poet make something definite, identifiable, unique.

The main genre-defining elements of these slam poem are: 1. that it be short (measured not by breath, or page, but time; usually three minutes); 2. that it be clear and 3. that it persuade; bluntly, that it win. Rarely has so little expectation, and so much pressure, merged in one aesthetic.

Few classical, even modern, poets have worked with time as any consideration at all (except in how it makes them old or kills them), few have prized com-

Todd Swift The Hungry Art of the Slam Poet

for the high score of the night, as judged by patrons of the establishment, usually from zero to 10—a 10 being, well, perfect.

From those humble, even insipid, beginnings, has sprung something of a religious movement, as cities across North America, then English-speaking countries everywhere in the world, began hosting similar slam competitions, and sending out teams of four to meet each other in bardic battle yearly at the (U.S.) National Poetry Championships. There's even a “Slam Poetry Inc.,” run by Mr. Smith himself, jealously guarding the trademark.

This zealotry (for slam poets take their work seriously, as all committed athletes do) has not gone unnoticed by the bemused media (*TIME MAGAZINE*, CNN), who periodically find it useful to lace their wars and scandals with. And now there's even an award-winning indie film, *Slam*, featuring one of the great National Champs, DJ Renegade.

What may be most interesting, though, is how the forces at play behind the highly-structured competition model of the slams has resulted in a new genre of poetry emerging. At first, critics and fans alike did not conceive of such a grand potential; it was just getting up and doing in public words in such a way that body and tongue met the audience halfway and hopefully sucked them in.

But this has changed. In doing research for my spo-

prehensibility above complexity, and fewer have laboured under the anticipation of swift victory or defeat. Most poets have suffered the transcendence of a late revenge, often from the grave, and rare is the poet who has gone to his verse as if to a rally. But rhetoric was once considered a great art, a defining one in the Greek lyceum, and not simply a pejorative term for the lies poets utter to grab the upper hand.

With persuasion a must—and a running meter in the background—the slammer is compelled to apply every strategy available to the poet, including the traditional ones, so their pieces are often startlingly musical. But the sense is often jarring. At stake is the mind and heart of the judges—the ones who get the poem—so they better really get it. What moves a public is what we get: anger at injustice, sympathy at suffering, exultation at conquest (sexual often), and a rage for inclusion.

This foregrounds the person, and personality, of the slam poet—and not their persona—for the mask is torn off and thrown to the crowd long before the slam poem ends. By then, the slammer is walking, dancing, shouting, naked by words, hopeful that we will see that nakedness, and find it good. Sometimes it is, and mere ones and zeros cannot quite reward the contestant that transcends the contest. Then the poem wins somewhere deeper than a bar, and keeps on long after closing time.

So let me get this straight

Michelle Morgan

There's this happy family man
Agamemnon, with his lovely wife,
Clytemnestra, and the three kids
Iphigenia, Electra and the boy
Orestes.

Only Agamemnon's brother's wife,
who turns out to be Clytemnestra's sister
Helen, runs off with some blow-in from
Asia Minor with a reputation for bad
judgement and
an association with plaster.

And Agamemnon goes after Helen with his
brother, Menelaus, across the sea heading

for Troy but they get holed up on some
middle of nowhere island, waiting for a good
wind. And Agamemnon, who just happens
to have Iphigenia with him
chasing after Auntie Helen in a
fleet of battle ships with
ten years' worth of sea biscuit and arrow-
heads, Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia?
for a head wind?

Let me get this straight.
And there's a goddess in there somewhere So
Agamemnon and Menelaus get Helen back
and burn down Troy and
kill all the men who aren't already dead and
sell all the women and children into slavery
except the boy children of all the really
famous dead men—they make sure they go

the way of their famous dead dads—and
Cassandra, who's the daughter of one
famous dead man and the sister of another
famous dead man and the auntie of another
one
and who has a strange gift for prophecy,
absolutely correct in every detail but
no one ever believes her
Whom Agamemnon decides is a lovely girl,
too good to waste on the open market and
a dab hand in the kitchen
all that experience with entrails
and he can't resist one more souvenir
to remind him of his time abroad
Greetings from Ilium.

Let me get this straight.
So Clytemnestra, who's taken up with a boy

Human life is ultimately a mystery. The exploration of that mystery in all its complexity and contradiction, is the purpose of his art. Hitch your agony to a star.

—Saul Bellow.

To make an album with no money and no publishing or distribution deal is an act of faith. Unlike the solo project of writing a book, an album requires that you find collaborators who share your faith. And so the sharing of that faith becomes an act of love.

Saul Bellow said that “faith is not a reflex action, it must be earned through the consideration of the full range of human experience and it cannot exist without the knowledge of profound despair.” Perhaps that is what inspired my collaborators to dive in and share with me the *POST ROMANTIC* journey. I could not have made the album without the creative generosity and friendship of fellow artists such as photographer Lewis Morley, Violinist composer Natasha Rumiz and Hori Toru. It would not have been completed if it were not for the sustained faith of the Gingermen, Roger Holtom and Pete Pagac.

Some call this the era of forgetfulness. I call it a name I can't remember and there's something in my throat but it's been there so long I've forgotten how to scream.

I had only two tracks written when I approached Roger and Pete about recording the album at Albatros Studios. I had no money. What I did have was an all-consuming vision of what the album would be and enough inspiration to convince them of the album's significance. Pete would tell me later that he was bewitched into making the album. That his creative and emotional investment was against all his better and rational judgement. But no creative endeavour is a rational one. The creation of *POST ROMANTIC* was filled with as much mystery as an imploding star. Even physicists have trouble predicting what will happen to such stars. Some end up as black holes. Others become galaxies. *POST ROMANTIC* I assured him, was destined to generate a galaxy.

My dream was to create an album which would be a standard-bearer for Australian spoken word. Inspired by the vibe created around the *UNITED STATES OF POETRY* album, I wanted to create an Australian equivalent, integrating spoken word, music and underground urban sound scape.

The creative process was driven by all three of us. We were a triangle. . . sometimes, equilateral, sometimes right-angled, sometimes obtuse. We were mother, father, baby, we were victim, rescuer, persecutor. We were Adam, Eve and Lilith, the three wise men, the three witches of Macbeth, the three musketeers, Suzie and the Gingermen. . . Slowly, with passion and curiosity, fuelled by the energy that only triangles can generate, we created *POST ROMANTIC*.

Trials and Collaborations A Post Romantic Journey Wednesday Kennedy

He stands her up between his legs
and grabs her by the throat
with love he plays her.
I want to be that cello
I want to get what she gets
But she's not the sort of girl who likes to share.

For nine months I lived between my flat in Kings Cross and the studio in Surry Hills. Frank Moorhouse said that a story is like a one night stand and a novel is like a marriage. The same can be said for a track and an album. An album is a long-term commitment. You take your vows to finish the album, no matter how long it takes, no matter how badly you want to want to escape the sticky web that is created when the boundaries of life and art become blurred. The streets became our script. We started walking the neighbourhood, mooching, loitering on street corners, sitting in cafes, lying on overpass bridges like three escapee trolls and howling over the roar of the traffic. Then we would take the world back to the studio and craft the journey around the stories and feed in the poetry of the streets.

That's comers got a history
you can feel it
you can smell it
but it's not a pretty story
so nobody wants to tell it
but let me tell you now before you hang around much longer that it's not the sort of comer that you want to get to know.

Roger is busking in the Central Station tunnel. Inspired by his tunnel-dwelling stories, Pete and I decide that our journey track will be in Central tunnel. We sit watching the human army of commuters hurriedly race through the man-made intestine. Late at night, armed with DAT and boots we record footsteps. Empty, it is at its most menacing. In the urban jungle, we're only protected by each other. After four months Roger takes the advice of the coconut lady. “Don't stay down here too long”,

she said, offering him a sliver of the coconut she chewed to keep her feeling sane “It gets to you after a while.”

And this unravelling of hieroglyphics.
Personally I call it love
Lasts only so long as their are marks to read then it is gone.

On August 3rd 1998, *POST ROMANTIC* was launched at The Basement. Eighteen months after its conception. There have been many black holes during that period of time. Funding rejections, sponsorship rejections, distribution rejections. Regardless, the album is made, the baby is born. My first child. It has not taken over the world. But it is more precious and poignant than I ever imagined.

I have now taken artistic asylum as a child-care worker in a vacation care centre. I lie under trees with seven-year-old girls who read my palm and tell me I am going to New York for a great adventure. All of my collaborators have now gone off to other projects. I have three hundred beautiful albums under my bed. Occasionally I pull them out and open up the twelve page booklet, illustrated with hand-drawn maps of Sydney streets and the photographs of Lewis Morley. I take the album from its case and place it reverently on the turntable and then I lie down on my bed as the first track begins. I close my eyes. And all I can see are stars.

with a completely forgettable name and no chin whatsoever,
welcomes Agamemnon back from the war.

He's killed her eldest daughter, stayed away ten years doing a favour for his brother never a postcard, no maintenance,
he's got a shipful of women in chains including Cassandra who's frothing at the mouth with prophecy and her frock falling off her she's in such a state but none of the men listening, getting a good eyeful.

Let me get this straight.
Clytemnestra says hello darling
home from the war are we fancy a bath?
And Agamemnon says “Hello love
I'll just have a bit of a wash

and eat whatever you've got on the spit
and who's this boy with no chin?”

So Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon in the bath and knocks off Cassandra just for good measure it's a shame about the frock.

Just let me get this straight.
Electra, who's always been the awkward one,
the middle child often is,
talks baby Orestes into killing his mum and the boy with no chin
I've remembered his name
Aegisthus,
Because Clytemnestra's been a bad wife and shouldn't have taken a lover or killed Agamemnon I wouldn't have thought
Electra was that close to her father really

but you never can tell.
And Orestes does and Electra goes mad and runs amok through the garden and comes to a bad end and
Then the Furies come into the picture where have they been all this time not a sizzle or hiss out of them before but there you go; they're on the case now, tearing after Orestes, he never gets a moment's peace after this and all because he's killed his mother.

And let me get this straight:
Agamemnon and Orestes are the heroes.

Reviews

edited by Dominic Fitzsimmons

David Kelly

cd & book

Ian McBryde *FLANK* Eaglemont

Pres s\$20 ISBN 0 9586543 0 2

First the confession—this is more a biased promotion than a balanced academic review. I'm guilty of thinking highly of the McBryde poetry and I hope by the time you've read this you'll be curious enough about his work to seek it out.

There are at least two kinds of Australian poets—there are the embellishers and the cut-backers. Sadly for the cut-backers the embellishers tend to do better in the big competitions. In last year's Newcastle Poetry Prize for instance, Anthony Lawrence came in first with Jean Kent and Robert Adamson the runners up. Certainly Anthony Lawrence and Jean Kent could be called embellishers. Dorothy Porter is more of a cut-backer; Steve Evans is a cut-backer and Ian McBryde is a cut-backer. His poems are sparse and tight and concentrated. Yet they are still fully flavoured like a nut or an apple. (I think J M Synge said that about speeches in plays.)

McBryde has released three books to date. The first, *THE SHADE OF ANGELS*, was published by Radial in an optimistic "limited edition of 500" in 1990. Magazine credits were minimal, about half a dozen and no 'name' magazines. In 1994 Hale & Iremonger released *THE FAMILIAR*. Again, magazine credits were minimal. The only Australian magazine listed was *NOCTURNAL SUBMISSIONS*. This year Shelton Lea, to his eternal credit, published McBryde's third book *FLANK* under his Eaglemont Press imprint. Only eight local magazine credits are listed.

Stephen J Lacey

revolving restaurant

Today I found a photo
of them—
he'd taken mum for
a big night out
the only time ever. . .
except for the Chinese
'slap up'
in Gosford
some Friday nights
and there they are
sitting at a table
in "The Summit"
Seidler's modernist cylinder
spinning towards a beige and glass future
through Mondrian grids
with his Elvis sideburns
and gravy-stained polyester
(he'd forgotten to use the napkin)
cufflinks heavy on the table
mum in her hairspray
and blue eyeshadow
framing so much
hope
turning on itself
where Galileo may have uttered
"Eppur Si Muove"

The lack of magazine publication is a curiosity for I'm sure that a huge proportion of these poems, particularly the top half in *FLANK*, would easily find their way into any of the magazines. I once asked Ian about this and he said something about how he should get into the habit of sending out new poems straight away. It is of course his choice not to. It's likely when *FLANK* gets the attention it deserves (in my opinion) that more magazine editors will contact him asking for poems. However, the lack of magazine publication does have the advantage when you read the book of making you feel you've discovered a 'lost poet', of making you exclaim 'where has this man been hiding this stuff?' Well in *FLANK*'s case, it had been with a well known Melbourne publisher for 14 months waiting a 'no'! It is of course not the longest wait in history for a 'no'. But it is a long wait.

Enough of the potted history. Let's look at some of the poems. Here's one from the shade of angels

The Red Sea

How this draining pain
circles monthly within you,
it's deep gush churning up
the dark rush of fury,

of uncertainty, of uneasy sleep.
If I could I would be
miniaturised, inside,
riding your lake of blood,

rowing a quiet white boat
oars dipped in gently,
scattering many delicate petals
over the crimson waves.

A poem good enough for any magazine. Metaphorical, sensitive. Some may even call it sweet and naive. Yet it also has deep resonances—the lady of the lake sort of suggestion, the Romantic out in his boat dreaming of his lady. Yet, in this poem, he is within the lady. In a quiet white boat. The simpleness and starkness of that realistic

description 'quiet white boat' will emerge through the books as one of the signatures of McBryde's poetry. And the poems will move beyond the Romantic metaphor . . .

Take for example, this from 'The Familiar':

New Order

Loud boys
bully boys, the world
a schoolyard
you swagger through.

Not too bright
but white, and that's
enough
with a boot
and a stick
and a killing or two.

It's the song of the wasp
it's the old command
it's an aryan tune.

You salute in a vacuum.
We recognise you.
We already know
what you do.

The sad little flats.
The pictures of Hitler.
The mirrors you sneer
into.

No longer Romantic or sweet. But poetically you'll still find that beautifully effective simple object. This time it's the 'sad little flats' and the 'pictures of Hitler'. It's the way the cut-backers have of focusing enormous complexities of

Mary Jo Bang

When the Weather Changes to Warm, the Boys Drive Shirtless

Their cigarettes wasting to nought.

Bodies locked to a mirror, an eye. An impetuous shutter.

Look. Here. At me. The skin a mere pelt, a hide, a peel.

What is this theatricality, this amorous vanity?

A line from the chin will elongate the nose.

Black will brighten the whites of the eyes.

Shaving the hairline will heighten the brow.

Charm me. Render me impervious to injury.

Make me invisible at night.

Skin like water, teeth like milk, the sapling back.

Make me invisible at night. The body as transit, coinage.

Consequence. Clean repetition of *I am. Here. Look. At me.*

Stopped in front of a mirror, self locking self

into place. Stopped at the side of a lake,

ledge of a window. Stopped, the impetuous shuttering.

We are in transit, no thought but the next,

vanity etching the surface.

The boys are shirtless: ornament and pronoun

poised just inches away from disorder

and trembling, death and the endless expanse.

feelings and causes and consequences onto a simple direct thing, a factual object fluorescent with suggestion. But also in this poem there is another one of McBryde's signatures which appears in all three books but gets more developed and used more effectively in *FLANK*. It's the listing of things. Often in threes. And often just nouns and maybe a simple adjective. Again and again the word simple comes to mind in describing the poems of McBryde, but no way simple in the sense of being dumb. Simple in the way a snooker champ plays the most direct and certain shot, avoids the fancy ricochet.

There is an undercurrent of fear and threat in many of McBryde's poems. A poem called 'The White Valiant' is a chilling portrayal of the car of a child pornographer/murderer prior to his setting out to find a victim. The poem is hinged about the words "the dolls" just about half way through. Nothing else indicates the intended victims are children. Like the "sad little flats" the factual object, the simple article and noun, focus our attention on all the complexities. 'Crawlspace' is another poem in *FLANK* with weird frightening suggestiveness.

Not every part of the poem is clear, and yet the feeling is clear. There is an intruder and that intruder may be a rat, or a spider or a human. We have no idea what the intruder will do. Do we need to? It is a kind of abstract poem that leaves all sorts of scary Hitchcock feelings floating in its wake.

FLANK also has softer poems dealing effectively with more traditional poetic subjects such as sunsets and flowers. 'Calling the Jasmine' is one such softer poem ending with a delightful description of "the perfumed/delicate tentacles of air." 'Montmorency Sunset' is another poem which addresses night in a similar way that traditionally dawn might be addressed. "All around us night | is up on her haunches, || waiting, facing west"

McBryde's poems are infused with certain signatures; they are all short, with tight, brief lines of mostly three or four words; they are divided into neat packets of two or three or four lines; there is frequent use of the simple factual thing to suggest the complexities of the poem's subject; there is also a clever but well controlled use of internal rhymes and sound repetition.

His style has evolved through the three books. The poems in *FLANK* are sharper and more tightly focused than some of the poems in the earlier books. The subjects are more accurately presented. There are more hooks for the reader to latch onto. There is a greater sense of looking out beyond what the poet himself is feeling to try, through imagination, to understand what others are feeling.

FLANK comes with a CD containing sixteen of the poems with musical backing. McBryde reads them himself, quietly and passionately but with no excessive theatrics. He is not one of your jump around bells and whistles performance poets. Just a good poet with clear direct material that will leave, I suspect, haunting aftershocks of beauty or threat or fear in anyone who hears him. He received very good responses from audiences in recent visits to the Queensland Poetry Festival and the Australian Poetry Festival in Sydney.

Given that he has had such little exposure in magazines, his output is small and the best poems of his small output have only just found their way into publication in *FLANK* it is no wonder that Ian McBryde has not acquired a greater reputation, is not talked of as one of the Australian poets. I suspect that situation will begin to change now with the release of *FLANK* and subsequent books which I imagine will be as good. Maybe better! As more people read and hear his unique and haunting poetry I'm sure his reputation will rise.

Peter Skrzynecki

Day Stay

Whether you're there
for an hour
or the whole day
it's always like returning home—

to that room in Immunology
where you've spent
so much of the past year.

With its two beds
and three armchairs, TV
and handbasin
it brings to mind
images of domesticity
that somehow one's spirit needs—

the comforting
and familiar, the secure:
what's easy to touch
and understand.

Tony, the duty nurse
welcomes us
with his happy, boyish smile.
"Darling, how are you today?"
"Fine," you reply.
"Wonderful! Now let's get you settled."
And he does—
in what's become known
as *Kate's bed*.

I settle down
beside you, sit and read *TALKABOUT*
or the *SYDNEY STAR OBSERVER*:
learn how hard
it is for people to be accepted,
to be themselves,
and how easily discrimination
rears its proverbial
"ugly head."

In the meantime
they prepare you for another
bone marrow biopsy
to test the presence
or otherwise
of further leukaemic cells—
and I cringe to think
how a corkscrew needle
will shortly puncture your flesh;

and how you, too,
will have to learn to adjust
to the world outside
this friendly little room—
whether the result
is good or bad.

Pam Brown

In Surry Hills

faintly scribbled in sky-blue pencil
on the front wall of my house
in Surry Hills in 1971—
"is this the hostel where the lazy & fun-loving
start up the mountain"

I don't think anyone entering the house
had hear of F. O'Hara,
their T-Rex records under their arms,
sauntering
out to the kitchen to lean against
the fur-lined door I'd made
to honour Meret Oppenheim
& for a sensual lean
as well

Tricia Dearborn

book
Catherine Bateson *THE VIGILANT*
HEART University of Queensland
Press 1998 98pp

I want words which are scalpel sharp
and shiny; poems keen enough to gut a
fish
and clean it. Poems labelled not for
domestic use...

And I want to feed you
warmly scented words;
small loaves of wholemeal bread...
I want to rock you with my mothering
songs.

—Tongues of Fire

The heart is the territory Catherine Bateson charts in this new collection of poetry, aptly named, and she does it with a surgeon's precision and a mother's fierce care. While the subjects of the poems range from the tattooist's schoolgirl lover/apprentice to a memorial for the victims of Port Arthur, she writes in 'Stories Like Dice' that "We spend a lifetime making sense of the heart's journey", and it is this journey that is the book's primary focus.

The theme of mothering, in its various guises and circumstances, is a strong one throughout the collection. In 'Thirty-eight Weeks', a description of herself in the bath:

Your belly is a pale bare island rising out
of the water.
You can't seriously believe its buried treasure
though you wouldn't do all this for less.

In 'Still Life with Children' she documents the sameness of the days ("These days begin with a dreamy precision."), the smallness of her desires ("a sunny morning and no tears, [nappies washed and folded before lunch]) and comments:

this wasn't the way I thought I'd live
in my motorcycle days.

And you can look to 'On Bukowski and Babies' for a response to those who might criticise her for being "too domestic".

The death of children is also a recurrent theme, from the "anxiety as constant as blood" around her own child's serious illness, to the cataloguing of actual deaths in 'All My Dead Children', part of the sequence 'After Five Years, My Own Reflection' (a suite of poems imaginatively based on the experience of Barbara Crawford, shipwrecked in 1844 near Cape York, who lived for five years with the Kaurareg people before being discovered and returning to Sydney):

Each year as regular and unforgiving as
the rains
I planted another half-grown baby
in the seedless earth...

How can I leave them now?
My handful of bitter apples
my secret, salted crop?

Bateson doesn't flinch at depicting the unthinkable and her spare language only heightens the emotional impact. 'The Grandmothers' tells of the military dictatorship of Argentina's "disappearing" of young pregnant mothers, imprisoned until they gave birth by caesarean section, and then taken on death flights and dumped over the Atlantic.

Each night the grandmothers dream of
their daughters;
bellies ripped from the birth, plump arms
outstretched
shot down from planes
like arrows or great sea eagles...

The death flights
those women
their torn wombs
ballooning
all that
air.

This is not to say that all of this collection is emotional heavy going. 'Wild Nights at the Alliance Française' is observant and wry in its depiction of the author at 19, wanting to be "a sexy woman":

While Jules and Jim cycled through
Truffaut's classic
Raphael from Rouen stroked endearments
into my palm...

I told my French teacher the Alliance was
not what it seemed.
She said my accent had improved
I went back for advanced conversation
and a Moroccan
computer programmer with a unit at
Kangaroo Point and a pool.

Bateson occasionally moves into a "prose poetry" style, and of these poems my favourite was 'Stories Like Dice', a series of vignettes recording the multiple ways people connect, and disconnect. The poem's strength arises from its matter-of-fact narrative and the telling detail contained within it, and the cumulative effect of the separate stories, which reinforces both the diversity and the commonality of this human experience.

In 'Scenes from a Marriage' she explores the difficulties, intricacies and contradictions of relationships. And 'When You Leave' is a delightful testimonial to the unspoken care of many friendships:

If I send this unsigned

18 CORDITE

will you know it's from me?
Consider it an apple,
or the caress I withheld;
this is my hand resting on your cheek for
one quiet moment.

Her imagery is often deft and beautifully apt. In 'Anniversary':

In the time between night and sunrise I
call him to my bed,
lay out my body like a party dress.

This collection contains the (prize-winning) sequence 'Notes from Ward Seven West', based around her experiences in the children's cardiac ward of Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital. The characters of this microcosm are delineated with clarity and affection: Phil, who, disillusioned with "pushing Nembutal | across the counter, the little notebooks, | the penholders announcing miracle drugs" came back to medicine because he wanted "the real thing"; Leanne, who says:

I'm going crazy to a metronomic beat.
You see, we patch these kids up,
they come back. We send them home,
they come back.
They come back to die when you're on tea
break.

The poem 'From Ward Seven West' illustrates the poignancy of small details; and the strains of the illness of a child, and the methods we adopt to protect ourselves and conserve our vital energies, are highlighted in "This is the Poem":

You don't look at the other beds-
you have only so much love
can't afford to spill it
on any other mother's child.

My only complaints about Bateson's writing would be an occasional preachiness ('What I Do'), and that sometimes the wording feels a little self-conscious or ponderous, so heavy with its intent or meaning that this becomes intrusive (the last line of 'Ultrasound Scan, Eighteen Weeks'). And 'The Bones and the Song' was a poem that I enjoyed tremendously at the beginning, but which (to my mind) became disappointingly rhetorical towards the end.

Jane Williams

the lodger

outgrown the body simply
drags what it can't carry

mouth slack as a stroke
but eyes the colour of bees

we are at the centre
of all that flowers in the lodger

and when he shows himself
we must take his useless hand

kiss him on the mouth
until he weeps like a woman

and admits he can't pay his way
causing trouble where ever he stays

but if we let him he'll learn
how to love us for his keep

all he asks is time
to prepare us for his death

The poem that kept drawing me back was 'This is the Poem', the first of the *Ward Seven West* sequence. It begins:

This is the poem you never wanted to
write
the one you'd change for any useless
thing:
a silver bangle
a holiday on the coast
a long life.
This is the one you were scared of
the one too close to the bone.
It muscles its way into your safe house
shouting and
breaking glass.

This poem showcases Bateson's strengths, in its graceful but powerful simplicity of language, its emotional range, its compassion, and in the satisfyingness of its structure.

Many of the poems in *THE VIGILANT HEART* are "domestic" in that they deal with the difficulties and complexities of relationships, with partners, children, friends; the happenings of ordinary life; and what happens to ordinary life when the dreaded intrudes. They are by no means tame. I look forward to Catherine Bateson's next collection.

Brian Purcell

cd
**Footloose Productions *So Be It* —
DARK INTO LIGHT** Collective Effort
Press

Earlier this year, ABC's 'Express' program did a segment focussing on poetry and music, but it was disappointingly narrow in its focus, concentrating exclusively on those artists following the Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and folk rock line: a 'modern troubador' ethic. What of other figures such as Lou Reed, Ian Curtis, Patti Smith, Morrissey, Beck?—rock musicians primarily, but whose lyrics are every bit as interesting as the more 'poetic' others and perhaps more effective, since by not announcing themselves as poetry, they are less likely to encounter prejudice from a 'rock' audience.

And yet, pause a while to pity anyone foolish enough to overtly mix the forms. If poets and musicians are often marginalised in Australia, how can such 'hybridists'—spurning genres and categories or deliberately blurring them—hope to find an audience? For a decade I myself was in such a group, call it a rock band if you like, and even the smaller independent labels told us to 'get out of Australia' to have any chance of success. When we finally did, in 1991, the European label who signed us eventually approached a national distributor with our well-reviewed CD, but were promptly told the band was 'too weird for Australia'.

So I can sympathise with *So Be It*'s defensiveness in evidence on their album's copious sleeve notes, and was determined to give them a 'fair go' and approach 'Dark into Light' on its own terms. For a start, the cover art is daggily forthright: merely the words 'So Be It | Dark into Light' in primary colours on a shaded grey background. Think colour Letraset, or Mondrian on an off day. The foldout photos feature the artists themselves gambolling around a verdant garden or cuddling an XL Falcon; only one has a 'trendy' haircut, but none of the three seem to give a damn about cultivating any particular 'image'. Promising so far in terms of an independent approach, but then they commit a cardinal sin—hell's bells!—they define, even review themselves! This is Robert Calvert, main composer/musician, from the

Mal Morgan

I'll Leave a Poem or Two

in memory of Primo Levi, an Auschwitz survivor

I'll leave you *nebbich* poems like these
Made to be read by five or six readers.
—Primo Levi

I'll leave a poem or two some teeth for no-one's
mouth old books newspapers and cufflinks
a broken bust of Beethoven a silver wedding ring
fashioned into honesty-leaves. I was true.
I'll not leave a cellar full of vintage wines dusty
bottles lying on their sides stocks and shares
and their dividends. I strived for something more.
Not to be shouted over roof-tops not to be crammed
into letter-boxes. This poem make to be read
by five or six readers.

sleeve notes:

"Process is where it's at, forget about all
the rest." [Oho!]

"SO BE IT is word-driven, not like music
with words added later..." [Aha!]

"As a musician I don't like to be categorized,
restricted by musical styles or genres." [Hmm!]

"The three of us have created a true meeting
place between words and music." [Oh
no!]

A work such as this, which attempts something different from the norm, should embody Popeye's credo—"I am what I am". It should not be defined by what anyone—especially the artist—tells us it is. Calvert's like a nervous kid at his first birthday party, running around and puncturing the balloons. At the very best, his assertions are fruitless if the work doesn't bear them out, and his last assertion shouldn't have escaped from a press

release. Such simplifications inevitably betray the richness to be found in any collaboration between talented people; they're also a red rag to a critical bull.

Perhaps I contradict myself by now questioning Calvert's assertion about categories, but in fact, if one is slipping between or transcending musical styles or genres, a potential audience needs to have some idea of what these are. Far from being beyond these categories, the musical underpinnings of *So Be It*'s 'soundscapes' come from a very specific time: the late 70s and early 80s. I hazard a guess that at least one of Calvert's synthesisers is of this vintage, and there are constant references to the more radical work of Roxy Music (especially the saxophone of Andy MacKay), Pink Floyd, early Split Enz, punk electronic bands such as those on the independent M-Squared label (which spawned luminaries such as The Dead Travel Fast, Scattered Order and the early

Mal Morgan

The Man in a Poem

for Kevin Andrea Sophie and Raf

There's a man in a poem
bathed in moonlight.
You know him
you've seen him before.
He's bending over
tipping his dreams
into a bin
with fish-heads and bottles
and yesterday's paper.
Nobody wants them.
He raises his head
to look at the moon
through a fork in a tree.
You know the moon
you've seen the tree.
Can you write him
another life?
You want to don't you
but where could you find
such a magical pen?
He's the man in a poem
every night
tipping his dreams
raising his head.

Mal Morgan

The Verb Mourir

I die
 thou diest
 il meurt
 elle
 nous
 vous
 etc.
 you know
 the order
 and
 how things
 go!
 I want
 Mozart
 Dylan
 the warbling
 magpies
 all in concert.
 A greater
 symphony
 I'll never
 hear.
 Neither
 will
 Monsieur
 Hulot!

Severed Heads); but in particular one artist and one album come to mind: Brian Eno's 1978 album, *BEFORE AND AFTER SCIENCE*. No mean lyricist himself, Eno's soundscapes on this album were particularly sympathetic to the experimental and poetic use of lyrics.

This is not to condemn Calvert: *BEFORE AND AFTER SCIENCE* stands up well today, and it's interesting that it—or at least the sensibility behind it—can still inspire musicians after twenty years. If one learns their craft at a certain time and is satisfied with the tools of that period, what's wrong with that? Would one condemn BB King for having the same guitar style for forty years if it can still express what he feels? Old synthesizers and drum machines—such as the Roland 808—are now as sought after as Fender stratocasters. This aside, it's impossible not to at least initially place Calvert's (and collaborator Sjaak de Jong's) music in a certain era and style. One thinks of Bowie's *LOW* when listening to "not (evil)" and similarly of Fripp and Eno's *NO PUSSYFOOTING* when 'Dark into Light' concludes the album.

Another of Calvert's assertions I take issue with is that *DARK INTO LIGHT* is word-driven. In the early stages the voice is distinctly raised above the music in the mix—but as the album progresses, for the most part it settles and truly becomes part of the music, especially those tracks consisting of only a few phrases—such as '(not) evil'—which are chanted or repeated. One of these, the eponymous 'So Be It', could be released as a pop song, and there's nothing wrong with that!

A refutation of the 'word-driven' assertion could be deduced by my avoidance of mentioning the lyrics/poetry on this album until now—but this is not to deprecate Jeltje's (poet, lyricist, singer) contribution. On the contrary, if *DARK INTO LIGHT* succeeds it is largely due to her performance. She reminds me of a cross between Ania Walwicz and Björk, and like both these women, makes a virtue of her foreignness

and unfamiliarity with the English language.

The vision I had of 'Performance Poetry set to music' involved a harsh, slightly confrontational exercise in grunge; this couldn't be further from the truth of Jeltje's performances. Her world is filled with animals, birds, cats, frogs, and is often under threat, but only from vague forces—like traffic and noise. Think of a guileless Leunig character wandering through a troubled world and you're near Jeltje's persona on this album. I was also reminded of the expressionist painter Franz Marc, who painted animals—mostly horses—due to his disquiet with the human world (well deserved as it turned out, for he died in a trench in the first world war). It's actually Jeltje's sensibility—and voice—which keeps you listening. The poetry is whimsical, with some gentle social criticism and an appealingly childlike desire to escape ("fly away good bird")—but there are no particular lines or phrases which stay with you for long. And yet, I was hooked after "think of the forest floor"—such various and delicious phrasing, cheekiness, charm and warmth. With another voice, the tracks could have descended into a New Age dirge, even bathos, but Jeltje continually surprises and delights with her bounce and quirkiness, such as performing 'Kickers (Green Frogs)' in Dutch.

The music is overall quite sympathetic to Jeltje's words and voice, and reasonably various within the above-stated limitations; but for my taste it's too polished (the more random and truly spontaneous sounds are filtered out) to really do justice to 'performance poetry'. Even the more 'improvised' pieces have a calculated feel. *SO BE IT* may work better in a live context, which would give a necessary edge to the performance.

On the other hand, I've been constrained a little here by the constant assertions that this CD is 'poetry-driven' etc. There are elements of this, sure, but I'd describe the album as a more left-of-centre or creative pop. And it's sheer sophistry to differentiate

music driven by words from "music with words added later". Maybe it might hold for pure pop songs, but in creative bands you can start at either point and end with the opposite result, which I'm sure was also the case with *SO BE IT*. What is 'Performance Poetry' anyway? Is it standup comedy, short drama, spoken lyrics, or all of the above within the space of a minute? It's the very thing I love about it, this uncertainty, the pauses in which the audience has to make up its mind: a few minutes of rare freedom salvaged from an over-hyped and over-catalogued world.

It's worrying that hype is now so all-pervasive that even an independent group is no longer immune. And this CD doesn't need it: despite my reservations it's eminently listenable, whether you want to attend carefully to the lyrics or have it playing softly in the background at a party. Even George Michael asks us to "listen without prejudice" to what's there, not what's said is there. In the end is the joy and the point of it all.

Collective Effort Press.
 GPO Box 2430V,
 Melbourne VIC 3001.

Michelle Taylor

book
Judy Johnson *WING*
CORRECTIONS Five Islands
Press 1998 \$8 isbn 0
86418 507 3

I first heard Judy Johnson's poems being read by the poet at Varuna earlier this year. It was the launch of her first collection of poems *WING CORRECTIONS* published by Five Islands Press/Scarp in series number five of their New Poets Publishing Programme. I had some reservations about being present on this occasion, if not entirely because I too had submitted my manuscript to FIP the year before but had not emerged as one of the six new poets. Could I be a true professional? (or is this role in relation to that of poet inversely proportional?) Was I objective enough to react to the poems and not to the poet?

Surprisingly—yes. My initial response to most of the poems was one of great pleasure. I think what I was reacting to was the language, the short scenic flights, melodic journeys to places I had heard about but had had no great desire to visit, until now. Even the title of the book evokes music. It is taken from the short poem 'Flying', this metaphor for our lives resonating through the collection:

Not so easy to dismantle the puzzle
 and see flying for what it is,
 what most things are:

a set of compromises—a series
 of subtle wing corrections
 to make the pieces fit.

The book begins with a dedication—"to my loved ones who help me fly" and in the

Judith Beveridge

Woman in a Street Stall

She makes torn shapes above a pot;
 and I love to watch how the moon
 adds its cool, transparent edge
 to her lips. She tests for enough spice,
 enough distance, and I watch those
 sticks of cinnamon float among
 her large, flat spoons. Ah, there could
 be a bird flapping out of tall grass
 by her sweet oasis, and a man too,
 whose breath smells of cedar and dust,
 who has come to quench himself,
 to listen too to the duet of her spoons
 and bracelets. I watch her face
 above the steaming pot, above the
 milky expanse where I imagine all
 her customers, lonely, yet open
 to the intimacies of their thirsts,
 to their days full of the umber scents
 of their longings stirred in well
 before dark. Far off, the sounds
 of dunes moving under birds' wings
 are the sounds her sighs make
 moored above her shimmering liquid.
 She sifts ingredients, spoons them in,
 and her bracelets slice the air
 with a thin marimba music, the kind
 you might hear somewhere far off,
 as you set your afternoon to the
 loneliest bandwidth. . . She sips
 a last spoon, douses the air,
 shakes in grains, spice, the green
 Formosan leaf. . . this woman who
 calls us in, draws us in with her
 skilful, aromatic finesse; who,
 like an illusionist, knows what
 she can and can't gain from the
 immeasurable edge. . . this woman
 who works in heat that begs
 illusion of her, distance of her;
 who listens for whatever she can
 amongst the soft resolutions
 of her bracelets. . . She blows
 now at the fine wisps of steam,
 gently, as if she held her lips
 to a man's damp cheek, though
 she consoles all of us, who've come,
 drawn out by the need for tenderness.

twenty-seven poems I counted eighty-six references to flight, the sky and light. Being partial to such images and ever aspiring to new ways of appreciating things celestial may be another reason I enjoyed these poems. For some though, this repetition may become slightly tiresome. Here is a sample from the opening poem 'My Baby Sees The Stars':

. . . my own light inevitably dying
 as whole galaxies fill the palm of his
 starfish hand.

The poems are not devoid of weight, however. Johnson seems at home contemplating human existence, and she does this particularly well when exploring its dark and undesirable aspects. The best of these poems are diffused with 'light', an unex-

pected beauty higher and larger than that which is happening in the poem. Roland Leach (on the back cover) describes this paradox another way: "To steal from and misquote Virginia Woolf: 'Judy Johnson's poems are butterfly wings threaded with steel.'"

Many of the poems are about that which is lost or leaving. There is the loss of skills and precision with age in 'Butterfly Collector' and the loss of one's memory in 'Alzheimers'. Both poems chart the inevitable with tenderness and originality but never with the misguided sympathy that may lead to steering away from the truth. I will not forget in the latter poem the grandmother who has spent the summer days watching her grandchildren eating watermelon:

She sucks the last inch of pulp someone has left behind as if memory is somewhere in a taste.

But husks trailed with ants are mostly what she is left with; bleached bone crescents—those pallid rinds she knows she shouldn't eat, though why? she can't quite remember.

Several poems examine lost relationships within a domestic context and lines like

"You have a new coffee set. I remember our| harlequin mugs, their rims sharpened to a suicide| edge..." from 'Pseudo Coffee' leap off the page to strike you. With titles like 'Discounting The Condom Theory Of Living' the tone here becomes more cynical, but this brand of cynicism offers reassurance, if only to reassure us of what we all already know—that flight comes with risk. (why else would we desire it?)

Those poems which impressed me most, however, are about an awakening to mortality and the deaths which complete this. See 'Gemstones', 'The Boy Who Drowned At Easter', 'The Burial' or 'Water-Wheel Man' to sample Johnson's voice at its most assured and convincing. The images in these poems are strange, sinister, exquisite and always unique. Amongst them there is often a disarming narrative at work. Try stopping at one stanza in 'The Boy Who Drowned At Easter':

It's not difficult to imagine the deja-vu that might accompany a toddler's stumble. The small tug on a psychic cord in the base of his brain—the place that still remembers birth, and ties the Act of descending with exile.

The collection as a whole is not without inconsistencies. A comment by Andrew Taylor in 'Reading Australian Poetry' comes to mind: "The only power they (words) have is derived from their not being what they signify." In poems like 'Fireball Sun' and 'The Woman Who Painted The Sky' even the titles sound familiar. Some of the images here seem a little too easy (not least because one of the very first poems I wrote was about a woman who painted the sky different colours to symbolise her moods) and do not work hard enough at extending the imagination. This is sometimes due to the over-familiarity of descriptives, but on occasions may also be attributed to the sheer number of descriptives battling for their own territory. Interestingly, this seems to be more of a problem in those poems describing landscape. See what you think:

The critics said for years she was too predictable, painting only one shade of sky. They seemed disturbed by the layered blue she had perfected—a white-blue that skittered across the canvas ...

I was disappointed that none of the poems in *WING CORRECTIONS* spanned more than a page. (Around half the poems occupy half

a page or less.) In poems like 'Water-wheel Man' and 'Dawn Fog' such economy works perfectly but I found myself wanting more from some of the other poems which feel more like postcards sent somewhat hastily from destinations rather than the detailed personal letter I desired.

Just a few more questions—in the last line of the poem 'Sea Bed' should "elliptic echo" be "elliptical echo"? The latter notion of an ellipsis would add more to the poem. And in the poem 'Pencil Melaleucas' did the poet consciously use the word "nightly" on two consecutive lines?

Despite a degree of unevenness, *WING CORRECTIONS* announces the arrival of a poet to watch for. (Some of you may have known this already, considering Judy Johnson's repertoire of previous publications and poetry prizes.) There are poems here which do what I hope for in any poem—that is to be moved, in two ways. In the first instance Johnson's poems have touched me and left me affected. The second way they have worked is by transporting me, beyond intellectual thought and reason, beyond the place where I live and the people I know, beyond my own small habitual views of the world.

Brian Henry

book

James Tate *SHROUD OF THE GNOME*
The Ecco Press \$US23 ISBN 0 880 01561 6

The American poet James Tate writes conventional-looking poems that are thoroughly unconventional. Since *DISTANCE FROM LOVED ONES* (1990), Tate has been moving toward a lyricism that carries the vestiges of narrative with it, establishing an oddly pitched, singular music—alternately deadpan and dazzling, understated and florid, earnest and cockamamie. His style also extends to his tone, which can be simultaneously hip and vulnerable (only Tate would respond to the title 'Where Babies Come From' with the first line "Many are from the Maldives" and then proceed to a moving conclusion). But despite the hilarity of his poems, his vision is tragicomic at its core. Although wit and humor can serve as defense mechanisms for a poet, Tate allows them to coexist with the painful disorientation that often characterizes the human condition and its frailties, follies, and foibles.

The forty-four poems in Tate's most recent collection, *SHROUD OF THE GNOME*, are among his funniest dramatic monologues. The language of these narrators, whose synapses seem to have been haywired, can experience peculiar slippages and convolutions: "I'll keep a watch out here for the malefactors | all the while ruminating rumbustiously on my new | runic alphabet, mellifluent memorandum whack whack." Throughout the volume, he constructs a variety of off-kilter worlds that operate by their own logic, as in 'My Felisberto', in which the narrator's intricate and super-rational argument is initially obfuscated by its absurdity:

My felisberto is handsomer than your mergotroid, although, admittedly, your mergotroid may be the wiser of the two. Whereas your mergotroid never winces or quails, my felisberto is a titan of inconsistencies. For a night of wit and danger and temptation my felisberto would be the obvious choice. However, at dawn or dusk when serenity is desired your mergotroid cannot be ignored.

Many of these narrators are half-insane didacts: they possess some sort of arcane

Philip Salom

Acupuncturist; Under the Needles

He's rather soulful, someone said

Half-undressed, your hands crossed on your chest,
you might be lying in state
but you are now the calmest of short deaths
in a room that's calming,
rectilinear, worn smooth by New Age silence.
Even the acupuncturist who
looks like a well-tanned ballet dancer but cannot
move a word without a minute
passing, then a stutter on each syllable, is
therefore, mostly silent.

You're nearly naked, stripped down to knickers
and T-shirt. He watches you
then actually says, Yes, and slowly his fingers
move your T-shirt down
discrete as sewing, for the needle he must touch
between your breasts,
and one lift of your knickers for another needle
just above your mons.
They are a stranger's fingers, and they touch
like slow attentions.
More, perhaps, because his face is long, voluptuary
from troubled speaking
and you never know the body's own seductions
surrendering, or wary,
(one more in both your wrists, then ankles) each
time he touches you and
says you must relax, and not wanting this ambiguous
more than *soulful*.

Silence. The sunlight moves across your face.
I listen to your breath
and try to feel you lying in this portrait. The needles
shine on your body
like the stars shiver on the limbs of constellations.
The body, and the silent
expanding universe. . . Years seem to be passing
in this room of elementary
pin-ups: the diagrams of Chinese men like pink
blow-up dolls.
The lines as virtual as an introvert's tattoos.
Your nerves perform
the finest calisthenics and the tiny needles seem
the inverse of idea. . .

But who knows? Perhaps, above, below, you are
all the hexagrams
rising and falling, the whole I Ching may be
passing through you
like currents in a lake, the surfaces which hint
at all the abstracts
but are mirrors: the trees, birds, the universe of clouds,
a fisherman at sundown
like *old souls*. . . as this man watches you, and me, his face
handsome as a magazine
but so serious, so. . . (Is the soul our favourite pastiche?)

I think of an old man
lying prone in another room, in another context
altogether—as each image

jabs him, remembering so much of a world that's gone
 he can't remember us
 but calls out to the figures filling into him, says
 the order of the years
 all wrong, the slowest acupuncture undoing him, his *soul*
 under moonlight, in the sun. . .
 We might be in another room, when I am old, and these
 nerves from my father
 blinking off in me, and as the nurse reaches down
 to me like needles
 you waiting there, as I am now, in the corner
 watching silently.

Later, you tell me how you felt without your usual
 points of reference,
 wanting to make the process work, knowing you had
 opened up your past,
 some grief, he said, and hoping he was touching you like
 just another patient
 even as he struggled for his words, and even as his watching
 was lingering too long,
 I thought of my father, so late and very close to dying
 and the no-nonsense
 nurse shouting: *G'day Mr Salom! Now toss back
 ya medicine! Whey!*
 And my mother flinching. And all the diagrams undone.

knowledge, often incorrect, that they wish
 to purvey before their hold on reality slips
 completely. This skewed didacticism could
 be pernicious if it were dishonest, but
 Tate's narrators believe what they say:

**I for one can barely tell where I trail off
 and you begin, since human beings are
 reported
 to be ninety-eight percent duct tape
 and feathers anyway.**

—'Same As You'

SHROUD OF THE GNOME is replete with
 such narrators and characters—a jalopy-driving
 boat-misser, “a crack squadron of soldier
 ants,” “a jackal-headed god of the
 underworld,” and “a hungry little Gnostic
 in need of a sandwich,” among many others.
 If tragicomedy is the bastard offspring
 of delight and terror, then Tate is a terribly
 delightful poet.

Rebecca Jones

book

**Peter Bakowski *THE HEART AT 3AM*
 Hale & Iremonger 1998 \$16.95
 72pp isbn 0 86806 643 5**

What criteria is Peter Bakowski
 setting up for his poetry when
 he ends his opening poem,
 ostensibly a list of similes for everyday
 phenomena, with, “Only truth| will make a
 poem| last longer| than a candle”. His
 ‘truth’, a word that no longer stands on its
 own terms, functions like a striker of resonance,
 and his poetry is to question the
 heart-rending mystery of life in a way that
 creates moments of illumination that shine
 a light more interrogative than a candle. It
 is this moment of revelation, of verbalizing
 a thing whose shadowy image we have
 grown used to in the dark, that is the true
 craft of poetry.

The search for truth is not an uncharted
 journey for a poet or a traveller of which
 Bakowski is both, and his poems, consolidated
 over a sixth month residency in
 Rome, span continents geographically and

psychologically in its pursuit. For all such
 expeditions one does well to carry a talisman
 and Bakowski's is the heart.

THE HEART AT 3AM or any other hour is
 the familiar but shadowy image that gets
 thrown into bright, sometimes harsh
 sometimes sympathetic light in his poetry
 and becomes alternatively the vessel and
 perpetrator of truth, “and your heart asks
 all its questions| that| only living| may
 answer.”

Mercifully Bakowski has the discernment
 to cement his contemplation of the metaphysical
 with the blessedly concrete, the stuff of
 living, and in this way strikes the match
 which activates the candle. He is able to do
 this on the tightest of word or imagery
 budgets, so that a ripening tomato is “sunset|
 to a snail”, but a concept far more
 enduring than the fading light it evokes. He
 lights sparks with his inversion of the
 obvious and offers humour when the questions
 without answers begin to infuriate, -I feel
 that I couldn't even dial a wrong number—
 ‘Life is difficult, part one’. This is one
 of many incidences where Bakowski
 assuages life's difficulties with an astute
 sense of humour.

Aside from the heart, other themes and
 symbols in Bakowski's work are an eclectic
 reflection of his travels through the cultures
 of the countries he writes about. It is a
 testimony to the infinite freedom and, on
 occasions, loss that identifying with a young
 Australian culture permits.

In ‘A Man of Rome’ the measured
 observations of a citizen from one of the
 oldest and most traditional cultures of the
 western world draw upon this dichotomy
 of what it is to be an Australian observing
 the world. It is comfortingly and enviably
 decorous and yet threatens to stultify. This
 danger is diverted by the likening of the
 man's soul to the goldfish he sees swimming
 in the pond, the cloistered public gardens
 of urban Rome allow for a symbolic
 contemplation that brings to mind
 oriental spiritualism. Whatever he writes
 about and from whichever place he writes,
 Bakowski writes with his heart, driven by
 the desire to extract the essential nature
 of what he senses, “I think the meaning
 of life is to shed

our armour: that's why I navigate my heart
 to paper.”

Charlotte Jones

book

**Jean Kent *THE SATIN BOWERBIRD*
 Hale & Iremonger 1998 \$16.95 96pp
 isbn 0 86806 640 0**

Delving in to Jean Kent's collection
 of poetry, *THE SATIN BOWERBIRD*,
 is a bit like entering a sacred temple,
 after taking off your shoes you enter a
 lofty space, a sense of hushed meditation
 and contemplation, rich in beauty and
 colour. Certainly, a deep sense of the
 religious runs throughout Kent's poetry,
 evoked through her observations of nature.
 Birds feature prominently, their humble
 and unassuming routine upheld as some
 kind of model for living. In ‘The Satin
 Bowerbird’ (the first poem of the anthology)
 Kent suggests a kind of spiritual awakening
 is available to those who observe the
 simplicity of the bird's life, “Come. Nestle
 nearer. Let the lustrous bird| sleep in us
 now. Let us swallow all night | our cranky
 cries until we too can wake | high in
 clean branches still holding| a gurgle,
 still practising| like some hope of
 happiness our throat strapped song”.
 Like Hopkins or Wordsworth Kent
 proposes transcendence is possible
 through observing and learning from
 the non-material world.

Her lush and heightened language
 transports the reader to the mysterious
 and magical heart of the senses. Even
 the mundane experience of ordering a
 pizza at the local pizzeria becomes
 suffused with a sense of the spiritual,
 “blissed blue-green turquoise—an
 ocean opening itself industriously
 smashing its sparkle| then calming
 back, into something whole again”.
 ‘Between Wave Breaks at Watsons Bay’
 pays homage to a friend of Kent's. This
 poem is a pleasing contrast to the
 hypnotic intensity of the nature poems,
 pounding as it does with the fierce
 energy of a three-year-old child,
 its central image. The poem's
 effectiveness works through its
 metaphor of child as a boisterous
 force of nature “a Southerly bluster
 roaring up from Bondi—”. Implicit
 in this metaphor is the contradictory
 notion that the child/nature is at
 once a source of exhaustion and at
 the same time functions as a panacea
 for the world weary soul. In the
 company of the child, the woman
 can learn to be spontaneous and
 free again, “and all the world you
 were in was also | suddenly
 transparently beautiful | shocked
 light as a bubble with undutiful
 joy”.

The latter part of the anthology
 is devoted to Kent's reflections
 while living in Paris where she
 took up a six month residence at
 the Keesing Studio. ‘The Baby
 Magpie's Catwalk’ offers a stark
 comparison between the fragile
 and innocent beauty of the
 Australian bush with the harsh,
 cynicism of Europe, “the
 flashbulbs fizz out in Paris |
 suddenly machine-gun bursts
 of French report | from Rwanda”.
 The tenuous song of the magpie
 is Kent's own doubts and fears
 about travelling to a place far
 away from her treasured native
 bush. This theme is revisited
 with greater intensity in
 ‘Imagining Myself in Australia
 for Christmas’, Kent draws
 stark comparisons between the
 chilly, wintry European
 Christmas and the stifling
 humidity of the Queensland
 celebrations back home.
 Christmas at home is alive
 with “cracking Queensland
 nuts’ and the “rich mulch
 of leaves”. In her Paris
 collection of poems, Kent
 travels back again and again
 to her native Australia. Ironically,
 her travel forays are not so
 much a discovery of the new
 as much as a rediscovery of
 the old, as childhood and
 family are revisited. “I am
 falling back to where it is
 day—day like an upturned|
 honey jar of my mother's
 garden” It is the ripe time—the
 family living time”.

Geraldine McKenzie

book

**Frank Kuppner *SECOND BEST
 MOMENTS IN CHINESE HISTORY*
 Carcanet Press Limited**

A major tendency in contemporary
 poetry has been the disavowal of
 narrative, not simply as form but
 even as a possibility. Narrative,
 of course, offers order, a sense
 of certainty and containment
 and, most crucially, of meaning,
 all of which are inimical to
 current perceptions of a
 chaotic universe and a language
 so splintered by multiple
 meanings as to lack a single
 essential meaning. Yet here
 is Frank Kuppner, seemingly
 restoring narrative to a
 central position in poetry,
 with his elegant quatrains
 sketching story after story.
 When Kuppner's first book,
*A BAD DAY FOR THE SUNG
 DYNASTY* (Scottish Book
 Council Award, 1984), was
 published, he stated that the
 work was “provoked by
 looking at the illustrations in
*Osvald Sirefs CHINESE
 PAINTING: LEADING MASTERS
 AND PRINCIPLES* and feeling
 certain that the whole story
 was not being told”.
*SECOND BEST MOMENTS IN
 CHINESE HISTORY* is located
 in the same territory and,
 as Kuppner says, is “formally
 identical and very similar in
 its preoccupations”. Again
 we have 501 quatrains,
 many of which “are supposed
 to be funny” and they are,
 the humour characteristically
 ironic, delighting

Dorothy Porter

Disaster

for Dr Diane Lightfoot

Why is it so fascinating
 watching disaster's colonies
 grow?

Some hang before the mouth
 like clusters of grapes
 others wriggle
 like the tempting blips
 of distant constellations.

Is the microscope honest?
 Is the petrie dish safe?

Disaster can be
 so gentle on the eye,
 wondrously translucent
 a swimming mystery
 with delicate working
 parts.

It's not so easy
 calling you names,
 disaster.

Even when the lid
 is lifted
 on your putrid stink
 you are generously
 enlightening us
 to the real world

its lurid lovely movie
 Divide and Rule.

in subversion—

108

As he leaves the astrologer's house,
delighted to have been told
That all the signs favour his immediate
journey to the capital.
He trips over a garden rock, falls, and
breaks both legs.
He crawls back into the house, to check
one or two details.

SECOND BEST MOMENTS is a much stronger work than the earlier text, more consistent in quality, more firmly sited in its world of the Chinese scroll and more inventive and assured in its dispersal of narrative. Kuppner's declared interest in the whole story has blossomed into a series of variations that actively sabotage any sense of story as true or closed.

An old man stands in an open doorway, a traveller sees him and passes by. The old man closes the door—these are the bones of what might be a story, then again it might be two quite separate stones. This is nothing new, parallel narratives are the mainstay of everything from Homer to Neighbours. What makes the pattern potentially disturbing is the equal weight given to both stones, so that, in a subsequent variation (312), the fall of a jug off a cliff into the ocean is juxtaposed with the massing of "a hundred, two hundred ships", both seemingly of equal value.

Another pattern of narrative occurs when the same individual simultaneously enacts two separate events, as in 6: "The man slumped, dreaming in a pavilion". Is the same man as the one climbing the mountain path towards him

Here, value is no longer the issue, it's reality that's at stake. This is also the case with another pattern Kuppner adopts where a narrative is established then returned to later in the sequence with a line changed. This practise is repeated anything up to five times, in some cases suggesting the range of possibilities that might emerge from a given situation but most notably entering an expanding spiral into absurdity, thus the Emperor who undertakes to visit a young lady of whom "he is inordinately fond" initially expects the trip to take a few hours. By the last variation, the projected journey has blown out to "a few decades".

Kuppner also plays with fragments of narrative, isolated scenes that hint at a larger story. In 39, for instance, the lady shivering in the snow and the semicircle of soldiers who surround her, could be the middle act in a number of scenarios. What is really happening? It's a recurring question—in 162 where "the Emperor's favourite horse stands bleeding", is this picturesque detail a domestic mishap, or the denouement of great and tragic events? This confusion is shared by many of the characters "The civilised man with the head of a large green ferret" who is "uncertain in his mind" (111) is only one of many indecisive, anxious, apprehensive and unpunctual figures, crossing and recrossing bridges, avoiding and not avoiding abysses. This uncertainty extends to experience of the natural world, sounds are ambiguous—"An occasional rustle | May be footsteps but is more probably just trees" (22). Images are just as problematic and it's not even clear if the difficulty lies in the limitations of the image or of the beholder -

51

A few bamboo stems sway unimportantly
in the wind. There are three. or four—possibly
five of them altogether. No. To be quite accurate:
there are six of them. No, waft a moment—
there are seven of them.

Misreadings can also occur because of the impulse to impose narrative on landscape—in 241 'Drinking Song' the singer describes a mournful valley, corpses hang from most of the willow trees, but this is amended "I exaggerate" they only hang from four or five. Again the singer corrects himself, there are, in fact, no corpses—"but it is raining

heavily". The difficulties of seeing are paralleled by the difficulties of knowing. Given the context, it's not surprising to encounter declarations of "the essential unreality of things", but even this is presented ironically—the scholar (266) who has just completed his 8 million word manuscript on the subject "searches his room in apparently increasing desperation | Wondering where on earth it can possibly have disappeared to". The flaw inherent in a denial of the material world is neatly captured in 30—

Six sages are standing in a little garden
Each has shut his eyes, and, by sheer absence
of thought. Has convinced himself that he has
been absorbed into the universe. An enraged
servant girl is about to kick one of them.

These sages are, at least temporarily, escaping the physical but the difficulties of doing so are enacted in the frequent coupling (in more ways than one) of Masters/scholars/sages with dancing girls/singing girls and wine—for example, in 120, the Master who is asked to "reconcile | His insistence on the need for a chaste, virtuous life | With his well-known penchant for having large servant-girls | Sit down on his face". Is there a real conflict? Dichotomies abound—spiritual/material, political | domestic, beauty/cruelty—but they scarcely ruffle the limpid quality of the text and its measured and orderly progression of stanzas.

64

Enamelled trees grow by the river.
A delicate humanity close their Jewelled
doors
And sail gently downstream towards the
palaces
Where the worst of the loud screams have
been beard coming from.

Here the juxtaposition of civilisation and terror is registered as though human suffering is no more than an unusual twist to insert in the last line. This does represent an area of weakness in the text. Although the quality is generally consistent, the demands of 501 quatrains and the sorts of patterning that occur involve occasional lapses into cleverness, banality, glibness and a sort of portentous simplicity that doesn't quite work—

379

A wet leaf clinging to a threshold
Gradually dries. crispens. and falls to the
ground.
There to join an enormous heap of other
leaves.
A royal dog wanders up to the heap and
pisses on it

These are minor irritants in what is generally a vivid and entertaining sequence, a more significant difficulty is what happens to the expression of chaos in the text. Narrative is multiplied, subverted, dismembered; experience is compromised by subjectivity and the untrustworthiness of the senses and nature; profound dualities are identified and, to cap it all, there are intermittent references to impending catastrophe.

We are within half a second of annihilation.

I'll no even have time to look at yow face
again.

—112

Armies muster off stage, peasant women are glimpsed in flight, Governors despair and a soldier on sentry duty has no idea whether they are winning or not —

A bored God's band closes round the
globe and crushes it.

—294

However, this chaotic and violent world is both distanced and contained. Of course, time is extraordinarily elastic in the world of the Chinese scroll, hours become months, years, decades, a stroll into the ocean stretches into the centuries; the distance such time spans confer obviously play a part in the detached tone of the text. The

ready humour functions in a similar way, both the neat wit and the cheerful bawdiness of the 'Drinking Songs', whilst engaging in one sense, simultaneously distance the reader from events—the man with broken legs, the compromised Master, etc. There is a sense in which all sorts of discordant events can be absorbed, and that glittering surface, by turns lyrical, elegant, ironic, will subsume all conflict into art.

This process is conclusively sealed by the use of the quatrain. Although there are a few instances where Kuppner pushes this form to its limits by the use of very short or, more commonly, very long lines, these are isolated cases and don't affect the prevailing sense of coherence, containment and craft implicit in a form which reduces each poem to a constant four lines, regular metre and a generally orthodox use of syntax. We can, if so inclined, praise the artistry that, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, gives a sense of some certainties; and there is no disputing that *SECOND*

BEST MOMENTS IN CHINESE HISTORY is a beautifully written sequence. That it is flawed is, perhaps, entirely appropriate.

Phil Norton

book

Alistair Stewart *FRANKSTON 281*
Five Islands Press, New Poets 5.

Not being all that familiar with Australian crime history, I asked a friend for assistance in understanding the reference of the title of Alistair Stewart's poem sequence *FRANKSTON 281*. The title alone did not trigger any memories, so I went on to explain what the series of poems was about. Some brutal murders of apparently randomly chosen young women which sent the community into a state of panic, and mobilized the police force into futile attempts at coping.

I was then recited a list of vaguely remem-

Kathielyn Job

Change

Having decided to change her life,
she slashes
welts of green
over her eyebrows.
She arrives at her house
to find the writers' group of five
bent like fingers
over each other's pages, laid out
on the lounge room coffee table.
There is her body
sitting with them
leaning into their words—
they don't notice
her disembodied animation
in the doorway.
One tells her
she has asked a few new members
and points to the other side
of the room.
It has ballooned
into a public hall,
filled with duplications
of her dining table, surrounded
by bent backs,
cardiganed, striped, seamless,
with faceless heads and voices
reading from their writings,
louder and louder to overtake
each other. She decides not
to worry about her eyebrows,
and rushes from table to table,
saying: that image rises from the page,
saying: here, your character is coming to life—
do you see,
do you see?
She leaves her body's imprint
at each table and stands
in the airy empty space
between the two half-rooms.
They are asking her questions
but have no time
for an answer. No-one
has noticed her eyebrows.

bered possible tragedies to choose from, assuring me that even if I was not familiar with the specific, I knew the general, and sadly confirming the universal nature of these psychotic offences.

FRANKSTON 281 takes us through a nonlinear chain of events (if such a thing is possible) and an almost schizophrenic series of voices as the details and events surrounding the crimes are recounted. We are given glimpses. Not full snapshots, but little corners of torn photos. The blend of voices and places and time is not smooth, intentionally not so, I believe. The poems don't flow into each other but sit scattered, more like the puzzle pieces they represent. The lack of titles and page numbers further adds to a sense of evidence gathering: everything is unnamed, unnumbered.

Thankfully, Stewart avoids sensationalizing and sentimentalizing as poets so often do with such emotionally laden subjects. Instead, Stewart gives us a kind of bare poetic reportage, laying out carefully chosen snippets of events:

There are no lone women
in the area.
An evening is held
by the local college
to discuss career prospects
for women undergraduates.
By 7.00 p.m.
the hall is full
of worried men.

This sense of paranoia and worry in the community is one of the central concerns of the work, and when Stewart deals with these, he presents the voices cleanly and simply:

Even if I get in my car safely
I worry about breaking down
on the road alone
and then he'll get me.

She starts work at 5 a.m.
and I walk down the driveway
with a hockey stick and check the car
just in case yer know?

Stewart's sympathy for his subjects feels genuine, something that is important when dealing with multiple stabbings and grieving families. Equally genuine seems to be his contempt for the attempts of the Victorian Police to deal with the crimes. There are numerous references to "Operation Reassurance", a "show of force" and "a person would have to be game to commit a crime with so many police around."

Though I empathize with the frustration one feels when watching authorities boast and reassure when the situations are anything but sure, I can also see the frustration from the authorities side in attempting to respond to such apparently random murders. I felt Stewart was a bit heavy here. (Though I must admit, I found myself nodding at his description of the police at the mall: "The show of force display | looked like a stall at a school fete | | one women inquired | where she could buy raffle tickets.)

Some of the strongest and most disturbing sections come when Stewart shows the victim and the abduction. In these sections, the sparse text undercuts the brutal actions:

she is pitchforked with stabbings.
a clotted butchered clench
of bruising and gapings
left
as a dead bird
is left
to the middle of the road

And then later:

rolls her over and digs at the throat
chop out that fuck'n screaming

The Five Island Press chapbook style suits this work as you basically get one book one story. Unfortunately, I found that it was an incredibly fast read, and was over almost before it had begun.

The only extraneous pieces for me were two visual "text" poems which were assembled from cut and literally twisted lines from the other poems. I didn't feel these two pieces brought anything to light that was not already in the individual poems and the collection as a whole.

FRANKSTON 281 is a powerful, disturbing collection. Stewart's ability to select what images to present when makes the work successful. I understand Stewart has a corresponding performance piece and would be interested in seeing how Stewart presents the material live. Due to the subject matter, *FRANKSTON 281* is not a collection that you enjoy. It is more an event you witness, then come away slightly dazed. It's like seeing a car crash at an intersection, and then getting the walk signal and having to continue on your way, leaving the crash behind. But not completely.

Pi O

journals

GOING DOWN SWINGING

PO Box 24 Clifton Hill Vic 3068

HOBO

PO Box 166 Hazelbrook NSW 2779

&

PO Box 1297 Nth Fitzroy Vic 3068

RED LAMP

61 Glenmore Cl., Cherryhawton,
Cambridge CBI 4EF, UK.

TEXTBASE

PO Box 2057

East Brunswick Vic 3057

RHINO

PO Box 164 South Fremantle WA

SPUR

Grey Matta Collective

When I took on this review, I excluded some small magazines outright: *SOUTHERLY*, *OVERLAND*, *HEAT*, [*QUADRANT?*] , *MEANJIN*. . . Why?! To tell you the truth, I couldn't come up with an adequate criteria, except that they didn't fit my notion of "small". Maybe its because of the size of the financial budgets involved i.e. if the shit hits the fan tomorrow there'll always be enough money in the kitty to tie them over to a FINAL issue; not necessarily so with magazines like *GOING DOWN SWINGING* , or *HOBO* (say). But even that description would be untrue in the case of a magazine like "&" (say) [established Nov 1997] [i.e. *AMPERSAND* [if you're in the know] or "*AND*" if you "look" at it in its printed form]; cos basically it's 2 or 3 sheets of A4 printed on a photocopy machine, collated, and cut down to an A6, with no card-cover, colour or expensive design to worry about i.e. maybe a \$100s worth!!!! [OH! I didn't put a value on elbow-grease, but that, in poetry, is a given (aye!)] Easy! And may I say BRILLIANT!; i.e. the heart of a lot of good poetry being written around the traps lately. "&" came out of the "burgeoning" Melbourne "spoken word" poetry scene, Adam tells me and editorially [from my perspective] it's a sharp and tasteful selection each time. But even \$100s can be a precarious existence for some magazines and editors like Adam Ford have been known in the past to be on the dole.

Another important small magazine emanating out of Melbourne is Lyn Boughton's *GOING DOWN SWINGING* [which has been coming out "yearly" now for almost a decade] and which has been associated with the rise of performance poetry in Australia since its inception, and in a sense showcases a lot of poets who have been important to it bloodflow. With the 17th issue however Lyn Boughton has decided to call it quits; the new editors—Adam Ford and alicia sometimes. [Adam Ford could [with 2 mag-

azines under his belt now] end up being the Citizen Kane of poetry if he doesn't watch it]. [Still] Lyn's choice has been heralded in Melbourne universally as a stroke of genius with alicia sometimes telling me that they hoped to include "interviews with people we think are influencing writers at the moment." as well as "a CD of spoken word as a document of what is happening. With that kind of openness, hope and dedication *GOING DOWN SWINGING* could end up being THE most exciting magazine in the country.

Another magazine I love is Dane Thwaites' *HOBO*. He has attempted also to produce a regular tape-cassette of poetry, for the "visually impaired" and others but from what I can work out the tape idea died only after a few issues. In one sense [and as an outsider] it was inevitable, cos (a) the technology i.e. a tape, was too old, i.e. not a CD, (b) it was not sold as part of the magazine, but rather as an adjunct to it (c) a tape-cassette is awkward-packaging with a conventional A5 mag. and (d) the poems on the tape were read by "others" other than the poets themselves. [Still] *HOBO* magazine has been a beautiful beacon [for a long time now] for a lot of good writers in Australia and in a sense it has never stood still. What I mean is that the magazine is always trying to expand our notion of what the current of poetry actually contains, and he has opened its doors to the home of the haiku in Australia edited by Janice Bostok a one-time-editor of *TWEED* magazine fame I'm always excited when I see a new issue of *HOBO*, and it always makes me participate in its writing; and that [for a magazine] is exceptional. As one poet put it to me over the phone, there's always "lots of poets bunched up in it" and it is genuinely "inclusive"—and that it is!!!!!!

RED LAMP edited by Brad Evans is subtitled "A Journal of Realist, Socialist and Humanitarian Poetry" and is perhaps the most courageous magazine in the country; defying the current trend in intellectual thought world-wide to disengage aesthetics from commitment. But what I find so exciting about the magazine is how the poem-on-the page is given its uncluttered space and relevant cultural context by the use of notes, footnotes and introductory remarks. The very notion that a poem exists in a cultural context, and that specific cultural knowledge is important to a poem's understanding is acknowledged, and allowed for here. In *RED LAMP* I can even get excited by a ballad, and that's hard to do in this day and age. I honestly think Brad Evan would be capable of doing an excellent anthology of "committed-poetry" for Australia, and someone should commission him now. Issue N° 4 will be coming to us out of Cambridge/ Lon-don where he's at at the moment. [He'll be back soon tho, so don't worry.!!]

The last magazine I want to engage with is called *TEXTBASE* and its given away free in Melbourne. It comes to us not from an "editor" but from a "collection" of editors for should that be "participants"?), it being a kind of ongoing collaborative project, by a core group of 6, none of who are actually "real artists" as they put it in a letter to me. This magazine [in short is interested in questioning everything [or so much of everything as they are interested in] and its unusual [in another way] in that you really can't contribute to it —[well.. I you can but they're not really interested in the one-off contribution. What they want to do is get really excited by a contributor and engage them, with [or within] a dialogue about aesthetics, or work in progress]; then have it transcribed into print [or parts thereof] for the benefit of their audience. As DJ Huppatz [one of the editors] put it "We don't really take unsolicited *writing* but we are interested in unsolicited *writers*". [their italics!]. So each issue of their magazine "is like curating an exhibition", a kind of "artist run gallery" full of

cut-up texts and graphics etc. The 1st issue engaged Ania Walwicz, the 2nd the art of the "cut-up", and the 3rd Mallarmé.... Perhaps the most interesting development in recent years is the number of "art students(?)" who've come to poetry out of art history and engaging [once more] the stages of poetry. *TEXTBASE* magazine reflects that shift [and the wonder is why there hasn't been more of it, since the last invasion in the 70s by the Ashbery / O'Hara assault]. Danny tells me, "I've found the contemporary art world quite open... much more than the literary world" and it's hard to disagree with him—"I guess all of us [at *TEXTBASE*] approach writing from an art theory perspective". A lot of poets on the scene today would benefit from a bit of familiarity with art-writers.

There were other "small magazines" I would have liked to review | mention but some like *RHINO* [in WA] unfortunately died before I got to them, while others like *SPUR* were too young and new [with only 1 issue out] for me to do anything with; maybe next time.

Michelle Carter

cd

Wednesday Kennedy Post ROMANTIC.

Wednesday Kennedy is a Sydney performance poet who recently launched her CD album, *POST ROMANTIC* at The Basement in Circular Quay. She was featured on the ABC Voices programme and also The 7.30 Report along with John Tranter and Robert Adamson during National Poetry Week.

There's something very zen about the themes and styles of Kennedy's debut album *POST ROMANTIC*. Her insistence on looking deeply, intrepidly into the pain of betrayal, deception, and abandonment takes us on a journey of poignant beauty, to the other side. It's like a transformation. On one level it's a physical journey from suburbia through the inner city which is reflected in footsteps, playground noise, planes, trains and shattered glass. Interwoven is the emotional and psychic journey from childhood innocence to urbanised adulthood with its deconstruction of popular myths and ideologies about life, relationships, language. This is most apparent in *The Promise* which Kennedy wrote for the music of Hori. Here the cliches/metaphors of love are both exposed as honey and re-vamped: the playmate, the prrr pussycat, the peacock.. the prima donna, the wife... It's a kind of exorcism but interspersed are the naive echoes of childhood: "Cross my heart, hope to die | Stick a needle in your eye."

Kennedy describes herself as a bower bird. She skilfully recycles the vernacular in new contexts. In 'Scream', for instance she uses the familiar echoes of a mother's warnings to signal impending danger, fear:

Don't forget your lunch, Have you got a
cardigan It's cold outside...

So begins the archetypal journey from innocence to betrayal. Reference to the Bluebeard myth, evokes the cultural enigmas of death and femininity.

And I will know my Prince for his beard
will be blue, indigo blue
Blue as the dark ice in the lake
Blue as the shadow of the hole in the
night.

Kennedy's voice is almost ghostlike, dislocated in time:

Some call this the era offorgeffulness
But I call it a name I can't remember
and there's something in my throat but it's
been there so long
I've forgotten how to scream

The narrative structure is polyphonic rather than linear, moving like a pendulum back-

wards and forwards it serves to re-evaluate the experience of the past and create new meaning in the present. With the help of multitracking and re-mixing, the cast of *POST ROMANTIC* includes the subaltern voices of Karl the dero-artist, buskers and street crowds. True to form many of the tracks were recorded on location around the inner city. 'Tunnel Vision' is a mesmer-ic fugue of the soundscape in Central Station's famous tunnel. Here words are reduced to subconscious whispers: "I'm following you fragments of thoughts, an urban meditation in a foreground of walking rhythms and city noise."

The physical or concrete becomes metonymical of emotional and psychic states. In 'Karl's Corner' (written about, and recorded in Kellet Way, King's Cross) the mood of the street affects the life of its residents: "Nobody loved that corner and that corner never loved nobody and you could also say that there was very little love for the entire next block You notice these things when you live on the ground-floor..."

From the seduction and jealousy in 'She', the fractured amnesia of 'Scream' and 'Wounded Aphrodite' we move to the emotional catharsis of 'Cigarette', a monologue remarkable for its relentless intensity: "There was fire in your belly, you just ripped through things ripped into them, hungry, starving devouring everything in sight and so beautiful in your destruction..."

POST ROMANTIC is a narrative of desire and memory delivered through a range of emotional tones by a diversity of voices. It traverses the genres of free verse, conventional song, cello rhythms and city soundscape. The success of the album is due to its thematic and stylistic harmony, its fine collaboration of textual, sonic and visual elements (cover photography by Lewis Morley). A stunning performance and production.

Letters. . .

whenever the Latin words "Catulli" or "Catullum" appeared, my translation was "Tolhurst" rather than "Catullus".

Forgive me for being a bit stern for a minute but do something about your reviews. . . Boyle was good in *CORDITE* N°1, but award-winning clowns and a fair bit of sycophancy has crept in since. *CORDITE* is in danger of becoming the Spice Girls of Australian poetry, and though I tremendously enjoyed the review of my book, you won't have impressed the bulk of your readership by running such silliness.

It would be dignified of *CORDITE* to publish this letter in full.

Yours faithfully
Hugh Tolhurst

Firstly Hugh, we all think you have a great future! I'm left with only one question. Who was the intended audience of your translations? Are these specialist translations to be read only by those of your peers qualified with a classical education? If so, you've taken a very narrow view of the contemporary Australian poetry readership. No, it's my belief you wrote also for the general poetry reader, and therefore 'general', ie non-specialist, reviewers are qualified to hold what reviewers since time immemorial have held: an opinion. Here, the offence seems to be that the ego of the poet Tolhurst has been confused with the ego of the poet Catallus—but is this not clearly suggested in translating "Catulli" or "Catullum" as "Tolhurst"? Diveristy of opinion being what it is, I cannot imagine either that there'd be unanimous approval of your work amongst those classical scholars dry, perhaps

Prater on Mallarmé

murmur of appreciation from the audience. Chris Wallace Crabbe also read from several of his collections, introducing a translation of one of Mallarmé's poems with, perhaps, just a little too much self-deprecation. Though Jean-Luc Steinmetz (another French poet scheduled to appear at the Event) could not attend, Rosemary Lloyd more than made up for his absence with a reading from his work.

After the readings, there were some questions from the audience, especially on the subject of translation. However, perhaps there had been a little too much champagne imbibed before the proceedings began, for all too soon there was nothing left to say. When asked how he felt about being translated into other languages, Deguy replied in French, drawing laughter from the francophones. When Rosemary Lloyd thoughtfully translated Deguy's answer as 'I am overwhelmed by sloth', all present knew that it was time to go home and dream of the abyss of the empty white (or black) page once more.

Friday morning's session was devoted to both readings and papers. Paul Carter's discussion of Mallarmé's intriguing phrase book for French students of English brought into play issues of (mis)translation, (trans)migration and (linguistic) representation. A little known work, Mallarmé's phrase book deserves greater attention, if only

even powdery, behind the ears and interest-ed in contemporary translations of Catallus. Giving this misdemeanour its due importance, I wasted no time counselling the reviewer concerned!

*I love it when you're stern.
Kisses, Ginger Spice.*

Textbase Post Box

Thanks for the review in your last issue. We really appreciate the support (and incidentally, we very much like what you're doing). [Well, someone likes our reviews!—ED] The address that was printed on your review was slightly wrong. It should read: Textbase, PO Box 2057, Lygon St North, East Brunswick VIC 3057. There are a whole bunch of postal boxes in East Brunswick these days, so the Lygon St North bit is important.

DJ Huppertz
Co-editor
TEXTBASE

ULITARRA

A quality magazine of fiction, essays, and poetry, every June & December. \$19 per year or \$10 for one issue. Submissions are welcome, accompanied by SSAE PO Box 195, Armidale, NSW, AUSTRALIA 2350.

ANNUAL POETRY AND SHORT STORY COMPETITIONS
With cash prizes & publication of winning entry in Ulitarra.
Entrants are required to buy the current issues of the magazine. Subscribers can enter free.

for its beautiful, almost Absurdist turn of phrase: "Is this a taxi or a cloud?" Following this, Kevin Hart shared some poems from (I assume) his new collection and Justin Clemens spoke of Mallarmé in terms of postmodern and media theories.

Elsewhere at the Event, Rosemary Lloyd presented an academic paper on Mallarmé's prose writings, particularly 'Italage'; Michael Farrell delivered his own translation of 'Tomb for Anatole', using knocks and pauses to dramatic effect; and Michael Graf, the Event organiser, read from his own translations of Mallarmé. Visual artist Juno Gemes graced the walls of the Alliance Française with an installation inspired by Mallarmé's famous dice poem. The Event culminated with a Christopher Brennan Gala, a chance for the participants to draw together the various strands unravelled over the two days and also to unwind in a social and relaxed atmosphere.

The Mallarmé Writers' Event abounded with creative talent and was a showcase as much of contemporary Australian writing as of Mallarmé himself. The fact that all speakers agreed to appear without payment illustrates further the dedication of all involved. The spirit of generosity and exchange produced lively and stimulating discussion, proving that Mallarmé, though dead one hundred years, lives on in the words and images of writers today. All praise the empty page!

Famous Reporter

A biannual literary journal

Edited by Lyn Reeves, Lorraine Marwood, Anne Kellas, Angela Rockel, Warrick Wynne and Ralph Wessman

\$14 for two issues

Walleah Press
PO Box 368, North Hobart,
Tasmania 7002

Contributors

Emily Ballou's poem 'Enter' won the 1997 Judith Wright Poetry Prize.

Mary Jo Bang is a New York poet who has edited a book of lesbian writing. She published her first book *APOLOGY FOR WANT* in 1997.

Judith Beveridge is currently working on her third volume of poetry. She will be reading at the 12th International Poetry Festival at Columbia in June.

Ken Bolton's most recent collection, *UNTIMELY MEDITATIONS*, was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Prize for Poetry. His forthcoming collection is titled *AT THE FLASH AND AT THE BACI*.

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

Michelle Carter is a GP on the central coast of NSW. She has had poetry published in *ULITARRA*, *LINQ* and *IMAGO*.

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

Tricia Dearborn is a Sydney poet, with poetry forthcoming in *SOUTHERLY* and *SCARP*. In 1998 she was awarded a place in Varuna's inaugural Residential Mentorship Programme for Poetry.

Brian Henry is editor of the American poetry journal, *VERSE*.

Felicity Holland (formerly Felicity Plunkett) is an editor of *SIGLO*.

Kathielyn Job's first collection *NOW, THE MELALEUCA* was written while living in Dubbo.

Charlotte Jones recently completed an MA at the Australian Film Television and Radio School. She also studied at NIDA's Playwright's Studio, and writes poetry.

Rebecca Jones graduated with a BA in Communications from UTS. She has had poetry published in *INKLINGS*.

David Kelly writes cut-back poetry himself, but some of his best friends embellish.

Wednesday Kennedy released her CD *POST ROMANTIC* in 1998.

August Kleinzahler is an American poet.

Stephen J Lacey's poetry has appeared in those windy journals *WESTERLY* and *SOUTHERLY*.

Deb Matthews lives in Adelaide and is a freelance writer/editor. She is currently working on a novel.

Geraldine McKenzie lives and writes in the Blue Mountains.

Mal Morgan's sixth book, *OUT OF THE FAST LANE* was released by Five Islands Press in 1998. These poems concern his experience of living with cancer.

Michelle Morgan is a writer, composer and performer. Her work has been published in Australia and the USA. She leads a band, Chelate Compound.

Phil Norton is at large in Transylvania.

Pi O is a Melbourne poet. His epic work *24 HOURS* was published by Collective Effort in 1995.

Dorothy Porter has published eight collections of poetry, including three verse novels. Her most recent is *WHAT A PIECE OF WORK* (Picador, 1999), a verse novel set in Sydney's Callan park in the late 60s.

David Prater is a Melbourne writer.

Patricia Prime is a New Zealand poet.

Brian Purcell's first collection *LOVELY INFESTATION* was published in 1995.

Mathew Rohrer lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Philip Salom's latest collection is *NEW & SELECTED POEMS* (arc, 1999). His next, *ON LOCATION*, is due out in 2000.

Rae Sexton's translations of Alain Bosquet have appeared in a New Directions edition of his work.

Peter Skrzynecki published the novel *THE CRY OF THE GOLDFINCH* in 1996, and the anthology *INFLUENCES: AUSTRALIAN VOICES* in 1997.

Todd Swift is one of Canada's leading poetry activists. In 1995, he co-hosted the prestigious U.S. National Poetry Championships. He is co-editor of *POETRY NATION: THE NORTH AMERICAN ANTHOLOGY OF FUSION POETS* (Véhicule Press, 1998).

Michelle Taylor has lived in England and Scotland. Her first collection, *FIRST LANGUAGE*, is due out in July.

Elizabeth Treadwell lives in Berkeley California, and is editor of the literary magazine *OUTLET*.

Dara Weir is New York poet.

Jane Williams' first book *OUTSIDE TEMPLE BOUNDARIES* (Five Islands Press, 1998) won the 1999 Anne Elder Award.

Mijanou Zigane recently graduated with an MA in Theatre Studies from the University of New South Wales.

SideWaLK

a new specialist
QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
for the poetical
\$20 for 4 issues

The Sidewalk Collective
PO Box 58
Enfield Plaza SA 5085