

FOUR POEMS



Dorothy Hewett

GREEN FENCE POEM

Something there is that doesn't love a wall.

—ROBERT FROST

the woman next door
has started whistling again
for a long time she was silent
because she hated the green fence
she must have decided
to keep on whistling in spite of it
while it lopes away down the garden
she has trilled her way right through
all the standard hits of the '40s

last winter we caught a glimpse of her
naked running through the orchard
like a girl her white flesh
bouncing blue with cold
but now she stands at the kitchen window
whistling against the dark the green fence
the cranky husband the black cockatoos
screeching from the pine tops the traffic

starting up at 7am on a Good Friday.

THE RAGGLE-TAGGLE GYPSIES O

They are camped in the park by the Pagoda Ice Rink
pine shadows criss-crossing their faces
their caravans their big old dusty American cars
the ghosts of their dancing bears

Look she says unwrapping the burnt child
I cry out *you must take her to the hospital*
you must find her a doctor
she smiles she rewraps the child
she traces my lifeline with a smokey finger
she tells me I will have a long life
and have many children
she doesn't tell me
I will run away with a madman
my child will die I'll get breast cancer
and break my heart
she watches me pushing the pram
towards the jetty white with gull droppings...

THE GREY PONY

I was walking over the paddocks
opening gates and crossing dry creekbeds
leading the foundered pony to Dutchy Butler's

she had foundered in the wheatfield
neglected her hoofs had grown
like curved Turkish slippers
she stumbled as she walked

when we came to the smithy
built into the shoulder of the granite hillside
she stood quietly while he held each hoof on his knee
rasping away to the roar of the forge
the flame brown high in the funnelling wind off the gully

I rode her back over the paddocks
picking her way with her old cunning
between the roots the stones and the rabbit burrows
she sidled through the silver air
pretending to shy at shadows
each hair of her coat
standing upright with joy.

AT HOME

Some day I will return to the ruined house
and live there hovering in the rafters
or sighing in the corners still left standing
after the cyclones every seven years
lopped off the trees unrooted the houses
sent the sheepfeeders spinning across the paddocks
it's a miserable country
the orchard white with salt deposits
a few York gums bent to the equinoctial gales
an absurd place to turn into a cultural icon
it's no colonial mansion just an old farmhouse
weatherboard and fibro with a black stove at its heart
the verandahs eaten out the iron roof flapping
the abandoned farm machinery
likes about like prehistoric fossils
in the home paddock
but I've mined every inch of it
and still keep coming back for more
hesitating on the edge of words
never quite making it.

There is no one to talk to here
except the odd crow
or a sheep wandered away from the flock
to nose over the paddymelons
in the abandoned kitchen garden
perhaps it's the blankness
the hovering the sighing
as if a wind brushed through a broken window
revealing much more than we can see.

FIVE POEMS



Dimitris Tsaloumas

TOWARDS THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Like a prosperous unborn land
whose promise is a phoenix yet unknown
in the ashes of an exile's country,
the new millennium is now at hand.

Our reading of the signs can't be wrong:
seabirds wheeling above, the frequency
of flotsam, dead fish and tamarisk bloom
on slick-dapped seas, the odd discarded thong.

I was loath to embark. Till as in sleep
a rumble of multitudes from sinking shores
like an ocean breaking over the dykes of
remotest Australia fathoms deep

down the map of known lands; a roar
of blood rushing like a myriad drums
rolling to mutiny under the whirr
of great wings beating the night to soar

above the binding dark, had taught me fear
of loneliness, hope in tidal rips.
For dreaming stills in the haven of harbours,
life stills, meaning's bestowed, unclear.

Rational vision firms our captains' grasp
of heaven's message, who now clearly bid
the soul remember bliss once hers and long
for home again. Wakeful, our captains rasp

precise instructions. Now and then, they scan
the line below the sulphur-acid sky,
study the smoke formations, speak words
we marvel at as at a new-born sun.

Yet as I write
a rose, old friend, a big red rose
burns on his livid cheek
and I think of you in its glow
and hear sweet voices singing
that could be angels in the trees.
For nothing stirs abroad
on this bleak night but leaves,
and the ditch is full of rain.

OFFERING

I have squandered my words
on substance less generous.

The house is poor,
I find no fitting gift for you.

But the small-leafed
round-headed basil on the ledge
is doing well this year.
It should last us the summer
though the water's salt.

I've gathered sage in the hills
and pennyroyal by the sea;
small camomile stars
and streetlamps tracteries
through the window vine
on our dishevelled bed.

When you are gone
I'll hang them by the calendar
behind the kitchen door.

PRAYING TO AN OLD IKON

Your gaze breaks through
the dark-brown skin of centuries,
wanders in space beyond the rule
of time or season.

Lady of moon-drawn seas

This is the time of year
when bilious Scorpio lies low
in the southern sky
blowing leaves and dust
between doormat and wall,
blasting all day with desert grit
the landward gates.

Your eyes reach soft beyond
consolation, hands folded still
by the burning candle.
You are the blood in the rose,
the sap in the tree they turn
to acid rain.

I'd have you rest your head
on my lap, dream up a star
for drifting ships
on storm-dark waters.
Maybe I'd hum him a tune.
But it is only rooks in the air,
sometimes a sudden sparrow.
I haven't seen a skylark climb
its vertical song in a long time.

Lady of moats and battlements
there is a sadness in the room.

The Emperor's army rattles back
to winter quarters;
bottleflies swarm in the lanes.
The plague will hatch in the spring.

May the walled-in city guard
your people and every living thing
from further desolation.

SONNET

I'd been looking for her vaguely
through morning mists, noontday haze,
and in the years of war and loss
in tropic islands rich
by the love of endless summer.
I had also looked in parts
less glamorous, the drab monotonies
of mule-drawn time.

So when she crossed into my lands
I failed the hope of expectation:
she brought familiar gifts. Now rid
of scope, my demands are minimal—
another dress, a new hairstyle. I
no longer goad the stubborn breasts.