

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 25 - Number 3

Spring 1975

A WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CHAPBOOK

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Cover Design: GUY GREY-SMITH

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INTRODUCTION

"Farewell, Australia! You are a rising child
and doubtless some day will reign a great
princess in the South; but you are too
great and ambitious for affection, yet not
great enough for respect. I leave your
shores without sorrow or regret."

—Darwin, *Beagle*

Australia is one of the most urban countries in the world in that 65% of its population live in cities of 100,000 or more (versus 31% for the U.S.). At the same time, however, it is one of the least densely populated countries (only Mongolia is less). Western Australia illustrates this situation in an accentuated way with three-fourths of its population living in the capital of a state that has a density of one person per square mile.

Perth sits on the fertile plain where the Swan River debouches into the Indian Ocean. Its suburbs run north and south some 30 miles along the coast and mount into the Darling Range, a low thousand-foot escarpment which parallels the coast for more than 500 miles. From the Darling Range eastward almost that far is the land of Yilgarnia. Born during the Archaean era, for almost two billion years it suffered changes we can only guess at. For the last billion it has remained, comparatively, unchanged.

One of the oldest land surfaces in the world, Yilgarnia sits like a great scab on W.A.: a place where evolution seems to have stood still — 80% of W.A. flora is unique on the species level, some gums and wattles indigenous to only a few square

miles. Eastward from Perth the land gets drier until the scrub gives way to salt bush and then to still more desperate zerophytes of the deserts which separate W.A. from "the Eastern States." To the north it's tropical, to the south it's temperate. One million people and one million square miles — enough to hold Alaska and almost two Texas.

Whereas New Zealand cities may look like the place the people left behind, Australian ones appear to stand in opposition to the land itself. Whether in the outback or in Perth itself, the people try to turn the land to city, as if afraid of the land's space; but the land seems to threaten to revert, almost without notice, to Yilgarnia. The hot winds blow from surrounding spaces through streets where people huddle together.

Americans may sit in the cockpit of history, as Dorothy Hewitt has implied. Australians in general feel themselves indiscriminately seated back in the tourist class. With Perth as close to Jakarta as to Sydney, Western Australians are, thus, in the baggage hold.

William Dampier called Australia a land of sand, sorrow and sore eyes (the latter referring to eye infections from flies who treat blacks and whites without discrimination). Others call W.A. a land of sun and sand - or sun and surf - and sore eyes. To which, I add, the occasional song.

Brian Dibble
Perth, W.A.

FOUR POEMS**Batavia Incident**

(The Abrolhos Islands, 1629)

After the wreck, Francisco Pelsaert, commandeur,
merchant extraordinary, historian, reviews his
career, sees the need for water and supplies.
Protesting, he sails for Java, leaving behind the
people and the Company's goods
for which he is responsible before God and his
high authorities.
And the chests of coins are at the bottom of
the sea.

On Batavia's Graveyard patterns shift, a new
order has grown.
Blood marks the coral. Cornelius, under-
merchant, in scarlet cloth and braid,
now rules an island. His will is God's.
Those who fight it wrestle with their creator.
In a God-fearing nation he has never been
baptized.

Terror is discipline. Be secret, obey.
In Pelsaert's absence, he is leader and must
follow
the patterns of his mind, a vision of a just society,
the subtle in spirit breaking the bonds of the
crude.
*Let the tares puff up, the living God is sharpening
his scythe in me.
Cut down the poppies, the cornflowers.*

They have killed most of the people, the strong
ones taken at night,
called from their tents, "Come, we will go and
look for birds."

Trussed like chickens, some are pitched from
rafts.

The word is they have gone to another island,
the drowned boys in the water.

Andries de Vries, granted his life, has killed
eleven sick people.

Now it is his turn. His stilt-wood legs stumble,
sprawl as they come for him.

His jaw hangs half-way off, smiling perpetually
from the shallow earth.

Salomon Deschamps, Pelsaert's favourite scribe,
saves himself by strangling an infant. Through
blood

he is admitted to the cell.

Old Bastiaenz, predicant, with his daughter,
accepts an invitation to dinner with Cornelius.
While the predicant drinks tea, talking of peace
and rain,

men in the darkness beat in the skulls of his wife
and her six children.

The predicant, dribble in his beard,
sits all day by the sea, declaiming.
Tearing with broken teeth at the dry skins of seals
he keeps his anger close. Always the devils,
"Let him live a little longer for our further use."
Bastiaenz, down on his knees, eats grass.

Crabs click among stones.

The voices on the air can never be silenced.
In the earth the flung bones conspire.

But on another island, Weibbe Hayes and his
soldiers,
sent to die of thirst, have found water sweet
as milk,
fish, fowl, eggs by the basketful, strange hopping
"cats."

The good ones, with home-made guns and pikes,
sharpen their days towards the final battle and
Pelsaert's imminent return.

Cornelius's cell has been disbanded, its numbers
still unknown.

Secure in the banality of evil, Cornelius has gone,
yelling "Revenge" in the best tradition.

The condemned also begged to see him hung.

Their bodies, too, twist in the Abrolhos wind.
And in Batavia with drums and flags, the people
celebrated further executions.

The good soldier, Hayes, has gone to fame and
forty guilders a month.

And Pelsaert, who lost the ship and left the
people,
has cheated the Company again by his death.

Over years, stout citizens of Amsterdam
will leave off talk of omens, God, the devil and
free will

to wonder at Cornelius who erased so many lives,
poor tormented Pelsaert, crushed by the

Company for his negligence,
and Hayes, building forts, making clogs and
tucking into good roast meat.

Kalbarri

World's end begins here.
The grasses rattle, everything is dry.
The simplest daisies blow.

Beyond the coffee coloured river where fallen
rocks are islands,
the walls of the gorge rise, ruined temples in
a godless land.
Corrugated cardboard, rocks flake off, in drifts
of red and bronze.
Above, some giant's blocks, collapsed inside.

Perhaps they came this way, wandering up the
coast—Jan Pelgrom, Wouter Looes,
mutineers from the wrecked ship, Batavia, and
marooned here
for their sins.

A second Eden is unlikely, the affections do not
change.

Looes, successor to Cornelius, lacking the tender
cruelty of the old
seducer, lost to Weibbe Hayes and Pelsaert,
unexpectedly returned.
Pelgrom preferred killing to a feast.

Pelsaert left difficult instructions.
"Man's luck is found in strange places. Look out
for silver, gold.
And having come to friendship with the folk of
this land,
by signs demand a lookout be kept for ships.
Above all, keep God in mind, and without doubt,
there will be a good outcome."

From the stiff houses of Old Amsterdam
to Cornelius's small kingdom of rock, and
murder beyond the call of duty,
they came at last to this, the unknown
land, with
offerings of bells and toys.
Pelsaert, always a good servant of the Company,
regarded them as emissaries.
Are these then their dark children whose
shadows follow us
down shelves of Rainbow Gorge within sound
of the sea?

Sea Fruit

Speckled like a mackerel,
her great enamelled tail swings in a green trough.
There is no recollection in her face—
stares from chill eyes and receives our concern
with indifference,
squeezing fish dry, feeding.

Beneath her hair, the sea woman weeps
for one shot by night in a ditch below our
walls.
They dragged him out and lopped his horny
palms.
Her eyes open upon our world, reflecting nothing.

But the old boatmen know
the way the winds are captured—
at night the sea-slimed creatures climbing masts
and shrouds
before the certain tempest. They know the song
that spikes the sky with silver
and of those who, lulled at last to sleep,
lie with their throats torn clean.

We understand
the pig-man who shut the gates, his head full
of offal,
and the sentinel who, seeing the creature
lumping at the walls,
gave him a mortal ending.

Upstairs Woman

Hours she sits, worrying her fingers,
blowing images that float around the ceiling,
burst, and then provide the answer—
an affair is necessary.

But who—tradesmen are out of the question.
In her district they don't deliver.
There was, of course, the delicious menace of
the driving instructor.
But getting her license put an end to that.

Over her shoulder, she peers into the mirror.
Her bottom-dimples enormous, remembering
that one day,
beneath the sports pavilion, when it was raw
with sand.
Something like marriage followed.

Her husband, the greengrocer, is rampant among
lettuces
below in the shop. The leaves squall as he
plucks them.
Not unexpectedly, another junior assistant has
resigned.

She leans far, far out the window.
Her breasts swing loosely, puddings in a bag
of skin.
But there are no customers, no assignations.

Lee Knowles

TWO POEMS**Roadhouse at Minilya**

First the Barrabiddy
 then the Minilya rivers
 both dry Minilya
 Roadhouse Fill her up, please

Check oil, water, tyres.

Over the yellow-green foliage of the
 River Gums with their white trunks and arms
 drinking themselves fat
 from subterranean water

and over the heat-stunned, stilled
 silent torrent of yellow sand
 upstream and down to the far bend
 flocks of garrulous White Cockatoos.

A white cigarette in a man's mouth.
 He is taking North
 a monstrous item of machinery.

A ladder to the cab.
 Twentyfour wheels to the transporter.
 Roebourne, Dampier, Mt. Magnet.

Exmouth. Overwidth. Overlength.

A small scarlet Mini leads the procession
 bearing a bright yellow banner.

The girl at the counter has a German accent.
 The truckies inside are eating pies
 with knives and forks The heat

is a palpable wall
that hits you when you step outside
from the arctic air-conditioning.

A barred electronic	glowing blue-barred
fly-catcher	spits
and spatters	like eggs frying

It has just consumed a locust

and in the dunny	
all up the walls	slimy small
grey	frogs

On the inside window too
of the Ladies.

We stand and look at them	
going up the perpendicular	glass
hopping straight up	from outside

They live in the cisterns in the Mens
and come down in a cataract
a whirlpool

in the can when you pull the chain.

Kellerberrin 6410

*Where civilisation is a remote
glint of roofshine
in one vast sea of wheat.*

Civilisation is a house
sixteen miles as the road runs
out of town as the crow cries
as the black and white magpies
yodel in the afternoon.

The main road runs right through
these wheatbelt towns with their
sagging wooden houses and their
one storey shops with fly-spotted
plastic strips over open doorways
and the smell of fish and chips.

A small winking glint
in the hot distance
is the house.

“One longed for someone to come.”

Scarify the sandy soil in May
put in the Super, sow and
watch the landscape turn to
green under the May rains
on into June and September
when the rains go
and the grain ripens
and the heat
would bake the ripe wheat
as grain still in head
before it is bread.

"The stillness.
One longed for someone to come."

There's a silo down at Tammin
where the quotas go,

And now the scrub-cover's gone
when the harvest's in
the fields of brittle stubble
give back nothing to the sky
but the sweet acrid smell of dusty hay.
"Annual rainfall's down
on what it was."

It's a resentful landscape
and a bored town. Neutral.
I bring you all a message from the sun.

"Here, open the gate. This was the garden
Those were roses.
Even the cactus is dead."

There's a gaping hole in the side
of the mudbrick shed
and through it I see
I see
someone looking

"One longed for someone to come."

an old brass bedstead
a child's tricycle
and a tin kettledrum.

"Mother said,
'I won't go back because
I'd rather see the garden as it was.'"

William Hart-Smith

the roads lay
as dark as

(as speed
stood up

as the wind
caught

the flowers
were rushing
tomorrow

“History .of
such a town. is
in the buildings.”

Poem Two: Alone

that stillness of the swan

are you on a marble
terrace this new
year's morning?

sandstone clusters on my back a greycold sand stone pillar
bleakdawn

are you still up
from last night?

nameplate “JEALOUSY” small oars dig into the still ness no waves
he goes smoothly

Poem Four: Airport Pool

"It is apt they should be here. They are a state emblem. Besides, they have wings. How is it

to be your own
transport?" wings are like
oars they propel
by reaction from
the surface (they're
beginning and end
ing

"An active definition of an airport."

Poem Five: Address

your camera holds that sunday like an address placing:
Queen's Park,
the Bridge,
over Water Lilies.

dear sir,)

the sweet moist of dew we arrived! through the rusted gates the sun crept along
the swan
was black again two of them
with a red beak identical
as jacks in a cardpack
i shouted 'GRAB!'

and disturbed them.

the film is an issue of place/related to time

Andrew Burke

TWO POEMS**Dili, Portuguese Timor**

Cannon point seaward over old walls
where crabs parade. Little boys sell fish
without really trying. Any sort of wish
to succeed in business rapidly palls,

except among Chinese. Heavy smells
of tropic rain hang in the air. The sea just here
seems always calm. At the customs pier
are just one junk and one barge. Shells

of wartime wrecks are piled among thick green
low growing plants. Across miles of haze
an island mountain rises. Goats and ponies graze
on the main airport runway. The scene

does not rapidly change. By the shore
in new white stone is a monument to a man
under whom the present policy began,
and who died five hundred years before.

At the Saturday market there are cloth and
cockfights,
a little old silver and a long walk
for villagers from the mountains. Talk
in the evenings under intermittent lights.

The cathedral bells sound long across the bay.
Purple, almost phosphorescent clouds
bury the mountain-tops in afternoons. Crowds
gather dutifully at the end of every Sunday

over the long centuries to watch the slow
lowering of the flag by an off-key band.
A few proud, green and bespectacled soldiers
stand
to attention, as tarnished, spit-filled bugles blow.

Thick nights, with lightning on the black
rim of the sea. A few Australians drink beer
on the porch of an hotel. The water here
is not to be trusted by them. Life back

home, though they have said it all before,
remains the constant theme of their talk.
Back and forth outside a few Chinese girls walk,
similarly dreaming of Hong Kong or Singapore.

Up and down. In the shadows old women prepare
betel nut. Dogs bark sharply in the night
at the edge of the town. The light
of silver fireflies skims low in the air.

A radio plays in the barracks. Someone unloads
a truck from the mountains, carrying cinnamon
bark.

Through the still night, up and down in the dark,
boys drive motor-cycles on a half-mile of paved
roads.

So, between the mountains and the sea
the centuries go by. Day follows day
in sun, rain, and flowers. A calm blue bay
with children swimming. There are worse places
to be.

Tropic Littoral

This is the height of the tide.
Strung sheets
of green water cover the beach.
The shore and the life of the shore
become poised. Hermit crabs
begin to stir. Birds are gathered, sharks
are moving close inshore.

The expectancy
becomes palpable. Moving mouths and legs and
fins
know what hangs over them now.

The miles of beach wait. Birds
hop and flutter in drifts.
There is no truce possible here,
and there is total understanding.

Hal Colebatch

THREE POEMS

Voices

*Je n'en peux plus de lutter toute
seule avec ces voix que j'entends
Anouilh, L'Alouette*

shaken he listens in again
to voices which come leaping out of dark
with vandal tongues they run among his world
scattering the meek and proper thoughts
obscenely shouting down the aisles and naves
so that the wooden pews heave and are upset
and the sharp arch shatters as the stones come
tumbling down

in the great gardens in the greenchill
of evening the world is headheavy
from the almost empty terrace he sees
(fumbling the cold spoon)
humankind soft of footfall departing
slipping between the rasping boles of trees
and he begins to find the voices kind
in the corner by the floor and wall
there is a patch of dark

what can
a man more need than this
they cry