

ANTHONY LAWRENCE

THE ART OF KILLING

The boy from the city,
the green boy who swore he'd walk off the property
if asked to cut a sheep's throat,
watched a Border Collie flatten its ears
and lift its eyes as the barrel of a rifle
was levelled at its head;
saw the marking knives gleam and bloody
the underside wool of a hundred lambs;
lifted bogged sheep from the dam —
their eyeless trembling, their entrails
crow-drawn through a hole beneath the ribs.
The boy who learned to ride by eating dust
and picking burrs from his hair;
who hardened his hands with fencing;
volunteered after six months
of smelling and tasting death, to learn
the art of killing.

In the shed, he watched old Gordon butcher
a ram and hang it up before the dogs
had licked the floor clean.
When his turn came, the sheep moved as he pushed
the blade in and ran away, its throat half cut,
rising and falling in the grass until Gordon
sent his dogs to bring it down, then went himself
to see the job was done.

He worked hard, learning how to punch the skin off
without bruising the flesh, and to take the heart,
the liver, brains and kidneys, arranging them on a plate
with a sprig of parsley for the manager's wife.

Mustering the drought-blistered paddocks,
he used his stirrup iron to brain
the lambs that would not walk.

Drenching a race full of rams, one lowered its head
and crushed his fingers against the rail.
He gave it fifteen shots of Thibenzol
and laughed as it buckled dead drunk into the dirt.

Obsessed with death, he took an axe,
stepped into the back of a truck filled
with crippled sheep, and went to work.
Surfacing, his shirt and jeans splattered
with blood and bone,
he threw down the axe, wiped his hands,
and turned to the applauding silence of the paddock:

“You should’ve seen the claret!”

(from *Jerilderie*)

DOUG BUCKLEY

THE FAIR-MINDED WOMAN

I only ever saw a couple of females up on the Line in France. One of them was the fair-minded woman and she sticks in the memory like sweet-and-sour, mostly sweet. Christmas Day it was, back in 1917, and it still makes a man smile.

Sel Tankard remembers her too. He was from well down south near Bundaberg, and a friend even though he was a sergeant. He had a high spot where he could see the German Line for fifty yards. “Come and have a look at this,” he says from behind his field-glasses.

I never took to fraternising with field-glasses. If you could see the Germans they could see you, so I wasn’t the one to volunteer for looking into the glasses. But he drops them down to me.