

Charlotte Clutterbuck

REVIEW

ESCAPING THE DRAGON

Rachel Bradley, *Dragonshadow*, Women's Redress Press 1989.

At its best, Rachel Bradley's poetry has moments of delicacy and a command of rhyme and assonance. She writes of summer in a Bondi coffee lounge where

... Paris
hangs captive on the walls —

Champs Elysee, sombre with November —

only memories
and red coats bright
in that sleety twilight, and the Seine
flows steely grey.

“Winter in Paris”

In “Margaret in a Photograph” she stares through the lens at her subject's staring eyes, “but you won't / let me / look / beyond / your eyes / I am waiting for the shutter to close... we are trapped in the circles of irises.” Here, as elsewhere in Bradley's poetry, the irony and observation are marred by the excessive and sometimes melodramatic use of the single-word line.

Occasionally she burdens an arresting image with too many words. “Gymnast” might have been better as a haiku:

Dancing on the four-inch beam
the girl takes air and
grasps it,
movement bending space
into poem.

points for tax investigations" (188). Sure enough, as if to confirm the "truth" of this proposition, a dinner guest at a ritzy Rose Bay function later confirms that Jack Catchprice is involved with "dirty money". This problem is compounded by the closeness of Carey's style to popular forms like the satirical television sketch. A world in which we can know a crook by his car phone is closer in kind to *The Gillies Report* than *Four Corners*; what it has to say about corruption in contemporary Sydney is often not news, but *Not the Nine O'clock News*.

1. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1976), p.ix.
2. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p.138.
3. Dorothy Green, *The Writer, the Reader and the Critic in a Monoculture* (Townsville: Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, 1986).
4. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p.289.
5. Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, *New Left Review* 146 (1981): 53-92.
6. Terry Eagleton, Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism, *New Left Review* 152 (1985): 60-73; Dan Latimer, Jameson and Post-Modernism, *New Left Review* 148: 116-128.
7. See Angela Matheson, Violence Against Women: Pornography as news? *refactory girl* 38 (March 1991): 7-11.
8. John Lanchester, Strangers, *London Review of Books*, 13.3 (11 July 1991): 3-5.

Her best poems handle the undercurrent of loss and loneliness with tact and simplicity:

The cup is cracked
and each year the crazing carries further...

and of all things, ends won't be evaded —
yet with what small choice is left
I will not
merely prolong the pause
in what-must-be-
we'll share just one more hour
of dreams, and tea.

“Shadows”

The last poem, “Home” returns to the high country which the poet longed for in “I Heard the Snow Falling in the Wilderness”. Here we have exact and gentle observation of the gnarled hands, the dam and the orchard, and only the barest sense of the poet standing at the gateway where a horse instead of a dragon calls her to a more hopeful future:

The horse lifts her head
to the figure waiting by
the gate — there is time.