

we have begun to speak to others, and to listen.  
we have begun to think,  
and we have begun to write,  
and we have begun too late.

The effect is like a physical blow, for the statement seems not about the past but about the present.

The title, *With Fires on Every Horizon* not only accurately describes the Brisbane landscape at certain times of the year, but images Clark's concern with a political and international landscape. He is not a polemical writer, and "Pax Mundi: a poem for voices", read at the Peace celebrations preceding the Palm Sunday Peace Rally at Kelvin Grove in March 1986, is a celebration of the fact that a Year of Peace had been declared as an ideal, in spite of the violations and cynicism which rendered it a mockery for many people.

A notable trait of Clark's poetry is its concern with and accessibility for young adults, a circumstance perhaps not surprising given his work with various levels of educational centres. Nevertheless it is an achievement to write accurately and seriously about younger people, as in "Late-Night Trading", "Punk with Pram" and "Bikie Funeral"; and in "The Descent of the Dragon" and "Post-Party Blues" he draws two quite different but thoughtful conclusions from suburban experiences.

*With Fires on Every Horizon* retains some of the whimsy of *Chameleon*, a wryness that is natural and unforced, but there is a greater sense of ease and the writing has lost all trace of the tentativeness that sometimes was felt in the earlier poems. The strongest movement of Clark's verse at present seems to be in fluent, conversational yet shapely lines, but he does sometimes use terser rhymed lines with interesting effect. His is a distinctive voice, not concerned with shouting from rooftops or large gestures, but not easily ignored, for all its watchful reserve.

Tony Page, *They're Knocking at My Door*. Pariah Press, Melbourne, 1986. 57pp. \$9.00 (\$10.00 mail order from 101 Edgevale Rd, Kew, 3101.)

Pariah Press has several very good collections of poetry to its credit, including Joyce Lee's *Abruptly from the Flatlands* and Stephen J. Williams's *A Crowd of Voices*. Tony Page, a Melbourne poet of similar age and experience to the Brisbane poet Ross Clark whose work is reviewed above, has published here an intense but disciplined selection of poems.

It could be said that Page's poems are suffused with and toughened with politics, or it could be said that for Page politics and life are

identical and that both are suffused with and toughened by poetry. The opening piece, "Poems political as petitions" looks ironically at the poet who spends some time — but not enough perhaps? — writing petitions such as Amnesty International letters. Wavering between guilt that time is spent "charging up a poem's power" while "somewhere else men's balls/ are electrocuted", the poem is also shaken by the doubt that Art has ever saved lives. The collection therefore begins with a poem that throws doubt on the validity of its own place in the human world:

Why then do I demand  
food for the soul  
even though there are mutilated bodies  
all over my library floor?

The title of the collection suggests that the poet knows he is besieged by responsibilities, even while he attempts to keep something of his poetry inviolate from all but its own values.

The poems record the experiences of a young Australian who has been well educated, entered the more serious phase of the genuine hippy ideal, visited India, found his guru, built his commune, and made his European tour, while also valuing aspects of sensual love. The elegance of the poems cannot be mistaken for glibness, because their economy seems to be the result of careful thought rather than careful craftsmanship. This is true both of longer sequences like "So much for paradise" and "Now and everywhere", and for the wry and delicate final love lyric, "Sungrowth", which for some readers may evoke memories of first reading Auden's "Lay Your Sleeping Head My Love." Page's laconic elegance, however, is at least a generation's remove from Auden, and the separation promises to be an advantage for the Australian poet's work.

An assiduous reader of poetry, trying to accommodate all the poems that find their way into journals and collections, feels that poetry today has a respected but not over-privileged place in society. Respect may not bring pecuniary reward or daily recognition in the media — although poetry does not fare too badly there — but it involves responsibilities for poets who take their vocation seriously. It seems essential that they do not take it solemnly. Politicians are solemn, religious quacks are solemn, most educationists and much of the medical profession are solemn, nearly all sports people and their backers and supporters are solemn, and millionaires and aspiring millionaires, multi-nationals and their hangers-on are very solemn. It is all the more urgent that poets and other artists should retain their faith and self-respect by refusing to descend to self-indulgent solemnity, and to keep themselves keen-edged and volatile by their wit, parody, humour, irony and love of justice.

All these things may be found in some form in Page's collection. There is much questioning but no cynicism. "A Possible Father" is only one example of the kind of highly individual yet intensely social poetry found in *They're Knocking at My Door*. The poem begins by comparing the old photographs of the many-sibbling family with the single "individual" photo of a child in today's pruned families. It sweeps back to a paternal Italian Renaissance city state at carnival, and then reflects on some of the reasons for the contemporary attitude towards families:

for they know to have children  
requires a certainty that  
experience is infinite.  
It implies an optimism  
which chokes and splutters  
in their groins now long since deodorized,  
and they shut the door.

These lines offer neat poetic analysis of the fear of families in the abstract. The poem ends with an image of that far from abstract drive which urges men (perhaps we are here thinking specifically of men) to have children:

Now each afternoon I see Huck Finn from the window.  
He hollers across the sundusted street —  
scraping it with his echo;  
and then in bare feet  
is gone again.

*They're Knocking at My Door* is a fine, varied collection which demonstrates how close poetry has grown to the daily life of men and women, without losing any of the intensity it has when it tries to entice the same men and women a little beyond the concerns of daily living. The regular appearance of such collections (a paperback, well designed by John van Loon) from comparatively small presses like Pariah, is one of those things that give heart to people who believe that Art, in its peculiar way, does save lives.