

“Set us up another,” he says,
 leaning back in his captain’s chair,
 surf in his ears and the hiss of wind on water.
Miss Pritchard, school teacher, cleans the board,
and writes up the day’s lessons. She is thinking about young Alf,
farmer, the one with twinkling eyes and reckless hands —
 “Naughty boy. Very enjoyable!”

Listen. You can hear the chaff cutter and chuckle of poultry,
cart wheels in the street, the telephonist’s sigh, men talking
on the verandah and whisperings in the boatshed. Listen.

When townsfolk look up they see blue mountains
beyond the detail of flatland by a river.

IN LOVE WITH THE CITY

Manhattan (Woody Allen, 1979)

How the camera loves Manhattan. Woody Allen loves Manhattan. And there he is again, ambling along in sneakers, the famous glass towers and the pavement crowds threatening to overwhelm everything, glances like gunshots in the street. The opening is brilliant – a view west across Central Park at dawn with that grand sweep and the detail of buildings and leaves as Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” fills the sound track with its haunting tribute to a magical city. I listened to the music again in Radio City Music Hall in 1982 as the skyscraper sets were bathed in blue light and the very idea of “America” filled that vast auditorium and flowed out through the streets and across the hills and plains and valleys of an irresistible dream and love affair. Comedy and romance, Woody Allen with his trademark mix of self-conscious wit and fumbling affirmation, uncertainties always there at the edge of definition, and Mariel Hemingway just eighteen and very tall. When Diane Keaton asks her “What do you do, Tracy?” and she replies artlessly, “I go to high school,” we see a small shiver of recognition and doubt in the shuffling forty-two year old little man at her side. He has told her already to go to London on a scholarship: “You’ll think of me as a fond memory.” But when the doubts come, as they must, we are reminded of his former wife who left him to live with another woman and who writes a bestseller

ridiculing their marriage. We are reminded too of his fling with Diane Keaton, back again after Annie Hall, and how he, Isaac, doesn't know whether to stay with her or to leave, both of them isolated, needful and uncertain. Being in love in Manhattan gives way, really, to being in love with Manhattan – with the Guggenheim, Elaine's, Zabar's deli, Central Park, art movies and concerts, the street theatre, the changing light amongst the leaves and the moods of songs colouring all ideas of identity and relationships: "Sweet and Lowdown," "I Got a Crush on You," "Lady Be Good," Embraceable You," Someone to Watch Over Me" and "Strike Up the Band," an assembly of old favourites for feeling and for style. The cinematography is perfect. The softness and shine of black-and-white establishes the strains of a lasting love affair, the little man lovingly at home in his city, the dream real and sad, the past so close always to moments of the present.



Nadine Brown

AT FOURTEEN

At fourteen,
I turned barren paddocks into many shades of green.
I learnt to draw water from deep beneath the earth.
To dig trenches, to lay reticulation, to plant, to pick, to tend.

I walked behind a tractor on exhausted, indifferent land.
And there, in the fathomless heat,
We watched green shoots arise before our red tantrum faces.

I drank salt water and kept up with the men.
As far as the eye could see, we planted pipes and sprinklers.
And the thought, that people would eat their vegetables so effortlessly,
wore — me — out.

At fourteen
I walked home, after twelve hours.
My head full of black poly pipe thoughts.
Burning and thumping from inside out I laid my body
On the cold tiles.