

## PETER BELL

## POEMS FOR A LOST EXPLORER

*Rockingham Bay*

That afternoon you used  
 Payne's Grey  
 to show the Rattlesnake's  
 slow bobbing in the swell.  
 Strangely evoking  
 St. Peter's Port, perhaps.

Perhaps you didn't turn  
 to where the ranges hung  
 amongst the clouds.

Knowing there could be  
 no turning back.

*Cochable Creek*

They left the drays mired  
 on the coast  
 and rode on light.

(Not thinking lightness comes  
 with casting off your soul)

Gladly freed of swamps  
 and sweat-bone cracking creeks,  
 crossed the range  
 and followed Jacky's wave.

There were tablelands at first  
 and rolling hills.

(Not thinking how acceptance  
 eases drowning)

*Bakerville*

The range reveals  
a choice of ways.

The eastern route's  
more fertile  
but the west leads  
more directly to the bay.

You knew enough of Greek  
to know the west is  
Hades'. The morningstar  
is love and life.

What fierce perversity demands  
you take the Walsh  
and die?

*Shelburne Bay*

There is no word meaning  
"to know you are dead"

but a vast peninsula  
of human doings  
transcends words.  
"Godforsaken" marks the border.  
The Death Camp was further on.

On with three watching  
two ride north,  
mean convict mouths miming  
British imperturbability,  
relishing  
imperturbably certain death.

A word meaning more than death  
would be  
"to know you had vanished without trace"  
on earth and probably in heaven.

They found Dunn's holster  
in a canoe.

Did he know that,  
fondling his pistol for comfort,  
wrapping death round him  
like a rug?