

D. PETERSEN

RUDI KRAUSMANN FROM ANOTHER SHORE

Prose with drawings by Brett Whiteley. Wild and Woolley, Sydney, 1975. (77 pp.)

Poems and their illustrations, however artfully paired, rarely hit it off together. But in the present collection the drawings come between sections of the various 'movements' of the prose pieces, and do not interfere with one's concentration on the text itself. They seem to have been chosen carefully so that they do offer some kind of commentary, by way of an alternative sounding of the interest of the prose. The female figure that languishes at the beginning of the section, 'To A Muse', almost like a proem, reflects the feminine aspect invoked in that section. The four 'wavy' lines in a blank sea that conclude the title section seem to enact "the voices of the past" trying to worm their way through, or the "total oblivion" of "any sea", and so on; they don't reach from another shore.

If the illustrations, as proficient as they are, serve a purpose, the reader needs to look to the prose to see if it justifies this artistic service. But he might ask first if it is prose. The blurb that accompanies the book raves about "this first prose collection of Rudi Krausmann's prose poems." Either there is an error here, or it is being asserted that a prose poem is no different from prose, so that *From Another Shore* might be considered a novel, or whatever. It is my understanding that the prose poem is a genre in itself, not to be confused with either of the two forms it plunders. It would appear that, if anything, this collection resembles something akin to prose poetry rather than polyphonic prose. It makes use of the figurative techniques of verse, while retaining a definite prosiness. It is not poetry.

The author makes extensive use of the well-worn method of modulating various moods by reflecting them in varying contexts, as the contents suggest. But the language itself, the style, l'écriture, does not modulate sufficiently too. The casting of various 'stanzas' changes here and there, but to no obvious effect. Without much variation the moods reveal themselves in a gamut of epigrams, rhetorical questions, homily, and Gibran-like revelation...

Even the flattest landscapes have invisible hills.
(Night, 3.)

What can you expect from a gentleman in grey?
(*ibid.*, 12.)

[Life] will not be without defeats. But don't fall
in with those who can't accept it. (*ibid.*, 14.)

I don't know how often I have lived, but my death
must arise from the ruins of the night.
(*ibid.*, 17.)

And all too often the author lets himself fall into banalities which seem to be so prevalent in contemporary

Australian writing as to be almost a genre in themselves...

When you are unattainable you become more
beautiful. (Day, 10.)

Many are the ways of exile, many arrivals,
many departures. (Ways of Exile, 3.)

Other parts are a little too prosy for comfort: "if you approach the world with artificial means..." (Night, 12.). These are some of the weaker aspects of this work, and could be added to.

But the book has its triumphs. The section titled "The Fish" is outstanding in style, if the substance of the thought wavers in places on the brink of cliché. One hesitates to ascribe mythical qualities to this 'story' (myths are born every week in Australia, it seems) but it certainly does appeal at the level of parable, with a sense of the timeless about it. Its rhythms are superb and the cadences finely controlled.

Perhaps the following 'stanza', though, will suffice to illustrate this writer at his best:

ll.

If there is nothing left, we invent the seasons.
An elegant landscape is elusive; and with the first
thought we

cause a doubt.

I can say again and again: 'So it is.'

Barren trees beside me do not take apart the silence.

I see us moving towards a pleasure caused by less
than nothing.

Our passions are not believed unless they passed
through the

public boredom. It is habit which exploits us.

Generally, this collection leaves the reader with the impression that the writer is sizing up an audience, consolidating, sorting out his cards. It is not the work of a pioneer, though it has glimpses in it of the outlines of yet unexplored territory.