

KAY FERRES

Stefanie Bennett: *THE MEDIUM* Khasmik Poets 3
Tomato Press 1976

This is a volume of poetry and prose by Stefanie Bennett who was also represented in *5 Poets*.

One of the prose pieces 'The Poetic Pulse' is written "in the hope that you will understand me a little better and/or cause some re-think of the poetry sphere." Here Stefanie Bennett reaffirms the concern with 'platforming' – the championing of causes – which she demonstrates in her poems. She names Judith Wright, Rodney Hall, and Kath Walker as poets whose involvement and commitment are such that even their "non-social poetry" reveals their social concerns. Probably the same thing can be said of Stefanie Bennett. Often the public and private voices coalesce.

On that perfectly natural
day she'd defrosted
the kelvinator,
spun-dried all
& sundry

then
packed the kids
off to grandma's.

The clue, exactly,
is longcoming?
Why chuck herself

out

With the garbage;
WHY, hey,
on such
a perfectly natural

day? (Interims)

Often it is a strident voice which makes itself heard in poems such as "A Spoken Word on the Probable"

"Australia/billow NOW the wave's waiting.
Australia/tomorrow is too LATE!
Australia/I plead when I scorn your accepted paralysis.
Australia/I . . . love you at this moment while I'm able
but I'll hate from a distance if you betray me.
I, personally, will take my shovel, unflinching,
& bury/you/alive
it's quicker.

"Unflinching" is an apt description of the poet's attitude: she does not shy away from issues or emotions. "Ballad of a Singular Woman" displays this honesty and the idealism which underlies it on a more personal level.

Both in the poems and the prose extracts there appears a searching for identity, again the quest involves uncompromising commitment. But the search has a personal and collective significance: the public and the private voices coalesce and the poet provides a medium for others to join the cry against "the society of soul-rapers, S.E.G.P. THE SOCIETY OF EXECUTION AND PREVENTION OF EGO" ("Vendetta and Cornets").

In "Figure in Deschordings", an extract from a novel *Stefan Versus the Drum*, the problem of identity is confronted in a dramatic way as an attempt is made to reconcile self-hatred and self-love, the portrait and the inner self.

"Why are you rocking backwards and forwards on your heels this way cradling this LIE? Do you want to believe in half truths? The outside is only half of you and for all that beauty it can never compensate for the hell it conceals; the demon that revels, breeds, suckles on beauty. THROW IT AWAY and forget it: LEAVE IT there on the floor of his studio. THERE where the sunlight can reach it. THERE where it smiles at the sun-giving light. THERE with its smudged features still perfect!"

In many respects the poems in this volume defy the concept of form in poetry, conversely the prose is often touched with lyricism. Stefanie Bennett does not suppress her sometimes shrill emotions with the result that they can supplant all else in the poems. What is admirable is the honesty with which she confronts these emotions, the courage with which she refuses to keep them in check. These poems function not as monuments but as signposts, and it is in this that her personal voice takes on a wider significance. Her search for herself does not turn inward and become self contained, it is directed outward.