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John Edwards, *Salt.* Gargoyle Poets, 26. Makar Press, Brisbane, 1977. 24 pp. Part of the 1977 subscription to Makar and the Gargoyle Poets. Details available from the publisher.

John Tranter, *Crying in Early Infancy: 100 Sonnets.* Makar Press, Brisbane, 1977. 61 pp. $3.95 (paperback); $8.50 (hardbound).

Philip Hammial, *Hear Me Eating.* Gargoyle Poets, 25. Makar Press, Brisbane, 1977. 28 pp. Part of the 1977 subscription to Makar and the Gargoyle Poets. Details available from the publisher.

If the title poem 'Salt' sets the theme for this collection, then we are asked to register John Edwards' bitterness with aspects of our modern society—capitalism, big business, the inspired sell as in selling salt to Iceland and the Tyrol. There's no doubt "you've got to have some kind of preservative for the bodies". Our pseudo-culture rates a mention with music for these people "from Santa and his reindeer". In this poem the bitterness is delivered with competent irony which doesn't allow it to sink too deeply.

'You Had a Hand in it' lists the aspects of life which have disappointed and defeated the poet, even "that old whore—poetry", and in particular the concept of the "creator . . . without whose essence we might get at the essentials".

Some events from the Vietnam war years provide a catalyst for this poet's consciousness. He sets aspects of 'their' and 'our' societies in parallel in 'Leicester Square Newscaster' — Peace talks turned down by the communists, our glorious free rip-off system, the protest business as hyper-industry. Again, the message is bitterness.

The mood changes in 'Two Sisters', the first poem in this book. The poet outlines his conflict simply. This image is intensified in 'La Chinoise'; using the 'Chinese Tradition' the poet hears "the accent of wider acceptance—the runcible [spoon/fork—phallic symbol?] clasp of June [that handsome woman of large proportions—Fame?]". The poet feels close to his definition of success.

Impressions from time spent in Paris, Goethe's Germany, and at the Opera follow. The opera experience, subtly titled 'Abbatoir', notes the human blood lust, "everyone out there will love you to death".

'Then' is an almost tender restatement of human experience, the imagery well drawn, "like a shack whirring down gales", effective. It is the human experience which this author handles best as in 'The Voyage', uncluttered by bitterness.

'The Voyage' is the longest, and last, poem in the book. The author journeys backward in time through youthful memory, then sails towards London. His mind is on the image of the Australia he has just left. London appears briefly to be a strange-familiar anti-climax.

Modern poets have claimed freedom from obsequious compliance with such things as rhyme and too regular metre. Forget the tag 'sonnet' John Tranter has included in the title of his collection *Crying in Early Infancy*; read on without any expectations derived from the form of these poems.

In Poem 20 the author states "This book's a catalogue of dreams": he invokes the sense of attending a movie marathon, with images in single frames stopped, then overlaid on each other and on first-hand people and experiences. All of this makes for a very hectic trip, with the symbolism of the colour blue recurring, elusive, unexplained. This is not a book from which you may pluck a single poem and enjoy it. It is better to float through a lengthy section allowing one's sense of humour time to free itself, and relax; time to heighten one's sense of the ridiculous—"it's called Strain Your Brain, conversely Put Your Head to Bed" (Poem 39).

This poet is adept at scene setting and he has created some excellent imagery, as in Poem 26:

> while the stormy fish
> gathered below the cliffs in a family
> of light, as it was early for the season
> to expand in bruised cloud and mottled rain
> against the rock wall.

In the scenario in Poem 45 the English widow of a revolutionary general in South America

> moons at a window
> and hopes that something will arrive
> but nothing ever does.
> A rose bush clutching at the rusty fence
> dries into brittle sticks,

and again we find the image of a storm, swelling "like a bruise".

John Tranter presents a kaleidoscope of scenes, like "a hundred plot lines for television" (Poem 86), and I suspect he would like to overlay them on the reader instantaneously—if John Tranter had a technique for doing just that.

The scenes are not merely personal. They are readily accessible to the reader and the challenge the poet throws to keep up the pace is well worth the effort.

John Edwards' *Salt*, and John Tranter's *Crying in Early Infancy: 100 Sonnets* offer vitality which is refreshing and infectious. These two poets display a similarity of technique in the writing of their poems, and although I do not feel that either one of these collections can be cited as a definition of modern poetry, they are very interesting, and viable, working pages in the process.

In his collection *Hear Me Eating*, Philip Hammial has set out a menu of very personal images.

We hear him eating from some distance outside the dining room, and we are neither invited, nor expected to partake of the fare. Perhaps the food is all simulated in plastic.

Although the writing gives promise of much energy, Philip Hammial's invitation to *Hear Me Eating* I must decline, with thanks.