

R G. HAY

TO MARGARET DUNKLE

Ref: *ABR*, December 1980

I tried to write a poem about Koob-boor once:
it's probably still around among my boxes of abandoned
attempts. I don't remember where I got the version, though
I seem to recall a small brown-covered booklet.
There was a beanstalk gumtree, I remember, and finally
perhaps the story explained why koalas don't drink.
I'm not sure now what I wanted to do with the myth:
I doubt I would wish merely to retell it in my kind
of verse. I think I had a vaguely Jindyworobak
feeling that we shouldn't be stuck always with
The Bruce, Jason, and Noah: or even Ned. And
probably a story with a big drought had a more
authentic feel than a flood, though we have floods, and,
as the bloke next door says, it always rains at
the end of a drought. But I don't really see why
I should pussy-foot round with aborigines more than
Scotchmen, Ancient Greeks, or pious Christians.
The only cultural context I can give any myth
is the miscellany I inhabit. I'm not a tribal aboriginal,
a fringe-dweller, nor a Commonwealth public servant.
I'm more like the blacks down the road who play
cricket, drink at the local pub, and mow their lawns. They
probably believe as much in beanstalk gumtrees as I do in
a Golden Fleece or that marvellous floating zoo. So if I should
happen sometime to use a bit of the mythology of one
of the six hundred or so tribes, I hope it's useful to
the black who got me caught and bowled with a slower
ball and a lovely diving catch last season. I took

a wicket that way myself once, and I think
I understand some of what he feels: though his lawn's
probably a bit tidier than mine.

ROBERT HABOST

OLD STRADBROKE GRAVEYARD

Disintergrating afternoon;
I could believe death had undone us
on that choleric earth.

Cracking sun chasms opening up at us;
vapours caught at me;
eggshell earth caul.
Death cawling

your ancestors rolling eye dust
world, tilting
stability like quicksand.
"Help!" "Help!" the crow laughed.

A hand shot out over there.
A voice that weaves the parts,
"Look! William Bennett, surgeon, died of cholera."
You turn, and then your eyes explode
and shatter my icicle skin.