

## KAY FERRES

### 5 POETS. 75.

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The introduction to this volume indicates that it was compiled with a two fold purpose: to offer a wide variety of attitudes and styles in work by younger Queensland poets and to enable the poets to reach a wide audience. On these terms the collection has achieved partial success. The poems individually are uneven in quality, but collectively as the responses of five different voices to contemporary problems they deserve some attention.

Ray Carmichael's poems are not possessed of any technical dexterity, and in many instances exist only as broken prose. Others such as "Bundy Clock" suffer for the poet's striving after effect. In this case, short lines which echo

"Shocks  
Sharp  
Clock-sharp  
Flocks"

and longer lines in which the syntax is stiff and disjointed, overwhelm rather than reinforce the idea of the time-clock's domination of factory workers. The dehumanizing influence of materialism is a recurring theme in these poems and fairly predictably the poet offers personal relationships as a refuge. Yet there is no certainty that any such intimacy can be achieved. The voice of these poems constantly asserts itself, betrays a need to dominate. The result of this is an abrasiveness which human warmth would find difficult to penetrate:

"Old man,  
you swim and keep  
your fatherly  
tough guy scene  
your own."

In this poem "Along the Beach" the old man (three times his age is stated) is able to break through the aggressiveness to the isolation, but only minimally since the young man does not respond. The old man's phrase "undecided life" contrasts with the catchword "definitely" of the young romantics ("The Haunt of the Young Romantics"). The latter poem perhaps goes some way to explaining the need of this voice to assert itself.

Julie Spreadbury is represented by six short poems. Where she has chosen to use titles these indicate her concern with the intangible

aspects of human relationships: 'Non Verbal' 'Beyond Words' 'Speak to me in silences'. The vulnerability of the relationship is such that words could destroy it, but more than this the fear of the inevitable severing of the connection is always present. The words "shrink to silence" which would explain "whatever is between us". Instead communication takes the form of physical contact. The problem is that these poems convey little of the essential value of this relationship. It appears rather to be brittle and dishonest, especially since the speaker in the first poem 'Non Verbal' even must suppress her own needs to ensure its survival

"You touch me  
with such tenderness  
that all of me  
cries out to you  
but I kiss you quietly  
and talking of everyday things  
go."

Two sequences of poems 'Windows and Mirrors' and 'Travellers' comprise Mal Andersen's contribution. Again it is human relationships which are to be valued, but the tone contrasts with the truculence of Carmichael and the timorousness of Spreadbury — this time it is one of tired resignation. The poems are written from the standpoint of experience (Travellers) but the title *Windows and Mirrors* suggests also limitation or distortion.

"I too have dreamed  
But now I'm quite resigned  
To most things as they are —  
Imperfect"

Perhaps a valid conclusion but a dissatisfying one since the poems fail to convey any sense of the tensions resolved which have given way to this resignation.

Stefanie Bennett's poems are radically different from the others in that they are not content with observing or accepting things as they are. They are assertive, accusatory poems.

"i claim, should i confuse you, it's  
all your own damn fault.  
i claim i have never compromised  
and that when one licks wounds  
its a form of detention seeking.  
i claim i am god, gore, muscle and i've  
met many like me." (One Voice)

This is a voice which does not merely resent impositions, nor is it one which attempts to cope with them. Instead, impositions are to be challenged, cast off

"i cannot write you your safe subordinate poem for  
it's misfit, a kind not to be lived with" (Lariat)

Nor is it a strident voice always, it takes on more measured tones (e.g. 'Star') but always there is involvement or commitment "without regret or ritual".

Laurie Neill's are more traditional poems, using the conventions of poetry to develop narrative. *The Ballad of Henry Clayton* makes competent use of refrains and repetitions and traditional ballad metre to present a narrative of an unfaithful wife. This particular poem may appear anachronistic, but in others there is an attempt to reconcile traditional narrative with contemporary material for example, "The Bitter Musings of a Late 20th Century Disgruntled Groover". Probably this conscious attempt to impose a conventional order is the most noteworthy feature of Neill's poems and this provides a contrast with Stefanie Bennett's dissatisfaction with misfit forms.

This volume has brought together in a modest way poets who despite shortcomings of technique, have succeeded in some measure in giving distinctive voice to their perceptions.