1984

South Australian Poems

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**Abstract**
Port Julia, Rapid Bay, Gliding near Gawler, Cape Jervis, Wild hops, the Flinders Ranges and Hackney

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN POEMS

for Nicholas, my brother

PORT JULIA

flat slap of sand and oozing ochre cliffs
vibrant as the barbeque on wheatfield’s edge
with the farmhouse on holidays and six nurses
calling the shots: loin lamb chops sizzling
under slabs of dripping-fresh pineapple
— a nip of rye, with rainwater —
kicking a soccerball high, in a paddock of onionweed
and soursobs ... ‘Chase me!’ ... a child’s strong cry:
the meaning of everything suddenly seen
as a Horwood & Bagshaw Harvester, greased, rusted
earth brown, waiting in the half-ripe wheat,
late winter.

RAPID BAY

The beach is so wide you start to disappear
zooming across sand, eating land
like an ant on a banana cake heading for the obvious
gaping cave, forcing you like a juicy tourist bus
into the only motel — into the earth-gut
twinge of piss and empty bottles, for the gypsum shouting from the smokeblack walls ...
They’re mining alright, at the other end of the beach, a whole poem away. The couple by their Range Rover boiling a cuppa are right out of the ad: politics as the progression of selfishness from stateless to status and how come i’ve missed out?
Nick, you’re incorrigible.

GLIDING NEAR GAWLER

Van Gogh would grasp this swirling sky of colours on an empty canvas sown... late afternoon’s slow-kindling fires awash with winter hues: orange, vermilion, grey, pink, blue: the moment hugs you to it — in air we live, in earth we will lie.

Lean blades of wing and cockpit’s rotund eye the gliders pulling from green ground till the cord is snapped, the tow plane dives and all horizons vertical, overwhelming silences, in the whack of air and rolling winds that lift a human thought into lasting flight.

CAPE JERVIS

We came from the winging ridge that rollercoasts through flashing green down in a gasp to blue — land’s end, the Southern Ocean’s smashed grey-blue and a horizon that bends holding Kangaroo Island proudly, at a distance.
On a scarf and wool coat day, the ferry wasn’t.
Two pelicans on serious round rocks agreed.
The seagulls stayed optimistic, didn’t avocado;
the mysteries of seaweed, stone and shell
all beacons of substance, in our child’s eyes
the sponges were satellites: the tractors still
in a semicircle, hogging that little beach,
holding their boat trailers out like hands
for the fishermen of Backstairs Passage.

WILD HOPS, THE FLINDERS RANGES

the wild
hops, red
swathes
of desert mountain
flowers, mid-Spring
on gate-opening
backroads,
splooshing the ochre
Holden through
glass-clear creeks
to Chambers Gorge
late raw sun
jumping across
river-soak shallows
rock water reeds
wide gully wall
aboriginal ancient
overpowering cliffs
seven skin-taut bone
shot corpses
kangaroo
the heedless scrawking
of 100 white cockatoos
The mornings are corkscrew tight:  
just-Spring in Adelaide  
and all the flowers shouting —  
almond jasmine wattle nectarine...

shocks of bright weed, over  
thrown with caterpillars, rich  
Wanderers* in brown fur coats —  
streets spattered with petals

on parked cars, sun-split clouds  
and still-leaking rooves, red wine  
in hand-me-down houses —  
the lions roaring from the zoo.

*) ‘Wanderers’ = the Monarch butterfly.