

POEMS OF MIRIAM HYDE

White Wings (1994)

White butterflies with motionless wings,
Fragile things;
Grouped above leaves, grey-green and veined,
Backs purple-stained.
Will these butterflies vanish, and I shall find
Only leaves behind?
Will they rise in a cloud, or one by one,
In the gleam of the sun?
No! - these daintily sculpted angels of white
Have no power of flight;
They are cyclamen petals! Was it you who chose
To give me those? -
To adorn my home, in an honoured place
With their pristine grace?

Playing with Orchestra in Perth (1975)

At my high window, lost in thought I stand,
The Indian Ocean's silent mass contained
Beyond this sparkling Western capital.
Eastward, the vast Australian continent
Of fertile hills and lonely Nullarbor,
Of Namatjira reds and white ghost gums,
Stretches away to far Pacific shores.
The hemisphere of black nocturnal sky
Is hung with stars, unfathomable worlds
That lie in cold remoteness from the Earth.
But close at hand tall buildings gleam, and lamps
Outline the margins of the River Swan.
The traffic passes up and down the streets
Like blood through veins, - the animating force
Bespeaking, here, the dominance of Man.
And I am but a corpuscle, a speck
Still breathing in the eternal scheme of life,
So insignificant, - ephemeral;
Yet in these precious days I've known a world
Which but a few are called upon to share;
A world of agony and ecstasy
That only a musician feels at heart;
The plaintive oboe solo and the rise
Of cello phrases on the higher strings;
The notes of doom that throb from timpani,
The surge of brass, the vibrant violins,
And piano chords that mount to climaxes
In which one feels possessed, engulfed by sound.
Strange, as one contemplates the scope of such
A universe, so ordered and sublime,
That it should be so hard, and mean so much,
To give one quaver its due point in time.

Licorice versus Aniseed (1962)

(To Dr Clarrie Gluskie)

When first I tried your new cough mixture
I thought "Here is a rare elixir!" -
So fragrant, subtle and alluring,
Apart from its prime use in curing
A fierce and wearing type of cough
That never seemed to clear right off.
But when my temperature diminished,
The stuffiness of head had finished,
And sense of taste became acute,
I was not quite so resolute
In pouring the full tablespoon.
The four hours came around so soon!
I'd argue with myself "Not yet,
'Twould spoil my breakfast omelette",
Or "Even with an hour's delay,
I'll still fit-in four lots today",
Or "Perhaps a teaspoonful would do,
I've hardly coughed since 10 to 2."
If I were ever asked to voice
My frank opinion on the choice, -
Your aniseedy recipe
Or Barry's licorice fantasy,
I think in future times of need
I'd rather take the aniseed
For dealing with bronchial upheavals, -
It's just the lesser of two evils.

Leaves in the Wind (1938)

Twirled on their stems and fluttering free,
The leaves in the wind thro' the tall poplar tree
Are dancing,
 pausing, -
Dancing again with a rustle, like wings
Beating softly on boughs when a silver-eye sings
While searching,
 probing, -
Probing the sweet lemon blossoms for honey.
Twirled on their stems and fluttering free,
The leaves in the wind thro' the tall poplar tree
Are flying,
 falling, -
Flying first one then another, for soon
The wind will be singing a cold winter tune
While sifting,
 driving, -
Driving where gardens no longer are sunny.

Evening Shadows (1939)

The first hint of cool air blew over the meadows
And shadows spread over the turf, beyond shadows,
Until they deepened a hill of blue peace
Where a farmer smiled homeward, his labour to cease.
I tried to look westward through flickers of light,
And heard rushing wings of some parrots in flight.
Instead of the green I had seen nearer noon,
The Sun, as it set, made a golden lagoon
(Where water lay still, between reeds, unsuspected),
With ti-trees' white bark and the sky now reflected.
The same little river was hushed in dull purples
Except where a water-bird spread several circles,
And swam proudly on, thinking nothing of breaking
The mirror-like surface, his wings boldly shaking,
Flecking with white the dark river's recesses
Before disappearing through mangroves and cresses.
The smoke from a brick kiln trailed into the sky,
And I noticed the furnace aglow, going by.
The bizarre bougainvillea flashed on the wall;
Some dates, hanging clumped in the palms growing tall
By the roadside, were orange as dates in the East;
And the brilliant poinsettia flamed not the least,
For it vied with the sunbeams to hold the last colour
Before heavy clouds painted tones that were duller.
I wept when I thought that the daylight must pass,
But felt you were near, when I saw some pink grass
Like the warm glow of Love rising straight from the Earth,
Like the warm glow of logs rising straight from our Hearth;
And whether the sun sets through ti-trees or heather,
I shall count all the times that we watch it together.

Before the Spring (1934)

Mould of dead oak leaves,
Tassel'd threads of birch;
For early snowdrops
We still in vain must search.
Glens of dry bracken,
Fungus on the root;
Not e'en a lilac
Has yet begun to shoot.
Cold mossy branches,
Acorns on the ground;
But not a primrose
Or wind-flower to be found.
Glades of dark pine trees,
Needles green and long;
And still the whole wood
Lies destitute of song.
Sleeping, this country;
Beautiful, as Sleep;
While the quiet pulse
Till Spring its beat will keep.

Mephisto Waltz (1979)

Calm as a mirror lay the little bay,
Clear in the sunlight of a winter day.
The crisp wind off the snow was not now stirring
To move the boats, unpeopled, anchored there
Like instruments left in the interval
Upon a stage, awaiting human touch
To bring them back to life. Only the ducks
Broke the reflections with their merging ripples
Or long-expanding V's, when one would make
A mid-stream passage with continuous wake.
But Nature here, on this idyllic morn
Was soon to find her mystic silence torn
By two enthusiasts whose instrument
Was not to stay unplayed! – and soon the sounds
Of Liszt were flung into the bushland peace.
Soft notes, repeated, pulsing in the bass,
The twangy fifths, as piano mocked violin,
Resounding pedalled chords, menacing leaps,
A pungent rhythmic figure, cackling laughter
In dancing semiquavers, from the treble;
Bewitching, off-beat accents, moments tender
And trembling, that displaced one's normal breath;
A nightingale's cadenza! – alien sound
Among the bird songs in the banksias.
Silence again, – the pause, the one-bar rest,
And then the dizzy triple beat resumed;
The waltz in final frenzy rent the air,
For Mephistopheles was lurking there.

White Peacock (1986)

When did this inspiration come to God? –
The first creation of a white peacock?
If ever there was doubt about a God,
Such doubt would be dispelled in one's first glance
At such a perfect bird.
In sanctuary, within the Wildlife Park,
Exotic in the rough Australian Bush,
He moved with grace belying his male role,
The long train sweeping, - like a royal bride
Down the Abbey aisle.
And then the wondrous moment came. When next
I looked for him, he stood, in sunlight pale,
With great fan spread in shimmering design,
A halo of a hundred facets, wrought
From finest Spanish lace.
White peacock, what will happen when you die,
For die you must? Will one with loving hands
Lay you to rest, and gently fold your tail,
And press a cheek into your wings, and shed
Some tears among your feathers?

Winter Willow Music (1939)

A willow-tree, just as the dusk was falling,
Drew thin pendant lines on the cloudy sky.
No shelter she offered from wind or from rain,
Not a leaf was left on her frail little frame
That drooped o'er the path where I wandered by.
The birds, somewhere, were prettily calling,

But not from the willow!

She had no music

Except when the wind found her thin, hanging tresses,
And moved in between them with gentle caresses,
Plucking the short strands, and plucking the long,
Until you could hear just a fragment of song

From her harp-like strings,

As the dusk was falling.

These are the Mountains -
For quaint nests to seek,
For bird calls unique;
When a heat haze intense
Holds the Bush in suspense,
And a whip-bird's lash
Rends the air like a flash,
Or a magpie sends a
Warbling cadenza
In cascades of sound;
Or, on his mound,
A lyre bird enchants
With his song and dance.

These are the Mountains -
That bring me elation
In contemplation.
I love the sweet smell
Of a bushland dell,
The eucalypts' essence
And Springtime's presence
Of banksia honey
From hillsides sunny,
And wattle's gold.
In Winter's cold,
Or Summer's heat,
The seasons repeat
Their magical round
Of sight and of sound,
And the perfumed air
I was born to share.
This is where my heart is -
"Terra Australis".

Mountain Soliloquy (1993)

These are the Mountains -
Where I find peace,
Welcome release
From the city's pace;
The ancient rock face,
The mantle of blue;
Beautiful, too,
When vapour creeps slowly
Enveloping wholly
Each valley and hill,
Eerie and still.
The nearest lines
Of majestic pines,
Darkly evergreen,
Can still be seen;
Their limbs embracing,
Like sentinels facing
The thickening mist
They cannot resist;
Powerless to say
"Come no further this way".

These are the Mountains -
For wildflowers and grasses,
For deep craggy Passes;
Steep steps descending,
Where ferns are bending,
And waterfall's song
Helps our footsteps along
Over creek beds and bogs,
Over stout fallen logs;
Where ladders are hung
With a missing rung;
Past rainbows of spray
On a sparkling Spring day.