



SONG CYCLE

PART ONE

(i) SETTING OUT— we first went south

Evacuees in wartime we first went south

yes

into undreamed of forest darkneses

where bunched leaves closed overhead

yes

even at noontide, strange birds up there

called like whips cracking, though unseen

yes

and at night our own windows blacked out

we huddled at firesides to wireless war news

yes

wondered when helmeted swart enemy

would come with bayonet and rifle to kill

yes

but the forests hid us well, we survived

to hunt rabbits for meat, make berry jam

yes

and at school rejoiced ringing the bell

when celebrating our army's victory

yes

then we could come back to open country

to birthland of mallee, mulga and salt flats.

yes

yes

(ii) SOUNDS OF SUMMER—Air

Brushing against fence, just the sensation
as you tread on clods, 'boondies' of clumped grass.
Your arm instinctively leans here to finger
and fondle the topmost tightly stretched wire.

What to regard here? Are you emperor...
the breadth of these pastures? All you survey?
As from dust creeping comes a 'stick insect',
mocks elongated eremophyla leaf.

As such instruments sound strident strummings
on the wire, wind adds ruffles and the tick
of chaff-ends blown heedlessly across fields.
Then tosses sky high the cries of curlews,

sprays diadems of brisk willy-wagtails—
darting black and white with their ecstatic
djittys-djittys. Where are your feelings, man?
Now there's sound like women singing to sleep

babes in blankets or returning footsteps.
Lean ear to telegraph posts to hear music
of the spheres, wailing of ranked acolytes
in eastern temples or lost vast wind storms.
In townsites fathers shout at feats of strength

in schoolyard buffetings. Look beyond these towns, to sparse bush groves —there's wire strung again—ever fencing open lands.

(iii). SOUNDS OF SUMMER—Water

Where ferns stoop among balga trunks
listen now to the bracken-browned trickle
of water among granite stones, merging
into ranked drone of crouching cicadas
in forest crowns of jarrah and karri.
Note cries of *gooraba* and *dilabut*
swooping in dapper black and white from green
of one hillside to another hillside.
They ignore old man emu's drumming beat
passing down woodland aisles in summer heat.

Until summer storms come with mountain's nudge
of thunder to pass in an angry flash
and leave sheoak, banksia, marri to drip
in stinging drops. A sudden hush descends
where ringtail and quenda edge through underbrush.
Tumult sensed amidst frog choruses here
reminds there is multitudinous life
teeming amid leaf litter's profusion—
orchids, fungi, mosses and lichens make
rainforest replete for water's sake.

(iv). SOUNDS OF SUMMER—Scents

Grease on axle parts
has an unctuous smell
mixed with spattered chaff

and the odd ear of wheat.

And freshly-wrought iron
has its metallic tang or
is it the taste we register,
when blade serrates tongue?

Rich aromatics rise up
from idling exhaust of
truckload of teetering hay
in settle of summer air.

You might sniff boldness
of a fox in the dry bed
of the garden or just tang
of old figs fallen down.

It's light this scent on air
and especially here at dusk
momentary trace is scented
boronia's sweet rush.

(v). SOUNDS OF SUMMER—Tastes

You put your lips to fence-rail's
parched timber and draw in
moisture or is it blood
of your own lips? Its grain

cracked and frail, this wood
has been long lying here
in sun and rain yet resists.
So you taste again the red gum

of some tree a settler lopped;
but it is too remote now,
it is the time to grasp at
twig and leaf of the living.

To chew for the blood
of the tree—taste of sap
and sharp oil of eucalyptus.
All this exchange of passion.

(vi). SOUNDS OF SUMMER—Earth

The naked foot knows best
the red earth of the Yilgarn;
almost as potent as ochre
pigments of Wilgie Mia—
old Thuwarri Thaa, mined
in the Weld Range for aeons.

Thrust aside with your toes
the shards of spinifex, shed
needles of casuarina, heap
this dirt up to inspect, to know
what is elemental. As your flesh.

PART TWO

(i). THE LONG ROAD HOME—Verges

By this roadside you have dreamed

to rest awhile, to hide from passing
of those who speed ever onwards.
Even urge you too, and take your soul.

These verges—well named as space
between. Extending almost all our
roadsides and rail lines of western
third of this continent, deserving

more than casual glances. Telling
much of man's fever for close
confinement, containment, closure.
But here also preserved so much.

Long history of the land lies here:
in micro form, before our coming,
each rock and gully, bird-flight free,
wildflower, ant hill and grass tree.

Despoiled certainly by our straight
stretches of steel rails, fence posts,
white centre-lines of highways and
lust ever to make all worlds anew.

But pausing, you stand on such a verge,
become briefly joined with remnant
land once more; seated here on fallen
bough of bush tree, try contemplation.

Enough of telling, so let us show
the verge discoveries where stalk
trapdoor spiders to lay out diadem
of tiny twigs to lead the innocent

to their tunnel of love and vice-
like jaws awaiting sustenance
in secure darkness. And tiny bird
in black and white splendour darts
from branch to leaf to gravel ground,
pecking at insect strollers, or scattered
wheat grains and any such sustenance.
Twenty-eight parrots grope on ground
for seeds then rise in shrieking flight.
So this remnant verge still shelters life.

(ii). THE LONG ROAD HOME—Salt Lakes

Aged fenceposts run out into the blue
of the sky to mark invasion's folly
and contempt for first nation's land.

At least Juat and Ballardong showed honour
to millenia of accumulating salt
crystals and dune shores of gypsum lunettes.

Your footprints may join wild duck and swan
but encode foreign alphabets and speak
of invasion's unknowingness and ill.

Even childhood innocence can perpetuate
dangers of a blameless guilt as you trail
a branch of blackbutt to write your own name.

For here is aeons-old samphire and saltbush
mending the winter storms' disturbances,
making peace with wild waters and rough gales.

You can learn, if you will, from wild damp strands
in your visitations. Come again and
again, make peace in contemplative mood.

At least this familiarity can
impart a dreaming to sustain certain
wisdom of salt more lasting than footprints.

And lakes will endure in dreams as singing
of this flat land's most ancient origins;
receiving the living feet of the worshipful.

PART THREE

HOME-COMING—For the Last Time

For the last time

yes

I loiter with intent

by the farm house

yes

walking by the sheds

stables, the sheep yards

yes

this was home to my mother

through forming, shaping years

yes

in the sand here, my trails

and tracks among others

yes

see imprint of bronze-wings' feet

anarchic strut of cockatoos
yes
patter of rabbits coming out
from under floor boards
yes
the scrambled trails of sheep
moving through this old garden
yes
where Geraldton-wax still
blooms and easter lilies wilt
yes
at the forge, goanna tracks
and disturbed dugite's whiplash
yes
I loiter with intent
in my grandfather's ruins
yes
for the last time
yes
yes

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A Painter's Background

My first experience of watercolour painting occurred when I was in the final years of primary schooling in a little outback town. Our teacher was an ex-Canadian airforce pilot with a wooden leg. One day he suggested we go out into the schoolgrounds with our paintboxes and drawing books and sketch something that appealed to us. I chose a tall white-gum that towered over the school roof. From that modest beginning, my interest in painting and sketching grew. Encouraged by my brother, who had already left for the city to study to be an art teacher, I gradually learned more and went out into the

country to paint the wheatfields and tree-lined roads. But I was keen to gain a scholarship to study at high school and had to divert my energies to improving my maths and other school subjects. Sketching became an occasional pastime for relief from the intensity of my high school studies. Nevertheless, although I never had another lesson in art at school, I occasionally sought to 'clear my mind' by going out with my sketch book for an hour or two. By this time I lived in metropolitan Perth and on 1951 was persuaded by a teacher to enter the Claude Hotchin Art Award for schoolchildren and was lucky enough to win a 'highly commended' for my painting of a local brickworks including its tall chimney. The painting was acquired by the Claremont Teachers College for its collection of local child art.

Thereafter I only occasionally sketched or painted on request from relatives or friends. Most of these works have long since vanished although have occasionally been glimpsed hanging in their homes in Australia, Italy, the USA, India and China. When I retired as a full-time academic I found I had time at last for my own work, particularly as a published author. Some of my better paintings, particularly those deriving from my academic concentration on 'Landscape Studies', began to appear on covers or as frontispieces for my books. Eventually it was suggested that some of my poems and stories could become appropriate illustrations within books. The more appeared, the more my awareness grew that, as a painter, I had some skill, rudimentary as my depictions were. At last I had so many sketches in print that there were obviously enough to create a book devoted to them—hence *One Hundred Landscapes of Australia, Italy and China* and to launch it there seemed every reason to put some of these paintings into an Exhibition at Edith Cowan University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Glen Phillips

Born in Southern Cross, Glen Phillips has taught English for many years at Edith Cowan University In Perth Western Australia, where he currently lives. He is the Founding Director of ECU's International Centre for Landscape and Language. His poetry is represented in 30 anthologies, and over 40 individual volumes. His poems have been awarded prestigious prizes, have been translated into several languages and are object of graduate studies. His more recent books include *Alpi e Prati: Poems of Italy* (2014), *Poems of the Wheatbelt* (2016) and *Crouching Tigers, Hidden Dragons: Chinese Poems* (2016).