

The Tunnel

Framed by the train window. The mouth of the tunnel, the tiled wall, the station name, the benches as the train moves into the darkness. Then the box carrying the cables at the side of the tunnel. The roar of the train in the tunnel. The voices and songs in the noise. A sense of panic and urgency. Big moments that pass by ungrasped. The heat blowing in from the open windows. The stale tunnel smell. Shouted words. Monosyllables. You picked a fine time to leave me Lucille, with four hungry children and a crop in the field. This time the hurting won't heal. You picked a fine time to leave me. The shrieking of the train. In the frame of the train window, the old man's round head bent reading. The columns. Coming out into the light towards Central Station. Looking down into Belmore Park and the dusty air.

On the table a piece of paper with a drawing of a star. Complex with many lines in different colours. Something drawn rather than written. I think of the term 'visual communication', a form of but not really the same as non-verbal communication. The meaning in a drawing. The meaning of the placement of a person. The shape of their round head reading, the gentleness, the focus and concentration, near the curtain, near the window, framed by the window or enclosed by a frame of other lines. Or the trees like rain across a page, like spidery tracks. Like slight movement in the heat.

In the art gallery, the aboriginal paintings placed in the dark downstairs area representing the gloom western civilization has thrown over them. The bark paintings which must have often been seen in brilliant sunlight against the backdrop of the delicate bush they seem to mirror.

The tall pylons. Coming into Central Station. The kids swinging around the poles near the doors of the train, laughing and shouting to each other. Out of the darkness.

On the table, the star drawn on the piece of paper. A compass with many points. In the north a place where people gather. Where something may happen in the future but at present fermenting beneath the surface. In the south, the cold clear air. The simplicity of lines of action. In the east open social life without substance. In the west heat and a red landscape.

The woman with blonde curly hair is savaging something, maybe everything with her teeth. A private viewing of a future spectacle.

He dismisses my doubts out of hand.

- You think too much. Why worry. This is the way it's always been and always will be. We must learn to accept it.

Blocking the way through, damming up the places where insight and analysis can slip through.

- Why can't we just let all this alone. Think about yourself, your work. The truth will out, quality work will prevail. All this social machinating leads nowhere. It's meaningless and will be seen for what it is.

- But if machinating and power games mean nothing why don't we have more women, migrants, aboriginals amongst our public writers and in our literary history. The wrong people are on the move. The market is being expanded, the multi-national publishing houses are amalgamating into cartels. The book trade

is being rationalized. Things are getting obviously worse. The star system dominates everything with its favouring of the bland, the conservative, the already known.

You suppress me before I begin, you interrupt my speaking, the first germinating ideas, my first attempt at analysis.

The kids come back inside the seating compartment of the train and put on the headphones of their walkmen. We head into the west. Through the window we stare at the separate roofs, the separate backyards, the separate fences, the separate shops, the separate street lights, the separate streets, the separate factories. Separate. Separate. Separate.