



Three Streets in Search of an Author

Alan Gould

'I ruled that shushed delirious sea,
house of my euphoria...'

Three Streets
in
Search of an Author

Alan Gould

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Introduction

Alan Gould's poetry has both lyrical and strongly intellectual qualities. Gould's work seems conscious of itself as poetic in a world which is not always so, just as he is conscious of the poet's role as poet. His work ranges over extensive terrain, creating new landscapes and exploring those he knows imaginatively—or are they places he has travelled? In a sense, it is immaterial whether the places in his poems are real or imagined. An abiding concern is with the exploration of place as concept.

In the essay 'Three Streets in Search of an Author', Gould contemplates further, through reference to physical landscape, the metaphor of streets as places in the mind and in feelings. From the first few lines, a tinge of the elegiac is sensed, and this rather elusive, wistful quality in his essay characterises much of his work. 'Australian Negative', for example blends with delicacy an intellectual expedition and a graceful poetic—a combination of the realm of his fancy and his striving for intellectual control.

Australian Negative

(*Torrens*, 1883, Recalled 1920)

The 'long live England, long live Captain Angel'
was me (I think). For I was loon
and just a girl, and lanterns ringed the poopdeck
and a shilling-moon had bobbed
above St Vincent's cherry skyline. Most
I ruled that shushed delirious sea,
house of my euphoria. Long live *that* thought
I might have prayed more wisely. For
though I danced poor father sleepless, dawn
was calm with beacons, tidemarks, rising
like somnolent strangers at a table
mumbling 'welcome'. This is vivid,

and odd scintilla from the un-green years
that followed—coronation teaspoons
ranked along the dresser, and the time
the brownsnake lashed in the pantry. My first
was ill-advised; our marriage cracked the day
he shrivelled under father's glare;
he's now that carpet for the proud he prayed
to be. The next, a churchman too
was witty, thus more kind. There will be others,
building other houses round me,
but none, I fear, will bring me home. Regret
for this remains my only illness.

This vernal century already wears
its scars; in one of them a son
of mine is buried. He crystallised this truth,
the England that digested him
I had outgrown by tiny increments.
'Dear' and 'mother' could no more
endear it. Here my three surviving children
build their homes on inland shimmers.
Their language grows in ways I can but ape.
I'm growing quaint like England. Amen.
I'll dance with father, neither here nor there,
and take the houseless sea for home.

[from *Formerlight: Selected Poems*, pages 24 and 25]

As expressed in his essay, Gould has a peculiar sensitivity to his environment, to relationships and to events which pass as part of the inevitable condition of living. Both his prose and his poetry are unabashed in their probing of difficulty, of human limitation, of the process of growth and change. Assertiveness, even boldness is a quality in his writing which gives definition to characteristic and elusive qualities of unease, discontent, remorse and regret. This is perhaps among the reasons that Gould's poetry often strikes chords of recognition: a fleeting glance of a familiar scene, or a fading situation, brought crisply to life again. The poem 'Requiem for a Graduate Culture', set in the future as it is, explores and uncovers remote tensions from a not-quite-forgotten period.

Requiem for a Graduate Culture

They always looked for more than met the eye
till they no longer saw what meets the eye.
Critique for them was a reflex, a nervous tic,
and with their querulous intellectual chic
they withered value, made impossible
effective government. Dreams could give them trouble,
like finding oneself on endless sand dunes, walking,
a wizened youth unable to stop talking.
Their opinions were transferred pain, their vehemence
in inverse ratio to their percipience,
their consciences were factories for invective,
but took the chair when conscience was Collective.
From something in speech itself they at last grew tired,
and years ago the last of them expired.
Among his papers we found this little item,
'Death's the product of an unexamined system.'

[from *Momentum*, page 63]

Perturbing, unsettling but expressive of a quality in Gould's work which lifts such poems out of the apparently dark, downward fall on which they end, this poem seems to characterise its author as careful and watchful, and as a meticulous observer of event and human interaction, in a world to which he is intensely attuned.



Three Streets in Search of an Author

I will attempt to recover two streets, and to create a third. The earliest is a street in 1950s Britain where I first began to have an idea of myself as a distinct person. The second is a 1980s Australian street where, with my wife, Anne, I owned my first house and into which my two children were born. And the third will be outside time as we know it, an imagined street on which, in a world where all wishes can be realised, I would prefer to live.

I might start by saying that most human lives, wherever they first see the light of day, do so within earshot of a street. For even as we flop, exhausted, into the world and, in those first seconds, endure its confusion, plastic tubes shoved up our nostrils, the birth-slime cleaned from our still-purple bodies, the shocking cold of the weighing scales' chrome dish, even as we hear the sobs of relief from our mother and the midwife announcing our gender, we are also hearing in the background, maybe, a bus grinding up through its gears, the swishing of tyres on wet bitumen, or the distant cry of a newspaper vendor, chanting something rhythmic and unintelligible.

But I cannot start this way. The grinding of those gears and the swishing of those tyres are sounds I have imagined, not remembered. My life begins, as does all human life, not beside a street, but in a stupor, conscious, but not self-conscious. That is to say, the year, 1949, in which, I am informed reliably, I was born, together with the two years following it, mean nothing to me because my consciousness can retrieve no sensory impressions from that time. Certainly there must have been a multitude of images that flickered before my eyes and perhaps registered on my subconscious. And certainly, within a few months of birth, I was producing a rather earnest babble, for I was dubbed a serious baby. But within my soup of vowels and occasional consonants coherent syllables, then sentences were forming and coalescing like cells and cell-tissue, until in 1952, at the age of about three, I can say I emerged from the stupor of infancy like a patient surfacing from the dentist's gas. And when I did I found myself in a street. Joel Street to be precise.

I was not without company. There were two bears, a curlicued white and a grandfatherly grey, there was a Hornby trainset with a maroon engine, and a silver knife, fork and spoon described as a christening set.

There were also, of course, my parents, visiting Icelandic and English relatives, and our house itself, flat-roofed, custard-yellow stucco with green windows, a skyblue bathroom and a settee the exact green colour and texture of broccoli. In front of the house was Joel Street and beyond that, London. Behind it was a field, and beyond that, England. All these details remain precise, numinous, though also curiously phantasmagoric, in my memory, despite the fact that I had left this place for Northern Ireland by the time I was four-and-a-half and have never seen Joel Street again in the four decades that have elapsed since.

Now, as I understand it, two things had been happening under this infantile stupor to produce the onset of my self-consciousness in early 1952. Firstly, the verbal hemisphere of my brain had been infiltrating the visual hemisphere with increasing confidence, connecting words to images like an electrician hooking up terminals. Thus, everything I can now remember from earliest consciousness I had words for *at* the time. I knew the word for bathroom, trainset and christening. I knew the difference between blue, yellow, green and maroon. What I cannot do is retrieve anything from before this, no matter what the stimulus. I'm told, for instance, that I was taken to Iceland in 1951, that we had lived at a place called Woolwich before Joel Street. I have been shown an engraving of the church in which I was christened at Chislehurst in Kent. But these belong to someone's version of my life and, if impressions of these places and events ever did register in my mind, they were put into closed files all stamped 'Not to be opened in the author's lifetime'.

Secondly, and more importantly, I not only had words for these things themselves, but I had words for their context, for their latitude and longitude in my experience. With regard to place, this is quite precise, 77 Joel Street, Northwood Hills which I knew to be on the very edge of London. With regard to time, I cannot confidently say I knew the year was 1952, though I can say I knew there was a king called George who was suddenly dead and then a queen called Elizabeth who gave all the children a plastic coronation coach. The blurriness in my sense of time is slightly worrying because I know from subsequent information that eighteen months intervened between the death of the king and the coronation of the new queen, while in my mind this period appears telescoped. Still, by the age of three I knew where I was. My language was wired up to my sensory organs. I was ready to hit the street.

The Street. I learnt it was a thing you could wander too far down. One morning, on my tricycle with yellow wheels, it seems I did this. I took off by myself, pedalling beyond our house, then beyond all houses. There were high dark trees on one side of me and they seemed to have a tunnelling effect. The pavement arc'd downhill and soon all that was familiar to me had been hidden by the road's curve. My feelings about my adventure were mixed. There was adrenalin; I knew very well I had come far beyond what was allowed. Yet it was natural and intriguing to follow that downhill path further into the tree-darkness, to see what lay just beyond the bend.

I did not get far. A guilty glance behind me disclosed my mother in pursuit. She seemed agitated. She descended on me, gave me the smack I had known from the outset was my fate, gathered up my silly little tricycle in one hand and marched me howling back to 77 Joel Street. But an archetype had formed itself in my mind. For, whenever I try to imagine what will be before the mind's eye in the last few moments of life, or what the approach to an after-world might be, I see a street curving downhill and out of sight with high dark trees forming a tunnel over it. The odd car will zoom by without stopping. The destination of the street will be hidden. And there will be no-one, no-one at all, to advise whether it is better in that extremity to continue or go back. For on this occasion my mother, and indeed all that remains of reality will lie before me rather than behind. My first street, in other words, has become an image for my last.

Not all the characteristics of Joel Street were so troubling, though many of its images seem to have this archetypal status in my imagination, perhaps because earliest experience has this peculiarly dream-like status in the memory. Take Derek Rogers who lived next door. I have no memory of what I actually did in Derek's company, only that I longed for it and felt inexplicably blithe when I was in it. Derek was in his teens, therefore to me, at three-and-a-half, he was virtually an adult. Equable, watchful, reassuring, I picture this boy-adult in a navy blue shortsleeved jersey forever making things from balsa, or cotton reels, elastic bands and bits of candle, never becoming annoyed. In other words, Derek's was a character that pointed toward Arcadia, or any state of existence where innocence is still possible.

Janet, by contrast, a little girl my age who lived on the other side, had orange hair, a spiteful tongue, and came clearly from some nether origin. In the midst of our play she was likely to draw her fingernails experimentally

down my cheek to see what kind of a mark they created. It was around this time that my brother was born and brought home in my father's black Austin, a tiny, shawled object shaped like a seal pup on my mother's lap. Within the first few months of his birth Janet had a go at his cheeks as he lay in his pram. She was curious, no doubt, to see if it had the same effect as on mine. A scientific nature had Janet. She was what might be called an anxious person to live with. Well, Derek lived on the left, Janet on the right, Arcadia and Purgatory, and I have sometimes wondered whether our political leanings may be traced to early experiences of this sort.

Such a fancy is, of course, flippant. But it is said that our first address, that is to say, our first awareness of particular space, has this formative influence on both consciousness and dream-life, aligning at the centre of our being the filters through which all the perceptions we ever have will pass, establishing the ground upon which our consciousness can be said to be both continuous, and characteristic.

If Joel Street was able to transmute itself easily into symbol and allegory, Hirst Avenue, Queanbeyan, was life, the vivid, untidy, untransferrable grain of life. Hirst Ave runs down to the Queanbeyan River and is close to the town's main thoroughfare, Monaro Street. It consists of weatherboard and corrugated iron houses with small front gardens, ex-verandahs that had been enclosed to become sleepouts, joists and doorposts a little askew from so many seasons of tiny but inexorable stresses. Nothing custom-built or sylvan here. All these homes were set close together, facing front with toes to the building line, their fruit trees cropped to warty knuckles of trunk, their cypress hedges pruned of any rebel greenery—and the impression as one walked down the street between them was of a 1930s Sunday afternoon militia in a polyglot of uniforms but each with its severe regulation haircut.

My wife, Anne, and I bought the house on the corner. It had a steep roof, a chequering of magenta, clouded and clear glass panes in the windows, and it hid, shy as a chapel, behind two voluminous Arizona cypresses. These cypresses were virtually the only two trees in the street that had managed to grow taller than the height of a fully-stretched man holding a pruning saw. Built in the 1920s, by 1982 the house had scornfully sloughed off every 90 degree angle and plane surface that might once have graced it. The front door opened easily in the winter and stuck

in the summer, while the back door opened easily in the summer and stuck in the winter. Digging through the two feet of rich black soil in the back garden was to discover an archaeology of the twentieth century. I found turn-of-the-century axeheads, a 1950s chain for hoisting the engines out of FC Holdens, bits of which I also unearthed, the smashed glass and untarnished caps of pepsi cola bottles from the 60s, and the alumina-plastic wrappers of potato chips, their fluorescent greens and blues undimmed by ten years under the ground.

Despite, or maybe *because*, of the observations that follow, we spent five happy years at this address. With trellis, honeysuckle, potato vine, olive trees, rambling roses, Mexican alders, and any fast growers she could find, Anne changed the visual outline of 1 Hirst Ave from buckled linear to densely serpentine. Her ambition was not only to have greenery engulf us as it does in the fable of beauty and the beast, but to establish a militant cadre of unstoppable vegetation that would eventually spread to all of Queanbeyan and usurp the pollarding mentality of its citizens. Anne was then, and is now, a kind of horticultural Ghengis Khan.

The vivid grain of life. Birth, marriage, death, family brawls, family reunions, neighbourliness and neighbour-quarrels, either happened to us or in our immediate vicinity. From an apparently sleeping Hirst Ave at three a.m. one freezing August night we set out for the maternity ward of Woden Valley Hospital and the birth of our first child. In those neon small hours Anne was examined by a nurse and a doctor in a small room with no windows and I, protective husband and prospective father, could not help noticing that when nurse and doctor entered, nurse had a huge still-glistening red stain on her otherwise pristine uniform, while the doctor's white front was spattered with reddish spots. In my four a.m. daze, I wondered if we had arrived at the abattoir rather than the hospital. They informed me that the action was hours off yet, and wisely sent me home to get some sleep. When I appeared the next morning I was greeted at the back door by Cassie, our neighbour, who thrust a white teddy bear into my hand and asked, 'Boy or girl? We saw you setting off.' As I say, this had been at three a.m. So it was true of Hirst Ave what Les Murray has written of sawmill towns, that

As night comes down, the houses watch each other:
a light going out in a window here has meaning.

Despite the bloodstains, Jack was born and brought home safely, as was his brother George two-and-a-half years later. On the night George was born I recall stopping beside the River at five in the morning and gazing at a half moon with the morning star large underneath it, like a Sultan's dagger with pendant watch. It was auspicious.

As was the River itself, sliding between its willows at the end of our street. For instance, Jack, who is now eight, devours books and programs on wildlife, and looks set to become a zoologist, specialising in snakes. It was beside the River when he was about eighteen months old that he got his first invitation to go on a wildlife expedition. This was when a wiry, bronze fellow in a sarong and carrying an all but emptied flagon of sherry became charmed by our toddler's antics and sat himself down beside us on the bank. 'Hey liddel fellah,' he said, breathing sherry fumes over us all, 'when you're a bit bigger, you come along here and ask for Spud Murphy. I'll take you along the River a way and show you where the water rats live.'

It should be said there were lots of water rats in oily inlets along the Queanbeyan River, as well as a good few of these benign hobos like Spud Murphy. I would find the stubbies and flagons of the latter, and occasionally an abandoned blanket or shirt in the willow thickets along its banks. There were also numerous vehicle bodies, old combis, Valiants, Mini Minors, from which two decades before, the hoods and joyriders must have continued their sprees on foot to become the respectable citizens and golfers they now, no doubt, are. More fabulous than these rusted car bodies were the supermarket trolleys that gleamed like vacant aviaries from the River's green-as-mint-jelly depths, where they had been pushed for a lark.

In the same month as we had encountered Spud Murphy I was picking blackberries beside the River with Jack on my shoulders, blackberries swollen to the size of Christmas tree lights and the sweetest I've ever tasted. Then, rounding a bend in the path, a blacksnake reared on us, its head fanned out like a cobra's. For one searing instant serpent and father-child danced together on that blackberry path before deciding we were unsuitable partners.

Now I conjure all this imagery because Spud Murphy, sunken trolleys and a dancing blacksnake belong to the register of experiences which were entering my son's subconscious in that early period of life I spoke of before as the closed file of things he has recorded but can never retrieve.

Like me, he cannot read his own file. But as his parent, I have access to parts of his file because I have observed the impact of these things on him. It is always from my perspective of course, but this does not prevent my imaginative sympathy from speculating on how some of these images may assert their chemistry on his evolving interests and character. Further, it allows insight into the behavioural mechanisms by which early subconscious material in general works on the conscious mind, and this has been rich ground for me when creating the characters that appear in my fiction and poetry.

Back to Hirst Ave. Of our neighbours, we came to identify, and eventually dread, the talkers. There was Mavis who would waylay us, dressed at midday in her turquoise chenille dressing-gown. Conversation with Mavis, which she supplied both sides of, ran like those interminable fence lines across the Western Plains, though she was wonderfully adroit at shutting the gates on my excuses that, really, I had rather a lot to be getting on with. Attending to Mavis I came to appreciate how deeply the act of listening is a charitable activity. Trying to remember the subject matter she covered in these sessions, I get an image of the test pattern on a television and a reminder of the panic that used to rise in me as I shifted from foot to foot on her nature strip in the sun's glare and thought, 'She doesn't actually mind how long we remain here, geologically speaking.'

Much the same was true of Peter, a burly ex-fireman with white hair. For all that he appeared lusty, drove his hotted-up ute as though it were a fighter plane, swung punches and hurled abuse up and down the street whenever one of his 'no-good' grandsons came on the bludge, it was Peter's health that seemed to be the main subject of his talk whenever he caught us in ambush. For a long time I couldn't reconcile his apparent vigour with his desire to acquaint us with the intimacies of his ailments, the sugar in the urine, the cancer behind the ear, the gangrene on his shin. Then I tumbled to it. It was a form of hospitality. He was saying, 'Come in, be at home in this neighbourly body.' For neighbourly body he was, as was Mavis, and my horror of being cornered by them does not disguise the fact I recognised both were motivated by a superabundant neighbourliness. I was also amused to observe that Mavis' husband Keith, and Peter's wife, Marjorie, were the two most reticent people on the street. It was impossible to get a word out of either of them. Anne and I speculated on

the effect were they to swop spouses, if only for a month or two. But Keith dropped dead of a heart attack one morning just outside our house, and cancer had killed Mavis within a year of that. When I last drove past their house it had been bulldozed.

Mad Mary could be a long-distance talker too but she was more a singer. She lived in the house diagonally opposite to us, a very thin woman with the abrupt lively movements of a small bird and a chirrup of a voice to match. Every morning she swept her housefront immaculately, including the small patch of lawn, the pavement and the kerbside. Although she had no car, she built herself an elaborate brick garage with roll-a-door, and a balcony on top from which she could screech malignities down on Cassie and Dick who had lived one door down from her for the past thirty years. I'm not sure of the psychology that makes natural enemies continue to live next door to each other, only that in Mary's case her warfare seemed integral to her wellbeing. The first time we heard her singing was eerie. There came a loud sound of dance-music from within her house, then above this, quite independent of it, a kind of baying. It was horribly, yet magnificently, unrestrained. Half of Queanbeyan must have been able to hear it. Furry animals three miles off on Mount Jerrabomberra must have pricked up their ears each time this caterwaul came to them across the rooftops.

Perhaps I exaggerate, which, on the strength of what five years in Hirst Avenue taught me as a writer, I should have learned not to do. For it was while living and writing here, peeping through the clear windowpanes at Peter going for his twenty-year-old grandsons as if he were their age, at Mary sweeping the previous day's dust from her lawn, that I came to value the given, what I called earlier the vivid, untidy, untransferrable, grain of life itself, and to see, like a host of writers before me, from Lawson to Les Murray, that writing about experience required something of untidiness and immediacy in order to capture a sense of The Given in all its integrity.

I can describe my third street quite easily because, as you will see, it proceeds from a monomania. This street will run beside a bay or an estuary and at one end it will curve around the small sheltering hill to have a prospect of the open sea. If this location reminds you a little of *Sylvania Waters*, it should also remind you of the kind of location favoured by the

earliest human communities, and the psychologist Jung's dictum that to live beside water is to be in the presence of the potent unconscious.

The surface of this street will be neither bitumen nor concrete slab, but mixed red, white and black granite cobbles arranged in fan-like mosaics, endlessly intriguing in their abstract patterning. The prevailing climate will be mid-coast New South Wales, and the most frequently heard language, though certainly not the only one, will be laconic Australian English.

On the estuary side of the street there will be a system of wooden wharves built on massive timber piles and diagonals, between which children will clamber and shriek and the clear green harbourwater will lap and sidle day and night in a continuous under-music. The planks of the wharves will be silver with age and will radiate the warmth of the sun to one's bare feet.

Here comes the monomania. Alongside these wharves will be a variety of wooden sailing craft, all of which will still be loosely in commission as coastal traders or fishing vessels. I insist that at least one of these ships be a three-masted veteran of the nineteenth-century China-tea trade because I think these lovely craft represent a high point, not only of maritime architecture, but architecture generally. Naturally its varnished teak, its gleaming brasswork, its lofty royal yards, will be visible from the window of my library. The other boats will consist of a motley of topsail schooners, spritsail barges, brigantines and yawls, all with their gigs and jolly boats bobbing below them at the end of their painters. As I say, monomania.

Life on this notional street will consist of days lovingly absorbed in little tasks of boatwork. When you come looking for me you will find me ankle deep in yellow shavings as I plane a stunsail boom down to size, or sitting on a stool putting the finishing touches to a backsplice at the hauling end of a jib halyard. To call this a form of work would be as wrong as to call it a form of play. It is a blissful synthesis of the two and an expression of love for the beautiful materials of timber, bronze, hemp and canvas that I and my companions, male and female of course, will be working with. Not that literary conversation will be lacking. For instance, 'Is Hamlet a medieval devil-figure, or what,' I will ask Bill, indicating at the same time for him to pass me the whipping twine. Bill, whose other name is Shakespeare, will put down his marlin spike and pass me the whipping twine before replying with a shrug, 'Dunno. Whatever you reckon.' Alternatively the conversation might turn political as I call out to

one of the loafers on the wharf, a fellow named Paul who manages a small music troupe. 'Hey, this is the Intercession we had to have, eh?' 'Too right!' will be Paul's cheerful response.

On the other side of the street to this cluster of wooden ships will be the buildings. These will be mostly residential, whitewashed, built with the intrigue and haphazard of corraline structures rather than more formal architecture. Their windows will combine seventeenth-century mullions with the late twentieth-century skylighting techniques that allow the sun to find its way into a room in shafts of light that seem always slightly unexpected. On the outside they will be interspersed by narrow, whitewashed alleys leading past walled gardens to other streets and further labyrinthine passages. Behind this pattern of streets there will be a broad, fertile plain crossed by meandering tributaries of our estuary, and the occupation of the people of this plain will be mixed agriculture, orchards, cereal crops and dairy. Like the loafers and potterers on the wharf, the work of these farmers will also be a kind of play and an expression of the love of human involvement with phenomena.

Some phenomena. Other phenomena will have vanished. For example, there will be no chainsaws. Such pruning of trees as needs to be done will use either a billhook from a Thomas Hardy novel, or a noiseless laser-saw from some future technology. Beyond the paddocks are mountains, volcanic in profile, the same blue as the sea in colour.

My notional street, as you can readily see, suffers from two problems. Firstly, it is, perhaps cloyingly, nostalgic. I have no excuse for this other than to say that however tawdry it sometimes is, nostalgia, or fondness for the artefacts and values of a vanished time, is one of the expressions of human love and I'm happy to indulge this in an age that has turned *The Sneer* into a deviously and relentlessly promoted poetry.

The second problem is that my notional street is a stage-set, or perhaps an unwitting rehash of some illustration from a children's book that has charmed me. It is essentially static, and for all that a theatre-set or a book illustration may have sometimes filled any of us with a yearning to slip into the idyll they appear to hold out, my notional street can never be lived in while the laws of physics and biochemistry are what they are. Life, to be life, cannot be static.

But my whimsical street can provide a clue by which, as an author I establish the continuity in my experience. Certainly this street is

somewhere in Arcadia, so Derek Rodgers was pointing toward it, and perhaps the Queanbeyan River was flowing toward it. Certainly that hellikin, Janet and her fingernails, have vanished with the chainsaws. But why the sea? Why the monomania for ships? After all, I have never lived beside the sea for any length of time. I have never been a mariner or a boatwright.

This raises the question of how we create and sustain an idyll. My idea is that the idyll, whatever its content, exists in that tension between what is not quite attainable and the imagery of daily life which, in a given individual's disposition, suggests that it might be. Indeed, the essential quality of the idyll is that it should tantalise. Take my experience of the sea. I may never have made my living on or beside it, but I have made intermittent sea-passages, across the Atlantic, across the Mediterranean, across Bass and Cook Straits. And I did a great deal of small boat sailing at one time. Whenever I set foot on a vessel, be it a passenger ferry or a catamaran, feel the slight sway of the deck, involve myself in the gear of ropes and blocks and cleats, and look up at the small spirals the mast is inscribing against the sky, I experience an inexplicable excitement. Sea-going craft are numinous for me.

Then again, I spent six years at a boarding school beside a navigable river and in sight of a village rather similar to the one I have described. I have recorded elsewhere how boarding school existence was an uncompanionable period in my life and I suppose it is possible that the prospect of this village nestled in its bay and with two sprit-sail London barges, their maroon sails furled against their varnished booms, became an image, and then an emblem for escape into a kinder, less self-conscious existence.

But were there already predispositions toward this kind of imagery in my outlook, set down in that file marked 'Not to be opened in the author's lifetime'? My Icelandic grandmother lived at the edge of a fjord in northern Iceland and I visited her there twice in the 1970s, twice in the 1950s including that 1951 visit for which I have no memory traces. Furthermore, my mother, who died a year or so ago, was herself brought up beside a different fjord, one of those deep, narrow inlets of the sea in north-west Iceland in a township that I have never seen but which, barring the climate, was perhaps similar to the one I have described. Perhaps in constructing my ideal street I have described no more than what was

everyday to her. The images of sea, river, and fjord life I have conjured here no doubt assert their obscure pressures on the way I imagine because I can glimpse and desire the *coalescent* nature of existence they offer at the same time as the simple exigencies of life, of streetlife, snatch them away.

Of course the idyll is also fed by a myriad of other images from more recent experience. Behind my notional street I recognise, for instance, various towns and waterways of the New South Wales coast from Nambucca Heads to Narooma, the alleys and cobbles of various towns like Malta's Valetta, Italy's Assisi, England's Falmouth and Clovelly, that I have visited. Then again, there are colour photos in the brochures of the skylight firm that recently put three skylights into my home in Canberra, the ship models I have made that adorn this home, the view of the dairy country and the distant mountains that I love behind Moruya, and a mishmash of imagery that reacts to the set of chemical conditions I call my character.

Well, I began with a street that curved downhill and which did not disclose what lay around the bend, and I have arrived in the world of idyll where all wishes are granted. So it is appropriate if I end by telling you what the child on the tricycle would have seen around that original bend. It would have been, of course, my notional street with its wharves and its jumble of gaily painted masts and wooden hulls. The wharves and the street would have been alive with all the untidy incidents and characters of daily experience, framed by the restless ocean on one side, and the impassive mountain ranges on the other. The fluid given, and the stable archetypes in perfect accord. And, despite the fact it would bear no physical resemblance to its namesake, it would be called Joel Street.

About the Author

Born in London in 1949 of British-Icelandic parents, Alan Gould lived in England, Ireland, Iceland, Germany and Singapore before coming to Australia in 1966. He has been a poetry reviewer for *Nation Review*, *Poetry Australia* and other magazines, and was a founding editor of both *Canberra Poetry* and the Open Door Press in Canberra. In 1991 he was appointed the first Poetry Editor of the National Library of Australia's quarterly journal, *Voices*.

He has had various short-term employments including those of nuclear physics technician, agricultural labourer, and relief teacher, but since 1975 has written as full-time as resources will allow. He has been a writer-in-residence at the Australian National University, the Australian Defence Forces Academy, the Geelong College, and in Lincoln, UK. He has remained living in the Canberra and Queanbeyan region since his arrival in Australia.

Alan Gould has published eight books of poetry and three books of fiction. His third book of poems, *Astral Sea*, won the 1981 New South Wales Premier's Prize for Poetry. His first novel, *The Man Who Stayed Below*, received the Foundation of Australian Literary Studies award for Best Australian Book of 1985, while his novel, *To the Burning City* was shortlisted for the 1992 Miles Franklin Prize, and won the 1992 National Book Council's Banjo Award for Fiction.

'...a real storyteller...his writing is rich, direct and rhythmic.'
Robin Lucas, *Sydney Morning Herald*

Also by Alan Gould

Poetry

The Skald Mosaic: A Sequence of Poems (Canberra: Open Door Press, 1975)

Icelandic Solitaries (St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1978)

Astral Sea: Poems (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981)

The Pausing of the Hours (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984)

The Twofold Place (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1986)

Years Found In Likeness (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1988)

Formerlight: Selected Poems (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1992)

Momentum (Port Melbourne, Vic.: William Heinemann Australia, 1992)

Fiction

The Man Who Stayed Below (Sydney, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1984)

The Enduring Disguises: Three Novellas (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1988)

To the Burning City (Port Melbourne, Vic.: William Heinemann Australia, 1991)

Other Works

Arteries In Stone: A Collection of Landscape Verse, special edition, edited by Alan Gould [et al.] (Canberra: Canberra Poetry, ANU, 1976)

I, edited by Alan Gould and Lyndon Shea (Canberra: ANU Poetry Society, 1973)

Within the Hill: A Collection of Erotic Verse, special edition, edited by Alan Gould [et al.] (Canberra: ANU Poetry Society, 1975)

Trawlermen, limited edition in broadsheet (Canberra: Open Door Press, 1975)

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