



## **Rediscovering Anne Elder, Poet and Dancer**

Compiled by Catherine Elder, *The Bright and the Cold: Selected Poems of Anne Elder*.

Gardenvale: Lauranton Books, 2018.

Julia Hamer, *The Heart's Ground: A Life of Anne Elder*.

Gardenvale: Lauranton Books, 2018.

## **Reviewed by Michelle Concetta Borzi**

*The Bright and the Cold: Selected Poems of Anne Elder* compiled by Catherine Elder and *The Heart's Ground: A Life of Anne Elder* by Julia Hamer are companion books in their representation of the oeuvre and life of a poet whose literary career began in the mid-1950s

and subsequently produced two collections: *For the Record* in 1972 and *Crazy Woman and Other Poems*, posthumously in 1976. Anne Elder's name is well known, synonymous as it is with the prestigious annual award for the first book of poetry published in Australia, an award inaugurated by her husband John Elder following her death. While each of Elder's individual books received a few critical reviews, her full oeuvre has had minimal critical attention. Her books have long been out of print and this in itself will have limited her readership. Catherine Elder writes in her "Preface" that the concurrent publication in 2018 of a biography and the *Selected*, marks two milestones: the 100th anniversary of her mother's birth and the 40th year of the Anne Elder Poetry Award.

Catherine Elder refers to "the various registers of Anne Elder's strong, distinctive voice, and her emotional range" (xii) as her guide in choosing poems for the *Selected*. Reviewers of Elder's two books have also commented on her "distinctive voice." Graham Rowlands wrote in his 1977 article "Anne Elder: Poet", published in *Overland*, that Elder was an "excellent" performer of her own work: "No one who heard her read at her best ... can forget the experience: her almost hypnotic presence, her voice-enactment of each poem" (21). Rowlands draws attention to her speaking voice, but two other reviewers have referred further to a perceptible tone in the poetry itself. David Martin wrote in his 1972 review of *For the Record* that "her range is too wide and her voice too individual for simplified judgments" (23). Philip Martin made a similar general statement in his 1977 review of *Crazy Woman and Other Poems*: "whether a poem is amusing or sombre or both, she speaks with a particular accent, unmistakable" (23). Those reviewers have recognised something about Elder's style that draws readers in, but they don't say what it is. Reading Elder now, there is certainly a distinctive note through all of the personas crafted on the page and this is worth exploring.

Here, for instance, is the middle stanza of "Triad":

A tune  
of rain fell where in the hour of dawn  
past rain had strung a frozen scale of breves  
across bare staves of branches. A bird  
like a last torn leaf against the sky  
from the slung cordons of the climbing rose

flew down and scratched for seed.

One wintry cry  
piped from its throat; staccato feet  
stabbed a gavotte. Then, spinet-thin,  
came chords  
from somewhere down the muffled street  
and someone lonely touched the chords again  
in an empty room, pianissimo. (4)

Elder's poetry is able to sustain long breaths of thought and imagery over a number of lines, often driven by layer upon layer of ornate facets of observation. One of the techniques used to power the expansive movement through this typical stanza is the stressed beat on the last word of each line, superbly done. The perceiving self in those lines is devoted to observing the natural world, not only to record it clearly, but to imaginatively transform it in ways that enable us to think about the part that rhythm plays in the imagination. Also distinctive of Elder's rhythm is her frequent placement of two or more lengthened stresses together: "rain fell where", "bare staves", "last torn leaf." It is hard to read this poem quickly. This is an effect not only of rhythm itself but of the attention to which precisions of rhythm refer us. Rhythm in Elder's poetry is as much psychological as it is bodily. She understood how exacting the art of free verse is, just as she understood the specific discipline of ballet, as a professional dancer with the classical Borovansky Ballet up to the mid-1940s.

Julia Hamer locates the late 1940s or early 1950s as the time when Elder turned to writing poetry, about the same time that she gave up dancing to start a family. Her first publications began appearing in literary journals from the mid-1950s. Hamer also recorded that Elder joined a writing class in the early 1960s (Judith Wright and Bruce Dawe were her tutors) where she was encouraged to write verse in metre. Elder might already have learned metrical craft around the same time as a number of her female contemporaries who were writing and publishing books from the late 1940s: Judith Wright, Gwen Harwood and Rosemary Dobson; and including significant women writers who are now a little less known: Nan McDonald, Nancy Keesing and Dorothy Auchterlonie. Judith Wright included some free

verse poems in her first book, *The Moving Image* (1946). Elder turned to writing predominantly in free verse in the poems published in *Crazy Woman and Other Poems*.

“Journey to the North” from *For the Record* shows Elder’s dexterity with metrical lines: a Pindaric mix of strict pentameter, tetrameter, trimeter and dimeter lines, irregularly placed and rhymed, the varying lengths playfully energetic. Here are the first three stanzas:

Vagrant sea ranging up from Antarctica  
scoops at our southern capes with bold  
blue polar paws: and as the cold  
sea hungers sharply for Australia  
southerners hanker for the restive breath  
of air that badgers them from birth to death.

But now we have come to the North to warm  
our wintry humours. Confounded by the calm  
smiling mouths of the noble rivers  
that deign to feed the ocean on this coast  
we move in blazing dream as though we lost  
our senses on the border. Distance severs  
the heart from its cool soil, and colour  
jigging on light builds up in belly and eye  
the indefinable yawning dolour  
of travellers. We do not believe in winter Dry  
or in the latticed unsubstantial homes  
of men who work this land offhandedly  
and squat in the shade of palms to boil their tea.

Unhinged by idleness we chant the names  
and cross the creeks:

Halfway and Sandy,  
Ironbark, Black Adder, Kangy,

Cold Tea, Ghinni-ghinni, Swan . . .  
meaningless magic spelled and gone:  
or briefly loved for euphony  
when Windy Dropdown Creek went dropping down  
to river or sea who cares, a dribble of tone  
channelled by ear to the pool of memory. (2)

Elder's language is bardic and colloquial. The poem evolves as a travelogue through an Australian landscape: a collage of external images and road-trip exchanges are encountered, mediated and articulated. One might say this poem is a reminder of language as ceremony, delivered with a jaunty toughness.

The poems in *For the Record* were written on the cusp of a period that roughly coincides with the emergence of dailyness as a fitting subject for poetry in English. The shift was international and for many poets, though not all, it had a link to the renewed interest in free verse around the same time. Poets as different from one another as Philip Larkin, Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, Richard Wilbur, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton – and Robert Lowell from *Life Studies* onward – were placing more of their poems within an observation of immediate, often ordinary, particulars. The concerted turn to an unselfconscious vernacular around the late 1950s (a decade or so later in Australia) culminated in a greater improvisation with form and an opening up of subject matter to experiences and details from everyday life. Donald Hall's 1962 anthology *Contemporary American Poetry* catches the zeitgeist of this shift amongst a post-war generation of American poets. In his "Introduction," Hall puts it thus:

It is the poetry of a man in the world, responding to what he sees: with disgust, with pleasure, in rant and in meditation. Naturally, this colloquial direction makes much of accuracy, of honest speech. 'Getting the tone right' is the poet's endeavour, not 'turning that metaphor neatly', or 'inventing a new stanza.' Conversely, when it fails most commonly, it fails because the emotion does not sound true. (30)

Donald Allen and Robert Creeley edited another influential anthology, *The New Writing in the USA* (1967), with Creeley writing in his "Introduction" that poets had turned to "the particulars of their own experience, the literal *things* of an immediate environment" (18).

Elder's "Farmer Goes Berserk" is a remarkable example. It is urgent and immediate in its daily setting – a chilling narrative of migration, hardship, and domestic violence. The narrative is difficult to excerpt. Here is the full poem:

Perhaps she said, lively at first but once  
too often in that softly stubborn voice:  
'What kind of a country d'ye call this!' – or  
'Pity I can't send for a wee drop of rain  
from Home' – and that would be Ballachulish  
on Loch Lynne (for the nine hundredth time).  
Here, water is khaki and each day a battle  
with mouths. Seven, born quick as roses but grown  
slowly insupportable with their throats  
and itches and grizzles. Two farmed out  
(a shame, that) and one in a home,  
returned maybe for Christmas and Easter  
a frightfully quiet stranger. They kept,  
just, the four little girls.

Would that be enough?

Rain at last, too much; the spuds  
to be got in, tractor on the blink, more  
work than feasible for one man with fear  
waiting in unopened bills and no rest.  
No rest ever from her soft worrying tongue  
and that ultimate gnawed bone, no rest within  
except in the grog (money ill spent) but oh  
the beautiful glad spurt of the grog  
so that he said  
'Shut your trap, woman!' Astoundingly.  
With the rabbiting gun. And she slumped  
open-mouthed all over the bed and then



topics of family and domestic life in her poetry, and reading the *Selected* and biography together, it is evident she took some inspiration from her personal life. Poems such as “On Leaving a House”, “To a Girl Sleeping”, “Pippit: The Death of a Fledgling”, “For Bracken, An Irish Setter”, “Forgive Me, David” and “At Ballindean” show a variety of life moods and experiences. However, as a poet, Elder strives for an impersonal voice that is beyond personal. She might possibly have read A.D. Hope’s essay “The Sincerity of Poetry”, published in *The Cave and the Spring: Essay on Poetry* (1965), an important book in its time. Here is Hope on impersonality:

What seems peculiar to poetry among other arts is the constant tendency to take poems as confessions, to regard them as parts of the poet’s autobiography. ... It is hard for most readers to distinguish the poem from the poet, no matter what his subject may be. What the poem says is apt to be taken by general readers and professional critics alike for what the poet thinks or feels. (69–70)

In Elder’s case, I would argue that her poetic involves transmuting personal memories and observations, foregrounding language in rhythm, invention and her own distinctive style. Take the opening stanza of “One Foot in the Door”, for instance:

During the Depression my grandmother  
was plagued in her daft heart  
by processions of hawkers. Supporting  
a wry neck on two fingers she nodded  
compulsively to tales of a little woman  
and kids unlimited; bought from them  
bootlaces, talc and Pears Soap galore  
out of the soft purse of her own reduced circumstances.

Her stocks increased, unused. I store  
the days and years like that, supporting  
myself during the depressions  
with two fingers on an Olivetti and pitiless poems. (82)

There may be a convergence here between biography and art, but that link is inherently unreliable. Those lines come near, and then veer away from a precipice of personal

revelation through the re-imagining of a story that might or might not be part of family folklore. That stanza is compelling for its portrayal of a writer who wants to be seen as taking risks: “pitiless poems” comes with a powerful double entendre. Elder’s interest is not in flaunting personal “niceness” in her poetry. Rather, her poems are often dark and, her voice occasionally intractable. Rowlands refers in his *Overland* article to a “strong strain of emotional violence in Elder’s poetry” (24).

“School Cadets,” for instance, has a rebellious tone, its first two stanzas blisteringly so in their caricature of school staff and officials at a school fete. And then in the final two stanzas, the school band:

‘Excuse me – excuse me’ – the mothers are shoving  
like hooligans. There he is! The short one, third  
from the right, sloped in the tango embrace  
of the great spiralled horn. Impossible to separate  
that agonising familiar forlorn  
lowing, practised in bathrooms on holiday.

He is pitiful  
as a babe in python coils, they are pitiful  
all of them, they are terrible  
as Kings in Babylon. The hateful nations  
inhabit their slight frames, the future leers  
desirous on their wavering formations.  
Earnestly they are inflated, diminished . . . and *away* . . . (59)

Elder’s satire can quickly turn to mockery. When thinking about how elegant her poetry is, it is stanzas like this where we need to ask whether the voice is as unkind as it seems to be. There is certainly no timidity of feelings or opinions. The thing about Elder’s poetry is that the detail is always so good, but when you read the whole poem, it turns out not to be about the detail at all. Take “Save the Last Dance”, for example. It begins with a thoughtful reverie, prompted by music, but threaded through the poem is a terrible knowledge of nothingness. The penultimate stanza has a blend of wry satire and anguish:

Shall we ever  
be split from the tunes? At the party  
to end all parties, the Big Surprise Conflagration  
that everyone pretended not to know was planned  
won't there be just two atoms with the courage  
to pair up by accident you know, first sight you could say  
give a hitch, and, tentative at first, glide, gathering hazy  
momentum, gyrating, out on that awful blank space  
for a waltz? (6)

This is characteristic of Elder's roguish style, and yet the poet's voice also takes on a suggestive musical quality in its imploring tone. Amidst the elegance and craft, those last two lines express despair.

"Frustration" from *Crazy Woman and Other Poems* is not in the *Selected*, but in view of what we are told in Hamer's biography about the prominence that Elder placed on her need to write, it is an important poem. It has lightness in its spirited rendering of the desire to write while navigating domestic expectations. This poem also is hard to excerpt. To give a sense of its vigour and changes in tempo and cadence, here are all five stanzas:

Last night I read of ceremonies in Bengal  
offered at change of season, festival,  
marriage, child-naming, welcome to a guest:  
of how a thin paste of rice is pressed  
with the tip of a little finger, the twist of a hand,  
in courtyards, at entrances; as we might lightly stand  
a vase. It is a patterning drawn from the mind  
freely, of creepers, ducks on a pond, the wind  
blowing petals. *Alpona*, a feminine art  
handed from woman to woman,  
spoke soft to my housebound heart:  
There if you like is a poem.

I am afflicted by such promptings, they come  
in the mail and spread in me. I ate a poem  
for breakfast; a delectable invitation  
that rightly presumes I am biddable to an Auction  
of Antique Jewels. Importantly,  
Superbly and With Exceptional Clarity  
I shimmer as catalogued. I am going, going,  
gone, far gone in imagination,  
gorging on jargon. And what  
is a Riviere of Emerald Cut Crystals?  
Forgive me a moment while I float  
and glide midstream on syllables,  
bleed at the point of an Amethyst Stickpin,  
write, glib as the snake in a Red-Gold Muff Chain,  
Four rows of Rubies in a Rare Siamese  
Bangle – four rows of words would not appease  
this mess of jewels. And whom have they adorned?  
Who paid the price? And was their beauty earned?

Come, come, there is a house to be kept,  
leaves swept, deaths wept, peas shelled,  
fears quelled, a policeman at the door!  
I am summonsed by diversity. What's more  
and worse, nagged by the half-lost voice  
of worlds that spilt from me when I was young.  
I am old, I am undone, stung  
by all that waste of word, my thought unheard!

Well, I shall badger it, the hour of time,  
to sit down (tomorrow will do) and hammer,  
humour and burnish the old rhyme.

Resolution briefly flares  
and flags. How flat  
are the dead loves resurrected?  
But the bright ones, unborn only wink at me  
from the grey firmament of duty and sobriety  
like cock-eyed stars.  
I walk under them, crying at their innocence  
and homelessness. They are children not my own  
inaccessibly imploring me.  
In the morning they are gone.

To be calm of wrist as the women of Bengal  
and draw my life simply on the house wall:  
to swallow a pearl at breakfast and regurgitate  
wisdom at midnight ... it is late, late,  
later than I think. I must go to bed  
and sleep my sounding head. (*Crazy Woman and Other Poems* 26–27)

“Frustration” is about inspiration and the ability, and inability, to grasp it when it emerges. The first stanza finds inspiration as a charm, the speaker discovering her muse in the creativity of Bengali women, linking their “feminine art” with her own. But a charming poem is an easy contraption and called out as such: “There if you like is a poem. // I am afflicted by such promptings, they come / in the mail and spread in me. I ate a poem / for breakfast.” The poet then parodies the creative process, hamming up an enactment of inspiration that over-reaches – “I am going, going, / gone, far gone in imagination, / gorging on jargon” – the process itself exhilarating and gruelling: “I float / and glide ... bleed.” But that parody is also directed at personal constraints – inspiration thwarted by domestic duty. A resolute voice reemerges – “I shall badger it, the hour of time” – only for that resolve to fade quickly, giving way to “the grey firmament of duty and sobriety” and quiet frustration at losing touch with the muses: “the bright ones, unborn only wink at me.” That line has a perfect, inspired compression. In Elder’s 1956 letter to Jonet Wilkie, her close friend and fellow dancer, she writes: “I get bouts of scribbling which have to give way to other things more often than

not" (189). Paradoxically, in "Frustration", the poet has turned the enactment of inspiration and un-inspiration into a very lively poem.

Hamer's biography explores Elder's openness "to the tag of 'housewife poet'" (289). It was an identification she fully accepted and owned. Intriguingly, she expressed strong disapproval of the feminist movement and of Lesbianism. After submitting three poems – "Spinsters", "The Baptism" (poems not in the *Selected*) and "At Ballindean" – to Kate Jennings's legendary *Mother I'm Rooted: An Anthology of Australian Women Poets* (1975), she later expressed her discontent with the anthology, describing the young women poets as "unskilled and boring" and the older ones as "bleating away with the utmost banality about 'my children are gone, my life is done'" (274). In the context of what Jennings wanted to achieve, *Mother I'm Rooted* celebrated the unheralded voices and experience of women, allowing them to stand out, the motivation was "feminist in its broad sense." Jennings writes in her "Introduction":

I think the women in this book, most of them writing in isolation, and uncontaminated by trends, fashions and the politics of the poetry world, write because they need and want to express themselves, and they have something to say, in their own voices. No oughts. (No page number)

That description would certainly apply to Elder. While there are some notable omissions from Jennings's anthology – the more established poets, Wright, Harwood, Dobson, Hewett – *Mother I'm Rooted* is anti-traditional, with a pro-female brushing aside of ceremony. Poems were chosen "mainly on the grounds of women writing directly, and honestly." Some of the poetry made a point of being scrappy, but reading that anthology forty years after publication, the *raison d'être* of honesty and rawness is pervasive and lasting. By its iconic nature, *Mother I'm Rooted* retains the freshness it was looking for, and Anne Elder went to it as a woman writer who was fighting for a professional place as an artist.

Elder's objection to being classified as a feminist poet is interesting when her contemporary female poets – Wright in Sydney, Harwood in Brisbane and subsequently Hobart, and Hewett in Perth, apart from a decade or so in Sydney – were consciously making claims as women poets. The question is, what is a feminist work of art in a particular place and time? Hamer writes of Elder's circumstances:

Anne was a child of the 1930s and 1940s in Australia, and a young woman in the 1950s, when women were still constrained in what they could say, do and write. Her circle, until she started to meet other poets, was not intellectual, consisting largely of neighbours and people met at church... She read books, including poetry, with intensity and great pleasure, but slowly and narrowly, chewing things over and remembering well what she read... The expansion came through the poetry. (244)

Wright, Harwood and Hewett were also young women growing up over the same years. But in contrast to Elder, they had an opportunity for university educations. It seems that she did not allow herself to engage with the intellectual feminist debates of her day and in this, she was of her time but not ahead of it. Hamer also offers some perspective on the complexities of Elder as a person: “[Anne] lacked a broad perspective that could have helped her reconcile her powerful and sometimes seemingly contradictory responses to things... In short, she was a mass of passion, rigidity, rebellion, conservatism, guilt, love, and anger” (243–44). Elder has written a number of fine poems – “At Amalfi” (not in the *Selected*), “Nude”, “Two Wives”, “Daphne”, “The Parley” and “The Bright and the Cold” – that implicitly explore the world through a female sensibility. Take “Daphne”:

*After Bernini's Apollo and Daphne in Rome*

She was always plagued by her own breasts  
small as snowberries, each with its crisp  
disproportionate stalk that rasped against  
her tunics in a dialogue that left her  
bereft of small talk. She was thought haughty  
by shepherds, and so she was, believing herself  
specially designed to give pleasure to the great.  
She was qualified to know, listening, smiling  
in secret to that debate so close to her heart.

I see that Bernini has caught her out

at the moment when the smile turned to terror.  
Poor silly, how could she guess that the godlike  
lover would be death when all she felt  
was the hands of the Sun stroking? To be struck  
so, to be rooted into the very ground! A chisel  
shapes her cold cry in the Villa Borghese.

Slight marble girl, you stand  
arrested on one toe, your fingers  
changing to leaves at the moment I saw you  
first and for all my life in the Villa Borghese. (60)

With its tactile imagery and its quiet, sensual fury, “Daphne” is undeniably feminist. The poet’s gaze throughout is on the vulnerability of the teenage girl from Greek mythology. Bernini’s marble sculpture of Apollo in pursuit of Daphne captures the moment of her transformation into a laurel tree by her father, a river god, to save her from rape. The poem’s quick turns of imagination involve several stages of metamorphoses and eons of time: from the young sensual woman of Greek myth in the first stanza to beginning to immobilise her in the second, to Bernini the Renaissance artist at work in the third capturing the very moment in marble, to the poet centuries later in the fourth, standing in the Villa Borghese imagining the artist chiselling the stone sculptured figure and, decades later, to readers hearing Elder’s voice in the poem observing Daphne in the same moment “arrested on one toe... changing to leaves.” The third stanza takes up a striking interplay between the poet’s voice on the page, the female body of Daphne and the hand of the sculptor, bearing a challenge to any notion of Daphne as object. She is imagined instead as a breathing subject: “the secret / smile that borders on madness, the self to the self.” In that phrase, the poet and Daphne seem indistinguishable.

We are told in Hamer’s biography that Elder experienced periods of self-doubt as a writer. In her 1956 letter to Wilkie, early in her career, she writes:

writing verses is something which can still provide satisfaction almost to one’s dying  
breath. It is something I have been puddling away at all my life, but only lately have

grown confident enough to post them off. I still get lots of knock-backs & don't suppose I will ever get very far as I'm too simple minded & about 20 years behind the times as to style. (189)

This motif reappears in another letter to Wilkie, written in the late 1960s: "I still have doubts where I don't think any of it is any good" (247). It is interesting that Elder considered her poetry to be "behind the times as to style." She kept herself at a distance from poetic movements of her day (290) and we can only speculate about which of her contemporaries she read and who her wider literary influences were. I made some points earlier about the style and bearing of a number of poets who were her contemporaries, here and abroad, whose work went through changes similar to hers. That may be as much a matter of zeitgeist as of individual influences. Hamer's biography gives a few details: an affinity with Emily Bronte, as "At Haworth" suggests; and through correspondence and family recollections, we learn that Elder read Bruce Dawe, Ted Hughes, Katherine Mansfield and a few American authors. A few clues emerge from my own reading of her poetry: "To Stevie Smith: A Letter Across the Sea" suggests at a reverence for that marvellous, mischievous poet; "Missing" mentions "Dante and many poets" (78); and a quotation from Rilke is included as an epigraph in *For the Record*. Returning to style, Hamer also speculates about whether Elder's poetry has "suffered undeserved neglect" or whether it "has become dated in some way" (291), but she does not explore that question. *The Heart's Ground: A Life of Anne Elder* is not intended to be a critical biography. That book on Elder's oeuvre is still to be written. The issue of style has to depend on the response from readers. What does "dated" mean? Is Judith Wright dated? Is Frank O'Hara? Or Sylvia Plath? Those poets are of their time, but their poetry is not dated. Elder's poetry doesn't always catch on in the first reading. It requires readers to stay with it and to read it again and even again, as most seriously-written poetry does. The more I read her poetry, the more I feel attuned to the robustness of her personal voice, which seems to continually assert an identification with a succession of poetic personas.

Hamer provides an insight into how highly sensitive Elder was, in relation to the criticism of her writing: the words of "some critics" produced feelings of hurt and rage, and later, rejection from publishers would "send her into a frenzy." "She was prone to panic in crises" (166). Elder's sensitivities about her poetry extended to her family, as Catherine Elder

explains: “It was threatening being asked to comment on her poetry, because it was so important to her and also we didn’t know what the right answer was” (181). Private family anecdotes feature strongly in the biography. It is as much a familial history, beginning with the poet’s grandparents, as it is an illumination of the intensities of the poet herself in relation to her creative life. We are also given details of Elder’s private struggles with her physical and psychological health:

Anne suffered various forms of physical discomfort for most of her life; in addition the range of her emotions was enormous, from ecstasy and deep domestic happiness to huge rages and desperate unhappiness and guilt, which could morph at times into mental instability. (188–89)

Elder experienced coronary heart attacks, the first in 1969, and was diagnosed later in her life with scleroderma, an auto-immune disease. Hamer also refers to occasional “attacks of paranoia” (291). Elder’s American contemporaries, Berryman, Lowell, Plath and Sexton struggled with mental health but what we get from their writing is not the imitation of mania but the crafted poems that come from it. So too, I would suggest, with Elder’s poetry.

Australian anthologies from the 1980s to the present have featured almost entirely different poems from across her two books. I’ve noted a few here, from an historical perspective. Rodney Hall chose four of Elder’s poems for the *Collins Book of Australian Poetry* (1981). Susan Lever picked three for her landmark, innovative anthology, *The Oxford Book of Australian Women’s Verse* (1995). John Leonard has edited three influential Australian anthologies, with two Elder poems in each book (with one repetition, “The White Spider”): *Contemporary Australian Poetry* (1990), *Australian Verse: An Oxford Anthology* (1998), and *The Punter & Wattman Anthology of Australian Poetry* (2009). Geoffrey Lehmann and Robert Gray featured three poems in their wide-ranging, lengthy anthology, *Australian Poetry since 1788* (2011). Some other anthologies have not included her poetry at all, among them John Kinsella’s *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* (2009).

Of the fifteen Elder poems included in those anthologies, six are not in *The Bright and the Cold: Selected Poems of Anne Elder* – “Horse and Mare”, “At Amalfi”, “Carried Away”, “Singers of Renown”, “Spinsters” and “The Baptism.” Each of those poems is as good as those in the *Selected* and it would have been rewarding for readers to be introduced to

them. The *Selected* is divided into three parts, with Parts I and II featuring twenty-six poems from *For the Record* and twenty-seven from *Crazy Woman and Other Poems* respectively. Part III is a collection of eighteen poems that were either unpublished during Elder's lifetime or the publication details are unknown, along with poems published in journals and newspapers and from a chapbook, *Small Clay Birds* (1988), compiled by Lynette Wilson. *The Bright and the Cold* is a start, but a full scholarly edited collection of her two books and a generous selection from her further poetry would allow for a broader meditation on her poetry. The matter of Elder's stature is not settled. But we know that. I think the last word should be hers. Here is the delightful "Singers of Renown":

I listen each week to the discs  
on radio, superlative voices  
busting their boilers to bring us  
nostalgia. Being a woman, it is the tenors  
and baritones who afford me  
most mellifluous pain  
at the heart. Standing tonight at the door  
I look over evening fields and listen  
to someone's immortal heartache.

What more  
can I do but watch an eagle wheeling  
into night and write  
this dry little verse, collapsing  
the whole sexuality of men and women  
via the voice into one ragged stanza.

Still, it is done, and I can go to the kitchen  
having loved my little bit with a pen  
and unaccompanied. Catharsis  
makes bearable the frying of brains.  
I thank you,

plump amorous tenor, I thank you  
with tender stewed plums.

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