

## **Returning The Angles, a text by Hazel Smith.**

I closed the door upon the guests and sat down. I had enjoyed the party but it's bliss when everyone leaves. I turned some music on and lay on the floor and listened. But there was a knock on the door: it was one of the guests. He said he'd left his jacket, I hadn't noticed it, but we found it slung over the back of a chair. It was strange that he was the one to return, I'd been looking at him all evening. He seemed familiar, even his shirt I thought I'd seen before. He turned as if to go, but I wanted him to stay so I invited him to have a coffee. He was shy but started to relax, we chatted and laughed about this and that, but I still couldn't remember who he was. And I didn't like to ask him, because maybe we never had met. After a while the conversation started to lapse, and we both rose for him to leave. But then, suddenly, effortlessly, and in a way that seemed utterly appropriate, he picked me up and swung me through the air, looping and turning me, looping and turning me towards the ceiling, towards the walls, towards the floor, sliding me past his face and the sweet smell of breath. Looping and turning, he swung me through a million different angles.

Do we have to map out the piece before we start? I hate maps and diagrams and schedules. I like to find the piece as I go, making clearings in the undergrowth.

Dear Anne

Just a quickie--hope you got my last email. Our flat is in Woburn Square on the edge of Bloomsbury. We are working hard but playing hard too: it's quite a treat. We walk every night to the South Bank past Leicester Square and Covent Garden, visiting our old haunts. I just love the Brits in their overcoats sitting in outdoor cafes! But the light is so dull. I'm longing for Sydney sunshine.

Everything is familiar but different, and everyone is a little greyer. We went back to the house where we used to live. My father gave us money towards it when he came round to our marriage. But they've pulled it down and put up evil-looking flats. And yes! everything has its price: they even charge you now for using the library.

Helen Simons, I believe that in 1996 you returned to England for a four month sojourn. So how did you find England?

And how do you feel about returning to Sydney?

Oh come on, that's not a straight answer.

And don't you?

the hard city lives in diagrams, maps  
but the soft city snakes its way round our wills  
made of tissue, froth and bubbles  
its music and mirrors drape round us

the hard city is made of corners and squares  
but the soft city swings and sails through our thoughts  
and the hard city sometimes dissolves into bends  
while the soft city moves the hard city's parks

An Angle-one of a West Germanic people that migrated from Schleswig to Britain in the 5th century AD and hunted the kingdoms of East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria. As early as the 6th century their name was extended to all the German inhabitants of Britain.

One thing I do know. It's not hip to be British in Australia.

Ladies and Gentleman --thank you for returning to the scene of the crime and the changing face of Britain. Today I'll be talking about New Labour, poetry, and huntin' and fishin'. Have you noticed how difficult it is to find places these days? It's all part of socialism's latest phase. Everyone is in love with themselves but hates each other. That's very efficient, but we mustn't let things get out of hand. Babies are being kept in the womb—a dangerous precedent. Soon people will be digging their own graves and writing without referents. We have to map the subject without losing the soul. But we manage our revolutions quietly and are very good at toilet humour.

Knowledge always breaks its own neck or gets you on the rebound. I suppose you think that the Angles were East German? Heed what Margaret Thatcher said, "The lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed". Look at them still singing Rule Britannia in Hong Kong! The colonies wouldn't have *The Good Loo Guide* without imperialism. And finally, the most important questions. Can you fall off if you sit on the fence? Am I screwing your position?

Prior to their arrival in Britain in the fourth century the Angles and Saxons were continuously on the move, and therefore became more homogeneous. Anglo-Saxon society was complex and hierarchical, made up of noblemen, commoners, freemen and slaves. A man's social position was defined by his wergild or man-tax, the fine payable if he was killed. And women in Anglo-Saxon Britain had more freedom than you might expect. A prospective husband had to pay a *morgengifu*, meaning a morning-gift. This could be a very substantial amount in money and land, and it was paid not to the father or kin, but to the woman herself. Women were therefore sometimes considerable

landowners in their own right. And in the family good relations sometimes superseded paternal or fraternal authority.

Dear Anne

We went to the manor at Cowley yesterday, it belonged to James Horlick of the famous bedtime drink. The upper crust are still hunting and shooting, and generally carrying on as if time had stood still. But there is something about Britain I really like: the bracing cold and the essential decency of people. The all-pervasive hospitality, we are continually being invited out to dinner.

I've lived in London most of my life but I still don't know my way around. It's partly because you never really walk anywhere, you just go underground, though these days I find the tube claustrophobic, packed with people. It's good to be seeing so much of my sister, though, now the kids have grown up. Our views of the past used to be diametrically opposed. But she is reversing hers, and I am reversing mine, and they are merging somewhere in the middle.

Sorry to hear about trouble at home. Is the wick running low on Mabo?

the sisters peel away guilt-edged secrets

the sisters skip through the loop of their childhood

the sisters hang their past on a lifeline

the echoes are bouncing back truth and error

the shadows exchange their rewritten stories

the mirrors merge between dying and birth

as sisterhood melts into musical memories

News, like memory, is always contorted because journalists have

to get an angle on a story. They can't tell the story straight. They have to bend it, turn it inside out, look at it sideways, until they find a way to seduce their readers. And yet the angle is always sliding.

**Good evening. Tonight is our first night of headlines only. They are turning the elderly away from hospitals in droves. Once upon a time Harold Wilson plotted to kill Idi Amin and nuclear fires blazed underground. There are more starving people in Britain now than at any other time, but it's a case of who cares not who's accountable. The cricket grounds at Headingley have passed away. Multi-national corporations are taking to the tropics and shares are careering up and down the market. So everyone is trying to figure out who and what the other is, and why Harold Pinter based everything on the concept of betrayal. But watch out, they are stalking the stalkers and the juveniles are striking out: a father sent to jail for smacking.**

Dear Anne

I met John in Dillons among the feminist theory. We chatted and reminisced, though it was funny what he remembered, not things that I thought at all important. In fact, I felt slightly awkward, wondering what he would bring up next. He asked me in what ways I thought England had changed, and I made the usual comments: more poverty, more muggings, more commerce, more tourist attractions, more African-Caribbeans serving in the supermarkets. But it's all just words that people want to hear. The things I really need to say cower like objects in the corners of a darkened room.

Do you remember the story years ago about the woman who got lost in the jungle? She had longed to go there and then couldn't find her way out. She stayed in the jungle for over twenty years until she was eventually found. She

had a husband, children and a job, but she couldn't get back to them. Twenty years alone with only the sun's heartbeat, the rustle of thought, and the squawking of birds and trees.

In Anglo-Saxon England there was much more woodland than there is now. The great forest, the Weald, stretched for hundreds of miles. Communications were difficult, slow and dangerous. Settlements were isolated and largely self-subsistent.

Until recently Romano-British agricultural practices were thought to have been radically different from Anglo-Saxon ones. The Romans were supposedly concentrated in the highlands, and the Anglo-Saxons preferred to settle in river valleys. But now it is believed that both Romans and Anglo Saxons were attracted to the valleys for cereal cultivation.

### *Fellow Australians*

*I have just returned from England, now live in Australia, have Jewish Lithuanian grandparents, but lived most of my life in Britain. Must I be crucified with the colonials?*

**A few days after I came back to Sydney I met an angel: he sat down opposite me in a cafe and ordered cappuccino and chocolate cheesecake. I could tell he was an angel from his florescent halo. I didn't open my mouth, but he seemed ready for a bit of a chat and commiseration. He said, although I can travel it's a damn nuisance always having to go back to heaven. It's so British. No sense of exploration, sex on the sly, and dreadfully class ridden. And as for any sense of urgency about anything, well, it's all a case of why do today what you can put off till the next millennium. I'd**

**love to come back here to a bit of rough and tumble. I could sell my wings at the going rate, although really, they aren't much good for anything except flapping about.**

the space of a poem  
is not a room or house or garden  
but revolving planes  
that tilt and cross

a black hole that would  
eat you up  
if you dropped into it

the world is crowded and expands  
but poetry is a space  
where nothing grows  
except sound  
words litter it  
lightly like peelings

**Yes, she said, I remember many things, though not at once or at will: my aunt embarrassing me by saying my stockings looked silly. Sharing my sister's room and bed. The journeys up and down to London feeling sick to the blinding smell of coffee. Our table manners differing from the British. And the**

way my father would never do business with the Germans.

*He had taken her passport away to stop her travelling. She remembered him coming into her room and saying you can't do this, if you do this it will kill all of us, the whole family, and she said I will do this: I will, I will, I will*

*and she did.*

once upon a time

once upon a field

once upon a tree

once upon a time once

upon a sign there was

upon a sound

once when time was hunted

up and down and round about

there was a line beyond

time was spoken, time was written

was a yoke of

time off-track

time for tales  
mined for terror

the sun was out  
you were stunned  
once upon a sign  
there was a fear that you would die  
there was a signal  
you were angry and resigned  
you wrote yourself a time that

once upon a find there was a pun  
when  
time was signed  
there was a time  
you found design

time warp  
sound as time  
time as muddle  
the times were gilded

once upon a pun there was a prism

They were in the room and the windows were barred. They had been locked up for days and now a terrible silence prevailed. Then someone suggested that if they played the last card maybe they could find a means of escape. That way they would play fate at her own game. Each person had to think of an act in their past, something they had done and never told anybody, something of which they were terribly ashamed.

The confessions trickled and then poured. One woman had had a secret lover, another had betrayed a friend. It was all rather banal. But they did not know whether this was really the worst deed, the most unspeakable, or one of many.

Then it was her turn and she knew that the moment had come. She was trembling, and her voice felt as if it did not belong to her body. She said: I carry with me always an idea I caused my father's death. I don't know how or why, but I feel I was to blame. There is no evidence to suggest that this is true. In fact everything points to the contrary. But I know that I can never escape.

Up to that moment everything was unchanged, but then the handle turned and the door opened like a ghost. The space beyond beckoned to them, and they knew that they were free.

**histories rather than history**

**sexualities rather than sexuality**

**masculinities rather than masculinity**

**glissandi rather than fixed pitches**

Anglo-Saxons lived in much closer contact with violence than most of us do now. Punishments included hanging, beheading, stoning, burning, blinding or castration. But the Anglo-Saxons also enjoyed their leisure time. They played board games and indulged in verse riddles, hunting and sword-dancing.

The intervention of gods and demons in their daily lives was taken for granted by the immigrants, but what they believed to happen to them after death remains uncertain.

**I've cut my finger:**

Cut off his head

Cut and paste the text until it delivers.

**Fellow Britons, we have not experienced a serious invasion for a millennium. This can only be regarded as good management, though modesty prevents us from boasting about how we shine. We love monuments, traditions and rituals, anything that means we do not have to think: scholarship too, but only within empirical limits. And black people? Well, we find them acceptable as long as they behave as if they were British.**

Dear Anne

There's a woman here, Diane Blood, who wants to have her dead husband's child—they kept his sperm but they do not have his written permission. She's pointed out she could have an abortion without asking him, but she can't have his child. It's all topsy-turvy and depends on making your pitch, like the euthanasia debate.

I found a book on walk poems with a section about Frank O'Hara. It is 10.30 and I am walking down Tottenham Court Road.

Chris' book is going well and he spends many a happy hour on the internet. But he complains that the library always tries to shut earlier than it said it would.

The TV has deteriorated a lot, nothing to watch. And, of course, there's no radio program like The Listening Room.

You are in the middle of a room, and there is a screen on the two walls adjacent to you. On one screen there is a cage with narrow bars, and a man is trying to push you into it. You are fighting with your fists, your whole body clenched as you feel his weight against you. You will

not let him put you in the cage. You keep pushing him away but you cannot resist him totally, he is too strong. You are neither in nor out. The movie never progresses beyond this point.

On the other screen you are walking in space. You are hanging from a rope and your feet are dangling. You are swinging against the unspeakable blue, gliding past the curve of the earth, round and round in the strong and welcoming silence.

You close your eyes, but you still see the films as clearly as before, simultaneously, on both screens.

Dear Anne

Everything is continuing to go well. We are writing a new piece together. I am writing the words, and Chris the sound, but we exchange ideas like gifts.

Went down to Manchester at the weekend. My father's warehouse looks more and more decrepit since his death, but they are totally rebuilding the area and prices are rising.

We are enjoying London so much that we are thinking of buying a flat here. Then we can travel backwards and forwards like eternal migrants.

she spread out the map and wrapped herself in it  
you kiss the hem of your own failure  
time flows with untimely feelings  
he taps out the keys which spell his own death  
what is a plot you say is plot a story  
she explored her own mountains and caverns and islands  
everything singing and swinging at angles  
a city emerging from mirrors and maps  
a missed beat rocking internal rhythms  
the city a merging and mixing of strangers  
you push yourself in and out of your feelings

you take a train to the edge of your life  
thought as feeling and feeling as thought  
firming the ground but the earth keeps moving  
the place which is nowhere and no-then and not-there

Back in Sydney but not down to earth. A huge pile of paper on my desk. The great plague of the nineties is not AIDS it's administration. Cockroaches and the threat of fires. Land rights and the pastoralists, Mark Atkins playing didgeridoo on CD. I've just discovered Eleanor Dark's novels—but the light is so bright here—Australia's gift. I love walking by the sea at the end of the day when there aren't too many people around. But I'm not too good at climbing and have to slide down slopes on my backside.

Tonight I'm making a low-fat stir fry: dish of the nineties. Chris is scything his way through the internet and composing with a million different computer programs. They may call his music avant-garde, but at the moment he's hooked on writing jungle drum and bass.

to return is never to repeat  
the memories cluster round a key  
becomes a shell becomes a thorn

to return is never to rewind  
the tape will stretch beyond its reach

as voices shift from place to space

to return is always to rejoice regret

as covered pathways hum like ghosts

and footprints decorate your steps

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