

Murray is an internationally acclaimed Australian poet, born in 1938, who grew up on a farm in New South Wales. His poems fuse razor-sharp description with passionate belief in sacredness, poetry and art, and wonderful sudden images, slithering between tenderness (for human beings and the natural world) and rage. His books are dedicated 'to the glory of God'. Stubbornly, unglamorously, the poems identify with nature of all kinds, from landscape and animals to human nature, above all the 'poor white' underclass from which the poet comes. Uncompromising, beautifully crafted, deeply learned and felt, they find (and make) beauty in unexpected places. In dispossession, ungainliness and pain as well as in what surrounds all that: cities, dust, wild fauna. With great moral and poetic authority, his work holds intellectual, social, personal and religious elements all in play at once.

This poem is about the agony of being unclothed (on the beach, when you are fat), and so it clothes itself in classic shape: a SONNET, whose classic proportion of eight lines to six creates a 'waisted' shape. But Murray denies his SONNET a waist and opts for BLOCK FORM – for a poem about not having a waist, about the misery of your own block form.

The first eight lines are physical description with an emotional undertow. The first syllable ricochets through the OCTET: back, fatter, strappy, back. The OCTET's second and second-last lines are the only ones that don't have that short A. Instead they have short E: belch, outstretched. Short I echoes through fifties, wincing, pit, pistol, families; short O in shot and pocket. The OCTET is a sonic maze of pistol shot vowels whose aggression is underscored by sharp consonants like K, T, ST: back, fatter, step: pit edge, waiting, pistol shot, laughter; pocket; hawk, outstretched, point to point, cars, back.

The deliberately unattractive words (belch) lead to a deliberately unattractive commercial image: greening waves cashing themselves into foam like cheques turned into 'greenbacks'. The metaphor (bitter at the lucrative holiday business) is intellectual, but slides makes it physical too. The waves becoming foam are a promise (like a cheque) made real in cash: then the foam slithers back into sea. The change is double: both money and transformation (a 'sea change', as in Ariel's song from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*) from wave to foam and back.

The stop-start rhythm, breaking the line in different places, stresses emotionally key words: back, fifties, fatter; step, sand,

horror; edge, pistol shot (two stresses, dragging the line over the line break), laughter. It gets the stop-start of waves, but also the poet's to and fro of action and feeling summed up in wincing.

Wincing is a TRANSFERRED EPITHET: it really should apply to the speaker, his flinching emotion and body as he approaches the sea, rather than the sea. It describes how he feels as he sees the sea's edge: it is the lip of a pit. Walking here, for him, is wincing. W connects them. Sea edge is pit edge. The beach which should be paradise is hell.

Ocean profits from this hell. The words She turns turn the spotlight from nature on to humanity. Ridicule and Ocean are personified. Ocean, a singular who keeps becoming plural (waves), parallels the ridicule which looks down in contempt: the singular idea turned into plural humanity (faces, families). The singular glare of sun and sea turns to a mocking sea of human eyes.

The poem's first free-flowing line gives an overview of the beach as a hawk's wingspan. Lovely, but in the next line this hawk continues the pursuit suggested in wincing: horror, pistol, averted, glare. The whole beach is hunting the poet.

To an English ear (and Australia too has 'point to points'), the wings' description suggests a race-meeting, adding to the sense of persecutory social gathering. The OCTET's last word rings back to its first. Front and back, the hunted poet is surrounded by surf. The ocean is persecutory commercial society, the beach a predator looking down on him, the sea of cars is more surf. The whole description breathes violence, pursuit and a savage sense of the outsider, a man marked down, marked out. The title bitterly points out that this is what home always was: alienation.

Different SONNETS move differently from OCTET to SESTET. In No. 8, the SESTET develops the OCTET, from sexual suggestiveness at home to sexual experience in a New World. Here, the SESTET is a move from description to reflection. Murray has described himself as a reflective rather than lyric poet, and his main intellectual point here is physical inequality; the way it hurts and how you survive it. But the move from describing to reflecting accompanies another shift: a shift of tone, from personal I to a universal you. Reflecting on where he came from (emotionally, geographically), the poet moves to other people, inviting readers to share the alienation his poem is describing.

New vowels, binding together the SESTET's first two lines, echo a persecuting word in the OCTET: peer, there, bared all pick up glare.

Short vowels echo the OCTET in more openly aggressive words: pistol and ridicule again, kills, killed, crippling. The softer consonants also lead to savagery: the I of still to ridicule, pistol, kills, killed, crippling, towel, still, smiled, play ball; P (peer) to pistol, crippling, play. Both P and L take us back to the OCTET's sharp ST: pistol, gets, spattered, dressed, neatly, still, shut, wet T shirt and (the climax) breasts.

The last three lines give the OCTET's persecution (by glare and hawk) more active menace. Clothed body is a shut mouth, so bared bodies presumably 'bare' their teeth. Relations with other bodies is where injustice bites. Happy bodies pair off as curved mouths smiled to each other (the only hint of sex in an archetypally sexual scene), but ridicule is a pistol, which separates women and men. Smiled recalls ridicule (from Latin *rideo*, I smile): paired bodies smiling superiorly at the fat.

Murray is working towards that lone red (both sunburnt and blushing) boy. When he tries to play ball (join in, join the system, the social gathering), wetness reveals what he cannot bear to bare. Though prepared for harmonically by dressed and wet, the last word breasts is a shock. Dressed or not, those awful breasts are exposed when *wet*. The inequality of bodies will out.

If the OCTET is a chase, the SESTET closes in for the kill (after killed, spattered implies blood), turning ridicule to murder, laughter to slaughter. The victim is both that miserable boy there now, and a revelation of the poet as he was. But the pain packed into these lines reaches out to other people: anybody (and anybody) afraid of 'baring' themselves and their secrets, their breasts, to the outside world.