

Migrant Hostel

Parkes, 1949 -51

No one kept count
Of all the comings and goings –
Arrival of newcomers
In busloads from the station,
Sudden departures from adjoining blocks
That left us wondering
Who would be coming next.

Nationalities sought
Each other out instinctively –
Like a homing pigeon
Circling to get its bearings;
Years and place-names
Recognised by accents,
Partitioned off at night
By memories of hunger and hate.

For over two years
We lived like birds of passage –
Always sensing a change
In the weather:
Unaware of the season
Whose track we would follow.

A barrier at the main gate
Sealed off the highway
From our doorstep –
As it rose and fell like a finger
Pointed in reprimand or shame;
And daily we passed
Underneath or alongside it –
Needing its sanction
To pass in and out of lives
That had only begun
Or were dying.