



THE POETS' STAIRWELL: A Picaresque Novel

ALAN GOULD

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...with scarcely a disruption to her rhythm, a gaunt Indian woman in purple sari voided the contents of her nostril onto her hand then cast the necklace of silvery substance aside. O, Boon was a proper enough schoolboy, instructed in the use of the British handkerchief, and yet the gaunt woman's action lodged in my mind, an image repellent, beautiful, troubling.

laude Boon and Henry Luck, young poets in quest of their muses, cut a swathe through the cultural capitals and byways of Europe and Asia towards the end of the Cold War.

The Poets' Stairwell revitalises the picaresque novel. Vibrant, sensuous and layered, it has a tumble of characters and pranks.

Anarchist puckish Beamish, the Isadora Duncan-like Eva, class warrior, Branca, a libidinous translator of poems with Jelena, her iconoclast daughter, Luc Courlai a jailed French philosopher, Titus the Yankee acrobat who cradles his gun like a baby, Mr Hark a saintly Irish funeral director, Willi a German truck driver versed in Thomas Aquinas and sensible Rhee, Henry's girlfriend—amongst others.

Behind this company lives a virtual one of poets and philosophers from Yeats to Plato, attending as time and place invoke them. Our picaros' adventures allow Alan Gould to discuss poetic inspiration from womb to self-conscious maturity.

The tale of Martha the American plumber will make you cry. There is Sir John Cue the obstetrician who delivers Boon twice across a lifetime to round out the plot. And the meeting with Ted Hughes is not to be missed.

Gould has set himself against accommodation to literary fashion. His courtly voice is one of the loneliest, but most arresting in modern Australian fiction. (Peter Pierce, The Canberra Times)

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