

dishevelled on the ground and rise towards perfection...

Here the poet allows himself the sense of humour he seems so keen to repress elsewhere. True, there is a kind of flipness at work in the titles of some of the poems in the final part ('Lilith Invites the Great Poet Czelaw Milosz into Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*') but this flipness

is cynical rather than glad-hearted. The bardic phantasy of poet-as-mage or 'technician of the sacred' imposes a sombre cast of mind on many of its adherents, and I was left with the feeling that much of what is good in Kinsella is occasionally undermined by an unhealthy seriousness.

Simon Patton is writing a thesis on modern Chinese poetry.

Complex but effective writing

by ROBIN BOWER

GARRY DISHER

Flamingo Gate

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IT IS observant, precise, imaginative writing that makes Garry Disher an acute commentator on events that seem to pass quietly and without notice: 'The evening is full of crouching cats and shadows', 'coins of sunlight pattern the bark chips under the umbrella trees', 'someone has kissed lips of blood to the surface of Mary Jane's thin neck'.

In his latest collection of six short stories and a novella in *Flamingo Gate* he brings together a series of apparently unrelated people in a group of apartments. The link is, however, much more than just the location. Each main character has the same aura of isolation and keen observation about him. Each stands aside from life and yet is unequivocally involved by his own actions. The protagonists are all male, separated from women and sur-

rounded by events that somehow draw them into an involuntary involvement from which the consequences cannot be ignored. Through his use of dark imagery and an atmosphere of suspense, Garry Disher makes his apartment block feel like a war zone — a war between trust and deception. Flamingo Gate represents a city of insecurity and secrets 'waiting for a healing wind'.

In 'Vapour', Reid must learn how his child uses an inhaler to combat her asthma attacks and is an observer, an outsider, to his own daughter's unusual drawings. He describes events just as she draws them; unemotionally and separate. Through her enjoyment of life comes pain. She must be in constant control in order to survive, just as he must control his emotions to protect himself from pain.

In 'Airship', Ross McDonald is not part of Flamingo Gate but is drawn to its inhabitants and creates a mystery by imagining thieves and break-ins. 'Bass notes...like repeated explosions underground' continue at parties throughout the stories — this is the constant beating of a society that exists very differently underneath its surface of urban normality.

'Syndrome' shows us Ross, the owner of a house in which he also becomes an outsider. Sam Drewe grew up in this home and wants to reminisce about the old days to his granddaughter. The old man is the innocent and it is now the young woman who has taken control with her probing questions and judgements of Ross.

One of the more obviously ironic stories has a man recording the traffic infringements of other drivers so that he can report them to the police. He follows that by stealing a book to give to his girlfriend and is finally robbed in his own home. Disher re-

mains subtle and understated in his humour of the hypocrite finally caught.

The novella is the last in the book and incorporates the themes of the outsider wearing a facade of deception and mystery, and that inevitable unconscious involvement that leads this protagonist into dangerous waters. Here is a professional man, Maslen, who traces the steps of a serial killer and eventually predicts the killer's movements enough to discover where the next murder will take place. At the same time, he is a lawyer working to create a smokescreen for HELM Securities, which is poisoning Yarraville. A parallel evolves between the serial killer and the environmental killer. Who should be arrested, axe murderers or murderers of rivers, lakes and mountains? When invited to one of the parties at Flamingo Gate he says: 'I'm not getting involved'. It is only in his obsession with tracking the serial killer that he lets himself become totally involved. The irony is subtle when he tries to disrupt the killer's pattern and finishes by taking on the identity of the killer himself.

Garry Disher's stories are complex and not fully explained. Every word is well planned. A first reading may not be enough and the endings of most stories, even on second reading, may still not be clear. This unpredictability, with images of clarity and vigour, and fastidious attention to detail, make Disher one of Australia's best and most innovative story writers. The journey may be more pleasurable than the destination but, if after one story you're not convinced, stick with him. He will transport you with the delights of his style.

Robin Bower is a Melbourne-based freelance writer and reviewer.

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