

Poland

LEWITT, MARIA. 'What will they say?', *Luna*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1976.

4 pages

A social worker recounts her visits to a now unemployed ex-school teacher migrant, Markowitz, whose life was disintegrating in a small derelict house. A distant relationship between the two develops, and a number of rather ineffectual visits are made to the man's house, where he is continually amid papers on his desk. Eventually, the man disappears and a woman explains to the social worker that she has taken the man into her house.

A story which probes the impotency of social workers when confronted by the expertise of non-professional people, and the enormity, but simplicity, of others' needs.

P.B.L.

Russia

LIBERMAN, SERGE. *On firmer shores*. Globe, Fitzroy, 1981.

Liberman is a disciplined master craftsman. Each story appears to be constructed with painstaking care so that it unfolds clearly and purposefully. The form is always the interaction of people, and often there is a forceful depiction of place to supplement the complexity of interaction. Sentences are mulled over and at times symbolism and metaphor are deftly woven through stories which range in construction from simple to intricate.

Each story conveys a sense of Liberman as a meticulous (but not pedantic) urbane, liberal Jewish-Australian doctor, steeped in a tradition of carefully observing and sympathetically engaging with his predominantly conventional middle class 'patients'. His notion of what short stories are about is as conservative as his characters' social roles, yet he prods and needles at a dozen or so of society's pressure points. With outstanding skill, we are taken into his confidence as he exposes the multiple causes of some awful pains. We share the diagnosis, but more often the remedies must be ours. When Liberman proffers a remedy it takes the form of pertinent, but ancient, wisdom.

This concern for defining ancient wisdom in contemporary terms is often explicated in stories in which plausible, even mundane, characters and plots reveal a 'classic' philosophical argument. So we find scientific rationalism pitched against random intervention; the individual free will struggling with

apparently predetermined structures as well as the problem of the meaning of pain.

Most of Liberman's stories move us through an event, or series of events, which are typically urban, middle class, often identifiably Australian in setting, and in about half the cases, identifiably Jewish. The elaborated lives of the characters are focused in the plot, and memories of Auschwitz and the refugee experience are frequently underlying themes.

In addition, Liberman explores reactions to the experience of being treated as the stereotypical Jew. At times he enlivens conventional stereotypes. At other times he explodes such limiting perspectives, though ultimately he draws us back to the idea that despite personal and family uniqueness, there are experiences that create a definable cultural identity.

This is most evident in Liberman's gentle, yet critical, probing of the inner lives of his men characters. Women tend to be less prominent, except in the interesting case of 'A marriage' in which the woman storyteller is the focus and the commentator on the family.

A number of potent stories describe minority kids' experiences of neighbourhood, families and schools in Australia. The stories capture many recognisable tensions and warrant wide reading in our schools. They are telling portrayals of childhood struggles in families and in society undergoing change.

These outstanding, careful, intelligent stories should appeal to upper level students and their teachers. To these readers the stories should be immediately accessible, but they will grow in stature with attention to structures and themes. Those relating to ethnic minority themes tackle some very central concerns with great clarity and humanity.

The quality of Liberman's short stories is apparently being recognised as *On firmer shores* had a second printing in June 1982.

P.B.L.

Russia

LIBERMAN, SERGE. 'Before the law', in Liberman, S., *On firmer shores*. Globe Press, Fitzroy, 1981. 4 pages

The individual longings of a boy to be a writer are pitched against the traditional authority of his father who desires his son to be lawyer. The son, despite his mother's gentle support, loses love for his father and dutifully opts for 'the law'.