

Kirril Shields is in his first year of a PhD in English at the University of Sydney. He lives in North Sydney and enjoys challenging Australian literary icons.

15 Dawn Pde

...From and for Daryl Alsop

Beside the pavement was built a house of orange brick. In it lived two men, one old, the other older. Up the walls of the dwelling clung a deep green ivy that framed, in small sections, the orange brick and its white mortar. The ivy covered not only the walls but crept its way across the yard strangling anything that tried to grow underneath. The two men ignored the ivy, and largely the house and spent most of their lives with the pavement, stretching minutes to hours and hours to days.

Scattered left and right of the pavement, amongst a mixture of dry dust and brown grass, were the snubbed out remains of cigarettes. On any one day an exact fifty-two butts could be counted, spread either side of the chalky cement path depending on the meanderings of the two men. They each smoked an exact twenty-six cigarettes a day. It took them two days to finish a carton, at which time the older of the two would follow the pavement till reaching a corner store. And at the end of each respective day, as the sun set, the two men collected the stained pieces of filter and disposed of them under the carpet of ivy.

The sun in its ferocity had baked and browned the bare torsos of both men. They were still taught, the muscles in their chest stretched, their arms bulging and veined. Both were attractive, and if you were to try and identify one from the other it would be a difficult task indeed. Age did not physically differ them. It was opinion and criticism that defined their individuality. The younger expressed a youthfulness and a sense of adventure whilst the second stagnated in both life and thought. While one spoke of a life ahead, the other saw little future in going on. The younger tried to inject life into the aged, and he, as if challenged, took much pleasure in denying youth of this act. So it was that day by day they existed, arguing and debating between drags.

Many of the arguments arose over the observations made about people who walked by, for what else was there to argue about? They knew each other too well, the house and its orange brick offered nothing, nor did the ivy. They were on par when it came to smoking, so the world passing by on the chalked pavement came under scrutiny. A world that existed no further than a short

walk up or down the path. Happily they had constant traffic so there were bountiful subjects, and rather than hide their opinions the two old men shouted criticism or praise at whomever happened to walk by. In most people's lives these two men were a constant, hardly worth a thought, let alone a detour. Yet a small minority took the footpath on the opposite side of the road, unwilling to share their travels. They were the few who took a personal dislike to their lives being reviewed each time they walked past the house of orange brick. While most chose to ignore, (there were even the odd few who walked past purely to gain the criticism in the hope of bettering themselves), it was the detour takers who, quite understandably, were given the blame when on one bright burning day the youngest of the men disappeared.

For a week only the older man criticized, and only twenty six cigarette butts were scattered either side of the pavement, and much to everyone's annoyance there came no balance. An odour of decrepit staleness hovered over the house and pavement. There were rumours you could smell death. It felt as if weeks were stretching to days and days to minutes. Then he too did not appear. Some thought he had gone in search of his youthful partner. Many assumed some foul deed had been committed, and those people who had taken a longer route were accused of hideous crimes. Pathways became divided.

The house of orange brick with its dark green ivy became a homage. People who supported the observations of those two men were found chiselling pieces of orange brick, soon destroying all that was left of the white mortared dwelling. So it was, once the brick had all but disappeared, the ivy came under attack and that is where they found him.