

## An Impromptu for Ann Jennings

long, memory, sing those seasons in the freezing  
suburb of Fern Tree,<sup>1</sup> a rock-shaded place  
with tree ferns, gullies, snowfalls and eye-pleasing  
prospects from paths along the mountain-face.

nursing our babies by huge fires of wattle,  
or pushing them in prams when it was fine,  
exchanging views on diet, or Aristotle,  
discussing Dr Spock<sup>2</sup> or Wittgenstein,<sup>3</sup>

cleaning up infants and the floors they muddied,  
bandaging, making ends and tempers meet —  
sometimes I'd mind your children while you studied,  
or you'd take mine when I felt near defeat;

keeping our balance somehow through the squalling  
disorder, or with anguish running wild  
when sickness, a sick joke from some appalling  
orifice of the nightwatch, touched a child;

think of it, woman: each of us gave birth to  
four children, our new lords whose beautiful  
tyrannic kingdom might restore the earth to  
that fullness we thought lost beyond recall

when, in the midst of life, we could not name it,  
when spirit cried in darkness, "*I will have ...*"  
but what? have what? There was no word to frame it,  
though spirit beat at flesh as in a grave

from which it could not rise. But we have risen.  
Caesar's we were, and wild, though we seemed tame.  
Now we move where we will. Age is no prison  
to hinder those whose joy has found its name.