Sir Howard Fergus

‘Sideshow’ (for denville 18.10.2000)

From Volcano Verses (Peepal Tree Press, 2003)

A tasty decoration

like a candle on a cake,

a technicolour postcard

of professional make,

or nature’s own networking

only beggarly describe

an egret’s stand-up stunt ride

on a willing cattle back

and ‘bull and bird in circus’ sounds

like a metaphor for clowns.

It was a moving picture

in the waning light,

a bid to steal the focus

from the spires of Soufriere

misting like a ganja sacrifice

and the smoking of a prayer.

Cattle back was a cultural centre

for the white egret, its verandah theatre

under the stars – spot to socialize

and be refreshed. When combing cattle

for tick, an hardly altruistic act,

this was the place to pause.

The sideshow was a peaceful contrast

while it lasted; not just white on red,

big bearing small, but an object lesson

in coexistence at the instep of a mountain

which holds a land in thrall.

Tonight chances pique still grows,

an unholy dome still glows,

but cattle low and egrets ride

in spite of fire from mountain tides.