

between passable and nearly excellent. Forbes usually recognizes, and respects, the challenge of providing emotion in poetry; in "On the very idea of a conceptual scheme," he asks, "if it's pitiful to waste your time, weeping the / at the margins of your life, is it better // not to give a shit?" Knowing the question cannot be answered, Forbes manages to avoid both melodrama and apathy.

With poems as singular and stellar as "On Tiepolo's Banquet of Cleopatra," "Europe, endless," "Love Poem," "Sydney," "Sydney Harbour Considered as a Matisse," "Panto," "troubadour," "Satori in Viterbo," "Homage to Kenneth Slessor," "Anzac Day," and "Ode to Karl Marx," Forbes could have filled the rest of *Damaged Glamour* with blank pages and he still would have produced a collection essential not only to Australian letters but to English-language literature in general. His early death represents a major loss for poetry, but we can find some solace in the fact that he left a finished book behind him, guaranteeing that his damaged glamour will survive him.

BRIAN HENRY

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### Helen Fielding. *Bridget Jones's Diary*. New York: Viking, 1998.

More than twenty-five years ago writers like Erica Jong and Adrienne Rich chronicled the perils and triumphs of women in the ERA-age. Today, Helen Fielding chronicles the perils and triumphs of women in the Viagra-age. Enter Bridget Jones—thirtyish, chronic smoker, compulsive dieter, "Singleton," office puppet, binge drinker, procrastinator, and VCR klutz. There's no stiff upper lip on this Brit whose diary charts her fluctuating weight, cigarette intake, and alcohol consumption alongside her insecurities, hopes, and joys. Through *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Fielding straps her readers in for a year-long ride that would invoke nausea instead of enjoyment if set in motion by a less capable writer. Acerbic wit saturates Bridget's voice. Fielding has created an English rose complete with thorns.

Bridget doesn't fuck, she "shags." And she smokes "fags," not cigarettes. The novel touches on the experience of women who, like Bridget, have put up with more than their share of "Turkey Curry Buffets" and "emotional fuckwits." But despite the British idiom, Fielding speaks to an American audience as well.

Without hesitation, Bridget proclaims herself a feminist—just one of those feminists of the nineties who maintains her independence while wait-

ing for her man to call as he promised. Forget about sexual harassment and freedom to choose—Bridget has more crucial matters at hand, like preparing for a date:

**6 p.m.** Completely exhausted by entire day of date-preparation. Being a woman is worse than being a farmer—there is so much harvesting and crop spraying to be done: legs to be waxed, underarms shaved, eyebrows plucked, feet pumiced, skin exfoliated and moisturized, spots cleansed, roots dyed, eyelashes tinted, nails filed, cellulite massaged, stomach muscles exercised. The whole performance is so highly tuned you only need to neglect it for a few days for the whole thing to go to seed. Sometimes I wonder what I would be like if left to revert to nature—with a full beard and handlebar moustache on each shin, Dennis Healey eyebrows, face a graveyard of dead skin cells, spots erupting, long curly fingernails like Struwwelpeter, blind as bat and stupid runt of species as no contact lenses, flabby body flobbering around. Ugh, ugh. Is it any wonder girls have no confidence?

*Time's* June 1998 cover story asked "Is Feminism Dead?" and slammed Fielding's book for having a self-absorbed female protagonist concerned mainly with her weight and her lonely nights. True, Bridget's thoughts often revolve around her looks and love life. After all, the politics and writings of Gloria Steinem and Kate Millett in the 1970s have given way to the melodrama and psychoanalysis of Diana, Princess of Wales, and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. Fielding reflects how the change in times have shaped Bridget and her friends, for better or for worse.

Contemporary feminists, Fielding appears to believe, talk and pontificate. They don't act, as is apparent during a diatribe Bridget's feminist friend Sharon releases during an evening of booze and sweets.

"Ten years ago people who cared about the environment were laughed at as sandal-wearing beardy-weirdies and now look at the power of the green consumer," she was shouting, sticking her fingers into the tiramisu and transferring it straight into her mouth. "In years ahead the same will come to pass with feminism. There won't be any men leaving their families and postmenopausal wives for young mistresses, or trying to chat women up by showing off in a patronizing way about all the other women throwing themselves at them, or trying to have sex with women without any niceness or commitment, because the young mistresses and women will just turn around and tell them to sod off and men won't get any sex or any women unless they learn how to behave properly instead of cluttering up the seabed of women with their SHITTY, SMUG, SELF-INDULGENT, BEHAVIOR!"