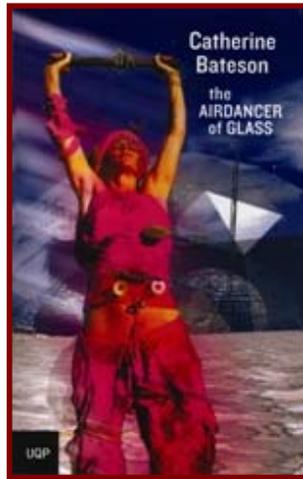


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THE AIRDANCER OF GLASS

Catherine Bateson



Teachers' Notes

Written by Catherine Bateson

ISBN: 978 07022 3393 7 / AU\$18.95

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SYNOPSIS

In a future corner of Australia society has fragmented after a catastrophe that has seen the demise of most of the population. Now humans live in small isolated groups, clearly defined. Clan, a small agrarian society lives in the mountains; on the largely denuded plains rises Glass, an enclosed self-sufficient city that guards itself from the other plains society, Tip. As the name implies, Tip and the Tippers live on the outskirts of Glass living in squalor foraging through the detritus of the city, trading bits and pieces of the scavenged artefacts to buy scraps of food and drink. It is from these people that the fatters of Glass draw workers and guards supplying them with voddy, drugs and chips for gambling. Separate again are the few itinerants who move up and down the plain between Glass and the remaining outposts of Defence and Death.

Escaping a drunken and rapacious father-figure, Lulianne, a circus flyer and one of those wanderers settles in North Tip, drawn into a family by the need for belonging; on one of his visits to trade and keep in touch with Tip, Clan member Egan sees Lulianne performing her airdance routine and is immediately smitten. The two are brought together by a common friend—Amos, a healer and revolutionary.

The Airdancer of Glass is the story of the three — each from a different section of the post-holocaust world — who join together in a revolution for the downfall of Glass and the betterment of the people of Tip.

MAIN CHARACTERS**Lulianne**

We meet Lulianne on the first page as she warily avoids the unwanted attentions of Nemrick, the man in charge of the small circus group of which she is a member. Nemrick has turned to drink after the death of his partner, Birdie, and when drunk descends into maudlin self-pity and alcohol-induced sexual desire. Lulianne is also grieving the loss of Birdie and the subsequent disintegration of the group, but can no longer face the nightly attempts at rape. By her escape Lulianne establishes herself as a determined, tough character capable of independent thought and action. As she begins the first airdancing act that the reader is privy to, we are made aware of her uniqueness in this world of no colour. Lulianne is a dispeller of despair.

Egan

Egan from the Clan represents the humanity of man that has survived the catastrophe. He has a deep love of nature, an understanding of the land and the capacity for a deep and lasting love.

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Amos

Amos is an almost Messianic figure, a thinker, a healer, and a man who acts for every man who longs for a better life. He is also a pragmatist, prepared to shed blood for the greater good.

The minor characters take on archetypal roles: Auntie Teece and Gran are wise women, custodians of the history of their people; Tilley, the mother figure; Nemrick, the lost man; Burr and Ned, warriors; Lovie, the pure child.

SETTING

A divided futuristic world dominated by an enclosed faceless fortress. The city of Glass dominates ramshackle Tip both physically and metaphorically.

PLOT

A sequential narrative of Lulianne's travels from her circus home to Tip from being owned to freedom; from a despairing world to one of hope.

THEMES

There are a number of themes in the book, all of which can bear close scrutiny including:

- Disintegration of society following a catastrophe
- Inequalities in society based on knowledge and the ownership of the production of basic needs
- The use of alcohol and drugs to subjugate a population
- The use of alcohol and drugs to relieve misery
- The effect of defoliation on the land and people

MOTIFS**The idea of 'Home' and belonging.**

- Selfishness stemming from a sense of superiority as epitomized by the fatters — their isolation from and dominance of the population of Outside by hoarding the means of production thus ensuring they remain an underclass; the theft of the children to continue their own line.
- The healing ability of nature as evidenced in the healing oils Egan carries, the blessing of rain in the final scene, as well as the envisioned regeneration of the land through planting and careful use of resources.
- Human nature to wish for a better life.

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES**Starting out:**

After reading the first five pages (and ignoring the chapter heading) discuss where you think the story is set. Is there anything in it to suggest this could be a novel in a landscape not our own?

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- Finish the chapter.
- Draw a simplified map of the country in which the story is taking place.
- Describe North Tip.
- Write in one or two sentences where you think the book is heading.

AFTER FINISHING THE BOOK:

- Describe the land outside Glass and Tip. Use what references you can to build up a picture. For example, the delight of the Aunties at Egan's report of frogs reappearing in the Winding (p.23); Egan's approach to North Tip (p.29); the glory of having a bean plant (p.11); the possibility of poisoned water (p.14); the emphasis on the unusualness of green and living plants (chapter beginning page 123); the existence of large ferals. What do you think Mounds are composed of?
- Describe the various societies of:
 - Clan: early agrarian society: subsistence farming, a society with an oral tradition. Close to nature.
 - Tip: On the surface violent and uncaring. Underneath, is Amos's children's army and as evidenced in Amos's diversion at Casino, an underground network of adults, armed and able to organize large groups.
 - Glass: While most of the physical description of Glass and its inhabitants comes after Lulianne has broken in through the roof, there are earlier indications of what it is like through rumour and speculation.
- Discuss the place of alcohol in *The Airdancer of Glass*. Include the description on p.152 of the role reversal of voddy from intoxicant to disinfectant.
- Discuss the contribution of the chapter headings purporting to be writings from respected historical figures to the story – do they help set scenes? Throw light on the societies of Tip and Clan?
- What does the group think the inhabitants of Glass meant to do with the children? On p.51 Amos tells of information from other Tips that girls are being rounded up, the implication being for reproductive uses; on p.87 the paid informer suggests they will be used for body parts and cloning; on p.131 Lovie tells Lulianne that the General wanted to have sex with her. That may have been a perversion rather than a need for reproduction.

CLASS DISCUSSION

- Do descriptions of a post holocaust society shed any light on aspects of our own society? If so, give examples
- The conflict in *The Airdancer of Glass* is, in effect, a revolt. Can you draw

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parallels between it and revolutions in history: French? Russian? The slaves revolt in Rome under Spartacus? The peasants revolt in England in 1381? Others? Does a revolution usually have a leader and planning or is it usually spontaneous? Does a revolution usually have a flashpoint? What is the flashpoint in *Airdancer of Glass*? Do you think that oppressed people will always, at some point, rise up against their oppressors?

- How important is it for most people to feel part of a group, a society? To have roots in some place? Discuss in relation to the people of Tip who preferred to stay in a known area, even though it was appalling, rather than risk the unknown as did the original inhabitants of Clan.

WRITING EXERCISE

Choose one of the following to write:

- A brief history of the land in which the story takes place from before the
- Contamination to 50 years after the downfall of Glass.
- A brief ecological report 50 years on from the fall of Glass on the then state of the land.
- A ballad about the fall of Glass as it would be told or sung by a bard as an important legend of the land. If possible perform the piece in front of the class.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Bateson's books have received much acclaim. Commendations for her books include:

Rain May and Captain Daniel

Winner CBCA Book of the Year Awards Younger Readers 2003

Winner Queensland Premier's Literary Awards Best Children's Book 2003

Shortlisted NSW Premier's Awards – Patricia Wrightson

Recommended Reading List for Australian Family Therapists Award for Children's Literature

Millie & the Night Herron

Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notable Australian Book 2005

Painted Love Letters

Winner Australian Family Therapists Award for Children's Literature 2003

Honour Book CBCA Book of the Year Awards Older Readers 2003

Shortlisted NSW Premier's Literary Awards – Ethel Turner Prize 2003

The Year It All Happened

Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notable Australian Book 2002

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Catherine Bateson grew up in a second-hand bookshop in Brisbane frequented by leading Australian writers including Tom Shapcott and Bill Jones. This, she says, gave her 'the incredibly false view of the world that everybody reads and writes'. The daughter of a journalist mother and father who was for many years Editor of The Australian Journal, Catherine's passion for writing is a lifelong one.