

Sarah Jane Barnett

With my Mother in Mackenzie Country

i

If all images are run
together

in a flick-book
or a short movie

the porch -
white boards
chewed by the wind,
sheep skulls
corrugated with dust -

would be constant.

I, the child, the variable,
will grow and distort
then flip out of existence.

ii

I swing
from the washing line

the orbit whines under my grip

drowning her out,
hands wet in the tub.

iii

We loop the wool
beneath an elderly couch,

over a squat range
and into the bedroom

where I thread string,
tie a knot, fix the cup
to my mouth and vibrate

Jail House Rock and the
theme from *Star Wars*.

Cup to an ear she hears
the soft call of a morepork

ru ru

drifting through the fierce poplars
that, when I mistook for *populars*

she said
trees that relate to others easily?

Nerves

The bridge has been
washed out,

the river bank
camouflaged with debris.

Last Waitangi Day
I saw a soldier buried

in the crowd -
his face gave nothing away.

Your lips sticky after kai
teach me a new language,

ka mate ahau
I te aroha e.

That night I dream
my family has arrived

for Christmas,
with the military police.

Arms cuffed
I am pulled from our bed,

held in an austere room
and made to explain
my position.

Black Dog

I don't have any
experience with death.

I deal with it as I would
a stray dog in the street -

bow my head,
avert my eyes
and become a foreigner.

The night the dog follows me
to stand bow-legged,
a hollow in my doorway,

I pick up the phone
and call home for instructions.

Sarah Jane Barnett is a heritage professional who lives in Wellington with her partner Jim and cat Chicken. Her work has appeared in *The Christchurch Press*, *Catalyst*, *Takahe* and on the e-zines *Blackmail Press* and *Turbine*. During 2006 Sarah completed the MA in Creative Writing at the International Institute of Modern Letters.