

Australiana

Every way of speaking is a land.
Édouard Glissant

i. *Odelic.*

Hold hard, Ned! Take me in your mouth
once more, lay me in the shade and say

'Life is so ambiguous' with that oddly raffish charm,
day falling from the leaves in silent gold drops.

Tell me, here before I 'die', before
my judgement speeds along the fibre optic glow

& gleaming press, rings out between the hollow stumps
left mocking by the fellas, falls silent in the end

and shimmers, clear and calm
in the dry absence of my head

Tell me why our artists cannot tell
their shape of grief, why anecdotes sequestered as blank verse

& clean delight sow librettos
to extinction, why life transfigured in the deep

halls of bloodwood & eucalypt
goes like an elemental spark

pouring out vitality in sickly smoky shadows
through the sleepy sunlit swim

& there suddenly I wake, voices
scrambled by the crunch of garbage trucks

compacting the grey dawn light.
Two small black birds

thread the sky, fresh
mackerel clouds, the orange moment of their wrath

a breath of clean night air
poured slowly into wakefulness.

You too, your soft animal pull into my side,
totally conscious. Think of a pool

for first thoughts, city rousing sound
out of still dark eddies,

surface tension slightly adrift, the warmth
from your head

radiant
in the middle of my pit.

ii. *Elementaries*

in the morning, down on the shore
how high
untangled spread of wings in the salt sense

she was born in the early 70s
& absorbed something of that *fuck you*
unfurling from her lips'

red tulip torsion equally intense
at the tip
rising over the sparkling bay

comprehends a heart full of fire,
memorable head
budding fresh in the garden

your swift voice a gale
flicks chemistry,
sings it.

iii.

I turn off the sound, take feathers out
from my old black briefcase, try to remember

why I kept them. The lorikeet, the sulphur-crested
cockatoo, an eagle, a sooty owl.

I hear them outside,
messengers of forgetfulness ascendant in the morning

rush, tea cooling by the phone
as you trace my skin with the tips.

There is a game in our mouths, talk
of emergence, that particular ambiguity after fucking

something like a glyph
an echo in your throat as you come

close to the physical reduction of history, our bodies'
friction on the tape recording

hot ferrous where we then lay still
as a question.

*Did we dream of them & wake,
their headlights flying through us*

like a vast new increment?
Is this the first plane of consistency?

iv. *A Nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey*
(A.D. Hope)

Our soil is partly human, silver leaves
& branches decompose in the lees of waste

soaked at least six feet deep
beneath my feet, first pegs & plastic

shopping bags, broken toys, a spaceman, a little
butterfly, a short length of bracelet chain

below the jacaranda treehouse.
Further down

old plumbing, a cog, half a gasket seal
green and brown bottle shards

mosaic in the clay & plate chips
blue white as cold teeth.

This is the new nature—
snow peas, english spinach & bright

pak choy synthesise foreign matter,
newsprint compost & old hay

break down the suspect plot.
I stand planted in this mix of attributes.

What lies beneath: transplantation,
skin grown in water

syphoned from the upstairs bath
thick with Indian vegetable soap

body scum, hair & shit,
sperm threads in blood.

v. *The Destruction of the Past*

Yours is a glut of silent martyrs money and carbon monoxide
the red glow I felt walking into the metaphor he lay

dead at my feet, a weapon a new gramophone downstairs in the cool
dark room we paint with quatrains to love &

bones gleaming in the venetian sunlight
coral perfection hysterically romantic.

I think about today's *ultimate commitment* to mutability.
In every city on the planet's surface

someone reaches their hand out to cup the same red glow
ash falling back from the husk of the earth

as it rises burning in a thermal vacuum, light
fading over the great harbour, a canyon of sand, concrete

vacancy signs hopelessly inadequate to the suffering amazement.

vi. *Turf Guide*

Sit right at the bow,
long feet bouncing
off the frothy horses leap
where scribbly, rubbed out faces
glide into the leaden wash
beside Luna Park.

Ash, fishbone, cochlea
remnants of what remains,
the whisper of a blade
thinking through the terrible water,
its spiralling feint.

We are the first last peoples.

Float backward into paradise,
middle clef clear between the breakers'
perfect face
lost beneath harmonic tides.

I watch bubbles rise
mix & burst
amongst reflections, constellations,
office neon intersections
on coloured strata slick,
seagulls driven into dark
over coolly bred
tenements of oily fish.

Mackerel backed
combs of light
smack against the dead machines.

vii. *Orphic Heads*

Holy there by the last white page
you rise to indifference
& panic, abysmal

exile squinting to pay-dirt & landscape
where you fail, flail and disappear inside a dream of mud;
quink gills suffocate in heavy metals

tide a plume of shit
et tu jure savoir au gosier les étoiles!
You have the lights of the city,

their dirty orange war in southerly clouds
you have the bright black scales
burning in the eye of a cutlass fish

you've stars' cold avalanche
sliding over the incredible river,
desperately beautiful radiation

reflected off your dust jacket
flapping wet by my feet
in the fibreglass hull.

That's how romance takes over—
saints place hands on graphite pearls
bergamot breath on silver cheeks

ghostly light in Magellanic Clouds
& low peninsular trees,
a silhouette tongue in black water.

viii. *i.m. Dorothy Hewett*

I asked you where we're
bound across the clear expanse of grass,
I asked you of the home we saw
out across the plains,
what field of yellow lies grows tough & wide
now poetry seems to fail us,
its lies no longer big enough?

*You said the Official Language
is spritely as an adder in the breeze,
blasphemous tongues
saccharine in formaldehyde.*

We know the politicians & the preachers
feel afraid
but can't find our ways to tell them,
imagination wary
in air made thin
as constant desolation dries it up.

Outside the bedroom window
a city stirs & spreads, suburbs
stacked in sheets of smoking glass,
millions penned
in above the burning plain.

The animals have up & left
a bleak and hungry circus
for an end to days,
dark salt seeps beneath the feet
of capital men.

Where are your lips' formidable accounts,
who's going to say
things are getting dangerous again?

ix. *Leftocracy Cosmetics*

Perhaps her *Optical Car Crash*
ten years too late, exposure centred on precedence

gift for a crude saboteur
seated beside the great river,
a Wyeth saturated in salt soak & erupting as Whiteley
stumped.

It's all clear now, sun shining
the temper of courteous suffering & music
as I walk into an open, outer field
from trembling walls
to watch in x-ray vision acres of beeves
aflame, transparent horror
a sight to behold
with extra eyes & dumb ripe enquiry.

Over channels of holy corn
a storm's first dry gust lifts the dazzling green ribbons
leaves & ants frantic below hearing
although I try to hear, strain
into fresh winds smelling of crushed ant, soil
green as the first roil of cloud
just overhead
reaches for treetops, flames in my memory
its urgent spits & hiss gone like filthy
canticles to life.

Ah. The silent white gravel too.
The earth is warmer than the sky, good to lie
& rest in, poor meadows.

x. *The Rivulets*

& so we are born, not
of the buried
but of rain, alive in rocks

*I only find within
bone's taste for eating earth
& stoned I feed
I feed on air.*

A storm
in the early afternoon
ends the day
& we stay home, play
music under water
pouring lucently through skins,
ocean chunks
fair foam in cold cumulus
churning overhead.

Rivulets radiate
from marks
our fingers leave on glass.

xi. *The Spectre of Exchange*

I walk through the blue smoke
driven from last century's magazine furnace

out toward wandering lights, over car parks
littered with voices, dogs

spectacular organs rusting crippled on ridges
& river banks, black faces

under stars we now know are planetary
& spaced like us, not lost.

I walk across debatable lands
under stars we commonly extinguish

history's dust at the back of my throat
as I wander emptied by hatred

bled from last century's golden epitaph
littered by spectacular spray paint letters.

I walk onto roads deserted by utterance
screens' coronal lust indifferent

to collusions of public parkland, astroturf
& sandstock talkback

flowers stockpiled in radiant beds
their investment

churned by micro-pastoral seedling labels
into beautiful plastic fleece.

xii. *Funkelnagelneu*

On arrival
clarity diving in mountain
river water

clothes in trees
mid autumn sunlight
sparkling off
currents & wet rocks

blue feather floating
down from a kingfisher

we watch it
spin yellow & green shadows
over water stones

blue minnows
turning to a net of minnows
just above rapids

as it slips & goes
over.

xiii. *Dog Cremation Lyrebird*

Rocky isthmus in a sweet spot
between fire & absolute night,
grass spurts fuzzy après-rien fall
where seeds germinate in dog's ears
coil down into brain heat
& burst deadly follicles of rye puss
over winter leaf litter.

Green stars shoot from the hip
burning under a half moon
jaw bright orange in orange coals
a small ring of heat in the dark fallow
corn field. I sit on black soil,
watch ash flakes pollinate
nearby flowers, imagine dog fallout
sifted white over river flats,
the tips of the long-eared hare,
an owl in the tall ghost gum
hovering over a bright band of gravel,
upriver neighbours' sleep apnoea
silently disturbed by waves
of particulate dog hair, flesh & bone.

The cold night air
an icy hole in the back of my neck.

Looking up at the plummeting moon
I remember hearing at dusk
a lyrebird recompose doubt,
phrases collected tête à tête
in a beautiful anatomy of choice.

Lyrical prints whorl a day
or two later in memory
feedback scratching up a mound
of hot hollow bones & leaves
to sing from, a lyrebird rising in flames
rippling over the cremation.

O artful pollution, when poems
in their title burn shitloads of straw, twigs, branches
trunks for the lonely animal
whose death from a single seed
is seeded here & sung, not needed.

xiv.

Night closes in, sea spray
& spindrift
curl around my idle feet

as I walk into a tidal sweep
of stars, senses
turned inside out of place.

You read me out
as well, take me to the edge
of sleep & say

we'll make our way in darkness,
hard as skulls
made to think & feel about

the *gross perpetuity of matter*,
not in that fake negative sense, just
positive, here & human.