



Unmanned





Also by Stephen Oliver

&INTERVIEWS
(Horizontal Press, 1978)

EARTHBOUND MIRRORS
(Horizontal Press, 1984)

GUARDIANS, NOT ANGELS
(Hazard Press, 1993)

ISLANDS OF WILDERNESS — A ROMANCE
(Penguin Australia, 1996)





Unmanned

Stephen Oliver

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I

*Poets have wrong'd poor storms: such days are best;
They purge the air without, within the breast.*

George Herbert







Cultural Misappropriation



is that what I hear you cry, citizen?
If a delph-glazed moon with its O so
delicate pattern pans over Holland, flat as
a tack, it also comes by way of the
Antarctic circle right to your doorstep
in equal measure. If the sun clamps
its golden torque on mosque or synagogue, pa,
cathedral or sacred site, does this endorse
any one people over another? Is it your wish
to head off the cultural bandits at the
historical impasse, citizen, by placing a
patent on your mana? Beware the polemicists
who define and so divide, who aggregate
authority unto self where before lay none.
Symbol becomes the circumference of
time & custom. It is not the thing itself,
but the beautiful echo of a people's harmonic
which cannot be bounded nor weakened.
Here lies the camouflage that protects the
ancient matrix, the silent memory of our
blood's journey & sound leads you to it.



Word Maps



1. Down By The River

Of the brain, mushroom shaped as
bomb blast, we project the image to
fact; up river from the torrent,
amongst the calmness of boulders, the
angler shadow-casts looping
the steady surface for the archetypal
fish whose leapt arch anticipates —
but the headwaters are held greyly
back by a concrete-net on this
dappled and uncaptured urban afternoon.
He deftly flicks & spools back and
forth from channel to channel.





2. National Park Holiday

If you go into the woods
today you will be part of a task
force moving in line-formation.
You will allow that the plastic yellow
tape which cordons off select
areas does not imply a Sacred Grove.
If you go into the woods
today, disinterment, not picnics,
is the order of inquiry. The
Vegetable Kingdom remains thoroughly
documented and every species is
accounted for; some of whom are
human, or parts thereof.



3. *False Idols*

It was always wood, wood
along the way, and exits went from
grove to sacred grove till deeper wood
lay beyond the Roman shield and sword;
that, though, belongs to another
picture book. The lyre-bird mimics the
chainsaw and Birds of Paradise
spit chips. Along the Hume Hwy. east
of Eden, a concrete Mountain Ash
dubbed '*Yggdrasil*' boasts a
wide-screen computer enhanced vista:
an arrow-straight monorail running
from Uluru clean through the Olgas.





4. Surveyors' Party

These twin obelisks which guard the southern entrance to the Great Sandy desert, though partnered to a sun fiercer than anything Egypt had to offer, preside over a millennia of flat emptiness, and attest to the prowess, not of indigent cultures, but the engineering whim of the LAND BARONS who pray that one day, these too, will invoke an air-conditioned resort for the rich to dwell in, amongst hydro-mythological fountains, playing endlessly over sacred-site motifs.

5. *Got Ourselves A Convoy!*

Hi Ho! Hi Ho! But they've been
laid off. Round Oberon, the town
spirit flat as a plank; then fury knots
in pubs. The big rigs aim chrome
cowlings at Canberra, *Convoy!* through
the ring roads to circle Parliament House
wagon-style. Hey, you can't knock
it: logging by generations for
generations have trod them down. Count
the rings of the rigs revving. Each
logger raw-red, necks blood-throttled.
Say what, anger? You can put a ring
around that, champ. *Hi Ho! Hi Ho!*



6. Cultural Desert

The earth is dismembered & what remains gives evidence; clues: history by blocks displaced as in the Aswan Dam & the Temple of Philae. Osiris rolls in the winding sheet of the Nile (O moisture of the World!) and vainly cry the well-wishers. Richard Burton tracked the source back to Lake Victoria, and back again to the Royal Geographical Society; no gushing waters from the cleft rock, only lameness, fever under the rays of the Sun God, Ra.

7. Down By The Station



Indecision. Doubt. A bungled
liftoff, the bumpy landing. Of course,
the forest dwellers who continuously
run at you from tangled undergrowth
onto the stubbled airstrip, dreamlike,
don't make it: LAST CANNIBAL WORLD:
lithe tribal girl hand jobs hero through
bamboo cage. The spiked wooden ball
swishes from tree canopy to impale
support cast. Sunday matinee in country
town. Farm boys lope under dirty clouds
to crop-dusted paddocks, and water
slips by the BP Service Station, somewhere.

8. *Continental Shelf Co.*

I officially declare the millennial
Poets' Symposium on the Age of Inner
Space now open: Welcome to OCEANISM.
Poets are required to be proficient
in submarine mythology of an exploratory
and Cousteauesque manner, able to
identify myriad life-forms luminescent yet
undiscovered (except, perhaps, for the
Vampire Squid) at depths unsounded, in
sea trenches unknown, free, hopefully of
maritime wrecks & missiles from any epoch;
whose task it is to float lines at once
filigreed as plankton, filtered as sunlight.

9. *Three Cheers The Militia!*

What plays us back — death? That
this world's a stage and we upon it act
to revolve the scenery with our yearning:
and while the syrinx play, panic rebounds
to the dead cry: ET IN ARCADIA EGO
from the walled garden and far wilderness.
O desert! O armour-plated sun!
Under a scornful wind the madmen bellow
and tribes cower amongst the rubble,
caught in the sound bites & grabs of war:
Tibet, Chechnya, Kurdistan, Iraq, Burundi,
plus the boys in the hills back of Montana.



10. Video Conference



Like a hurried geology that
arose out off glasshouses came the
skyscrapers; meanwhile, History
cut a swathe through the Natural World
and architecture strove to regain it.
Lost to the familiar, Age moved us
out of living memory, unlike those tribes,
the autochthons who saw the earth's
infancy still. Let us go, you & I,
to re-invent the damage and call it
discovery, to uniformly lift up our cry
in *schadenfreude*, meek before Great Cities
that bend as fenders to the glare.

11. Crow Country

A field of wheat, a paddock of
stubble, the chafed dust-cloud staggers
the pick-up at distance, the Rock
of Ages rises over Plainville: pop:
dead serious. No hermits, only
the bowing pumps facing west for oil.
Family photos hang easy next to
the semiautomatic in each clapboard.
The Long Horn Saloon boasts the
one rule: NO SPITTING. NO STRANGERS.
The hard hat's passed round every
Sunday and the big fists knuckle under
prayer & flag real righteous like.

12. Hills Of Home

Greywacke mostly, & fat pale
clay where I troubled the hills about
Wellington (Brooklyn-west) that
you dug through to reach China as a
kid out-the-back of our place.
The gorse gully and yellow flowers,
black seed-pods bursting in the summer
heat. Down you went past broken
bottled glass to the untouched cool
clay hoping any moment to pot hole up
into a paddy field through the
earth's centre. Every failed dig
stayed a secret from adults, forever.





13. Eco-Tourism

Welcome to Smeltback Inc.
copper, zinc, lead, uranium, iron,
O mineral gardens of the Inland Sea!
A company satellite tremulous as
a divining-rod maps onto flow charts
corporate terrain; prospectus
for all the kingdoms of the earth.
Radio Redneck pumps the poet
who banks safe on a right-wing bet,
steadies to subvert the norm
for God and Clever Country's sake.
Prettily thus he underbends the knee
to throw his best foot forward O.



Generation of '68

Frank O'Hara (here I'm skating slow
on sacred ice) has got a lot to answer
for, yet who hasn't? Take the legacy
of '60s poets, for example, who can't
help but write like him; syntactically
careering around his blizzard of words,
elbow-jolting crazily, clutching at
each others' earmuffs, buttonholing
opportunity. Seems they did that as
par for the course till it got too dizzy.
Round and round the freedom rink they
went & those who zigzagged quick & cut
up rough fell back upon the railings
youth exhausted to exhale worn, cautious
success — though tried not to show it.
What happened to the stragglers in the
maul is anyone's guess; some unmarried,
a good number courted hardship — whatever.
Nobody cares overly much. The '60s poets
they go on to write like Frank O'Hara:
fewer drop-by parties, meaner somehow.





Pat Boone & Tonto

White-shirted (not blue)
they approach in twos:
'Excuse me Sir, a small
moment of your time?'
Soft-selling eternity &
the clean-cut hereafter.
The boyish accent downloads
the serious side of the
American dream, eyes fixed
computer bright. The other
is slower, slope-shouldered
& disciplined, backgrounded
by a blandished brain.
As a child, when the God
was always friendly,
big as a house, long as a
street & the day endless,
the knock upon the door
signalled: 'Excuse me
young man, is the lady of
the house in?' Welcome
the suitcased salesman; the
Bon-Brush Man: big-bristled,
wooden-backed scrubbing
& bottle brushes, sandsoap
& Brasso for hard domestic
usage. *Not now*. These two
modern peddlers head out
to the brick bungalows of
the inner city suburbs



selling the Light & the Way,
galloping round the outer
handicapped districts;
brainwashed right-wing angels
confident as professional
sportsmen on a World Tour.





To Talk of Flags



‘The flags fall like large, hollow,
monochrome leaves,’ said Ritsos, but
this isn’t Greece. How can you talk of
changing flags as blithely as you
would a marriage? When we fly the flag
it’s as label to proclaim attitude,
and rightly so, too: the Remembrance
Day Parades, Expansionism, other
people’s wars; the main street of every
country town at the dying of day lights
up the Unknown Soldier & the long
lists of the Dead written in lead. No,
these things will always hold, rung up
once yearly, regular as a poker-machine.
Change flags, to acknowledge what? Whose
domestic honour, what custodial deaths?

A southerly
whistles up over the gun emplacements on
Brooklyn Hill,
Jim, scattering
the unposted Autumn leaves.



Christmas

Under the mining operations of
the moon, continental drifts of cloud
collude and a pelican scaffolds
the air. In cities, bricks sweat. We
are blinded by the rush to live;
'keep it moving,' says the sense of loss,
our common language. The information
Super Highway informs to inform —
'supra' clicks the instinct. 'Hold on'
screens survival. We are built upon
reflection; under the arch of the railway
see the conduit flow & steady in the
round. A piece of hill lights up and
beneath it shadow — so shakes the net.
Hear the sheer drag of scythe on metal
the shunter makes at the curve of the
viaduct while, with elongated wail, rolls
three spoil-wagons to the hollow hill.



Emblems

1. Adam

A lamp passed behind a perforated shield;
stars leaked. What he thought thunder brought
footfalls of lightning. He scanned over the
plateau & nowhere found a neighbour's spoor.

2. Oblation

The Island nations of the colder latitudes
breed alluvial poets, it is believed, who convene
once yearly under friendly, arched viaducts
to talk of river shingle, boulder, and water birds.

3. Detail

The yellow machinery tracks on the freeway
are as soldiers in single file stretching out into the
late afternoon, slanting sun, shadow-crimson
earth leaning forward to the compassed horizon.

4. Born

The year of my birth followed by a hyphen,
by the solace of expectation, by a small measure
of success, by a teasing out of hopelessness
and of course, by another date yet to be fixed.



5. *Style*

Would he have leaped from the stern of the
Orizaba, at noon on April 27, 1932 if he'd known
of the unfashionable rise in sea-levels 70 years
hence; Hart Crane, a rhetorical gesture, surely?

6. *Beachcomber*

Pampiniform it writhes, bladder-wrack or
kelp, a heavy swell that slops about rustily in
the basalt trough, breaking through the sea rush;
& solitary goes Heaney, curling at dictions.



Transgenic Pigs

The *oin̄k* is a fugue, Baconian
and philosophical. By a corncob moon
they snaffle, silvery-hulled backs
adrift & dolphin-arched in the mire. A
litter of stars in the laboratory-bright
sky. 'PUT SOME PORK ON YOUR FORK'
intones the television commercial. O but
but these are no bristle & foam flecked
boars of Arcadian Days, brutally twisting
on some Danaan spearhaft, in a
flying rage tearing at ilex roots, or
blasting marble shards with iron-tough tusks.
These are the sleek-lined, chrome-bright
& delicate trottered. These with a call
soothing as a computer bleat, ears
alert as mobile phones, flesh pliable as
an artichoke, temperament cool as a cold
cut. These, the upwardly mobile,
porcine delicacies, models of dinner-table
decorum. Designer-label pigs, feted,
wined & dined exemplars of taste, accepted
in the most refined of social circles.
These are the well-appointed pigs replete,
with a privately funded education bred O
so exclusively for the Export Drive.



Sheet Music

Like some murky storm that presages
pain, or engine that mauls the curb, the
stereo wallows its bass notes at the
top of the head, lands soft as afterbirth.
*'If you place a white sheet over America
500 Indian Nations show like bloodspots,'*
said Jim Harrison at Lake Superior,
*'the buffalo and the Big Tree's gone
too. Greed!'* Mostly, beauty is nostalgia.
The random motes of a rainbow end up
on the garbage heap again. These sticks
which encase the Great Lakes, Jim,
are the Happy Hunting ground for the likes
of you & me. Men picking on the chance
sounds of emptiness. The daily round
of campfire, man and nature, *etc.* A moon
patient as an escalator, maybe. It's all
been done before, anyhow. What was
that about Indians leaving a flaw in the
fabric for the soul to escape? Ours
is the gift of factory seconds, well-made &
well-meant through to a public we detest
if you think about it. And the quickest way
to solitude is via a four wheel drive, *eh?*
There's comfort in that mate, getting out.



Myth & Mariolatry

At a small village not
far from Manila, in the house
of armaments & munitions,
in a house of grenades &
ammunition, the plaster
statue of the Virgin Mary as
humble as a trademark,
stands splashed in carmine
tears like some peasant
shot on a quiet morning bearing
water from the creek.
The hovels strewn about
the hills are so many broken
boxes. The sun is spinning
clockwise for hope. One
cloud out of nowhere & then a
drape of blue that might
be the sky. The gathering of
people is more impressive
than a food drop. They come
at the appointed hour when
the boy who serves as
runner to the Beautiful Lady
arrives, breathless, with
the Word. Occasionally,
the statue weeps paint-fresh
tears. They will leave
once faith is gathered in




abundance like so many wild
flowers off the nearest mountain
slope. Here under a glass
blown moon, a cool wind shall
leave this place sacred.





Stork

The scene is of a deep rural setting done by one unhurried Impressionist, say, pre-World War I, c.1907. Everything luxuriant, soft and round, the paint is combed out by cordial summer breezes. Countryside: Poland, a rained-on morning, the distant splash of milk into wooden pails sounds thinner than its clotted creaminess. The cobbled yard is blue and wet after the morning's sluicing; alder, elm or poplar windbreaks, but what shows through is the church spire you would observe if you lifted your gaze up from the unhitched wagon, its spars tilted off skyward from the fields, past chimney, gable, and farmstead. The stork is here on its top (though) bottom heavy nest of thickly woven twigs which throws the scene into surreal proportion, suggesting a still hour of witches and moonlight moving stealthily through the forest's black patches. Stork, calm as a weathervane (a model) presides over maize and barley crops, that brighten through weeks of high summer, stretch tight as a canvas to the nearby farms, and further still, to centuries old, grassy marshlands from which the stork feeds its nestlings.



Unmanned

Take this day, lonely as a man in
an empty house, at his window, the wintry yard
below.

Sea calm. The moon scatters its
coinage. A rubber dinghy bucks an orectic
surf. Pebble beach. The conning-tower signals:


'which came first, meaning or memory?'

One flashlight winks hungrily under seacliffs,
and then the flare. This setting becomes
an habitual space, chosen era for commando or
smuggler.

We make our choice, learn that grief comes
regular as sunset.

The bow-wave
turned in chrome coils as the coastline dropped
from view.

Once in a metal-etched hour, people
ran away to America to buildings the colour of
gun-metal, to a sidewalk venting steam
about the ankles of sable-stockinged girls.



How many of us cannot begin the adventure of the
day upon its arrival? The ablutions of the night done
with, the half-bad dreams wiped away, the tensions
of the muscles adjusted in preparation for the

perpendicular, the carpet rolled back, the masks
hung up once more upon the wall at the ready. Each
waking is a starting out from the old country.



The responsibility
of light beckons, unclothes the familiar objects and not
so familiar ones.

Lightning leaves the expression surprised
and the lone tree in the paddock startled with
cinematic glare, unharmed and lovely.

In a homely way,
the headlights sweep the back yard hovering over the
roped-swing in the pelting rain and neighbourhood
of cat & dog. This tells you that the family

is in deep trouble to be called into account in
afteryears while the shutters slap wettish to little
effect.

Shaped as an emu neck, steam extends
over the factory stack from the industrial sector
in this small, southern city. A yellow band
of horizon suggests sunset. The steam dissolves out.



Now runs at 4:15 the see-through veins of rain from
window to sill. A splashed up forest of drops tap out what
is left of this late, ruined day in July.

Here there is no history, if by history you mean
the soul fired in the kiln of time. Here there is only
the compilation of event in a scrap-yard of days
& kicked aside incident.



You can still hear the
settlers' squeeze box & fiddle in suburban settlements &
tavern, the landscape-flat accents, the *Sky Channel*
applause and throat-clearing of smoke exhaust.

We remember the po-faced poets who went away never to
return from the Ambition Wars & Success Sorties.

As always, cars chattering in long queues in the
persimmon light of dusk, on freeways dreary with drizzle
and distance, at the encoded city-bound intersections.

He makes his heroine his addiction and vice versa,
becomes the object of obsession into which safe-zone he
precipitates himself, unmanned.

Away now from that well worn cliché,
the crazy party hat of Sydney's Opera House / the bat-eared
shells



Braidwood

for Judith Wright

Granite & quartz country, once
gold rush, now cattle tread amongst

the white hawthorn and yellow broom;
from Captain's Flat to Major's Creek



the creek-beds cut the empty vein.

Hail or heat, the hanged ghost
of Thomas Braidwood rolls out his

oaths big as boulders upon the town:
'dust, poverty, despair, drunkenness'

before he choked his rage at the
end of a rope, phlegm thick as gossip.

November 4, 1996




Modern Love

1.

They are survivors, the sole
occupants of this one guarded world.
The local repertory theatre packed
up & departed elsewhere. These two
old troupers stay on as the sweeper
plays his broom against the grain
backstage. They play out by agreement
the familiar angers to a suspension
of hostilities. A semi-believed in love
tried but haunted by its past. A
self-deceiving hope posturing the loss
of lives that went before — of youth,
of partners had & names forgotten.
What holds at the season's close
is passion flogged to life like a
single-piston engine, a sputtering
exchange of plenitude, the usual run
of days & dishes. The couple come home
to roost at last, tense & too aware.

2.

Squinting back down the telescoped
years as he had once through bombsights
to that recently freed city, after the
war & burnt out trams to how they
first met. He posted to Berlin and the
American sector, she from Baden Baden where
he had fallen for her. So agile & aerial,
a mermaid of the trapeze, star act of
an old fashioned circus. A picture framed in
time within the bleak cabaret of youth:
he uniform crisp & she in sequined tights
with her angel's *Wings of Desire*
flared from bared shoulder-blades. They are
holding hands in celebration of the letter
'M'. Now, married into age & ageless
on an ancient Island, theirs is a love
old as childhood & wise as water. Solidly
based as the fist-backed rock of Uluru.



Brilliant Losers

On reading Geoff Cochrane's Tin Nimbus

The gay psychologist quoting 'The Divine
Right of Kings' and the lexicographer, his life's
dream of the Great New Zealand Dictionary,


both entrenched alcoholics, both the originals
Dostoyevsky might have claimed, although
both stark losers by the world's brute standards.

Yes, I was there too, that late Saturday night
after THE DUKE, riding the Kelburn cable-car up
under the shadowy, Gothic pile of Victoria

University, where furtive as hedgehogs, we found
a hand-hold to jemmy open an illegal window,
fossick the disused office for carton stacked upon

carton, each one packed with indexed filing
cards, meticulous references, NZ arcana, forgotten
dialects, fables rare as moose from Southland,

obscure derivations, *etc.*, incalculable musings
of an idealist and dreamer (this he showed us) here
lay the singular industry of a reverential scholar,



abandoned — yet thirty years on, *The Oxford Dictionary of New Zealand English* first appeared, penned by an academic of that selfsame city.

We are the last of the witnesses Geoff, like the derelicts who took the sun sitting behind the Public Library, or sheltered in Pigeon Park, days long

gone (along with THE DUKE and THE GRAND HOTEL) a city newly syllabled, yet the light remains, much the same milky white and pale as stone.



Hotel Diligencias

In Veracruz
dusk troubles with a scent of
gardenias after the last tramcar passes by,
and the rocking chairs begin their
small breeze-making on the balconied
terraces between the family photographs
and little statues.

The dancing couples revolve at an angle
in the great brewery mirrors marked:

'Cerveza Moctezuma'

before the globes lighting the plaza
die out at 9:30 pm sharp.

But this was
Villahermosa.

Lightning burns like mescal in
the throat of night.

The whisky priest skulks about
the mountain roads where you are headed, at
Chiapas or Las Casas, charging so many
pesos per baptism in the illegal night.

With or without him thrive the false
saints & miracles in these remote regions,
pure homage to superstition.

O comfort of Poverty! O lie of Pleasure!

You recalled the hot seaport,
your departure planned on the '*Ruiz Cano*'
that dangerous barge which took you
out over the Gulf of Mexico

away from the anger hidden in laughter,
from the pistilleros lounging by
the Presidencia.

You — the too curious
gringo left behind you the coasting steamers
& pink squared plazas to forget the
taste of warm beer in dreary cantinas.

You headed for the high ground
of Tabasco & the country of ruined churches.
Back at the beginning

of those lawless
roads lie the dingy houses smearing out onto
silver sandhills.

Wardrobe Drinkers

is what they are in Austinmer.
Yuppies from the North Shore, \$300,000
homes on the beach front, sending
the RSL broke & the greenies
blocking development for a few birds
up an estuary. Could be worse,
given the Japs on the Gold Coast
going off like mobile phones.
The miners & cottages are long gone &
so is full employment. In 1941
as a telegraph delivery boy I made
13 shillings 10 a week. Across
the Harbour Bridge to the North Shore
on a regulation red bike. Sunday
was the day for casualty messages,
the dead & wounded delivered
all over Sydney except Vine street,
Darlington, where *Darcy the Crim* lived
& the most dangerous place in town.
I came to Austinmer 30 years ago
before the Wardrobe Drinkers
in the days of the miners & cottages.
Take those grain & coal carriers
upwards of 250,000 tonnes with a 12
man crew, anchored stern to wind,
off Hill 60 out of Port Kembla
navigated by satellite direct to Japan.
You want the best view? Sublime Pt.
Lookout, right down the coast, the
Pacific ironed flat far as the eye can
see, a sky expanded metal-red nightly.





Girl. Gold. Boat

out of Port Moresby. The obese
Oxford villain tumbles overboard
speared by the fuzzy-wuzzies. Our
hero, Captain Singleton, finally

puts his shirt back on and tilts
his cap to the sunset. He places one
arm around his sweetheart and the
other at the helm. The sea falls into

suburbs of light, a topiary of
Islands could be mist. He is American
and at home in the world as he
moves forward on the celluloid tides.



He came out of sickness country
(*sic*) he came out of the Holy Land.



Domestic Pack Shots



1. The Gays Next Door

shrieking like hyenas in
their sexual mirth to the disco
bang of Madonna making her
mint in the sacrilegious from the
sacred. For some, perhaps, a
continuous custom to hang together
whatever sense of family may
be had once the wild oats
have passed into the photograph album:
circa: June, in some tumbled month,
the garden hose spurting champagne
and the neighbour, suspect as
an affair, out of shot.



2. *Working Hot*

Joe Hammer makes his move on
screen and the girl cries out for Mamma.
A family of sperm packs up and moves
house. The removal of limbs.
The images dim to an impotent mauve
and the stage act begins. She's
only working warm, consistent as a
vibrator. She hopes one day
to make big bucks; the conference
room, that is, before she hits twenty.
The one spotlight fixes on
the portico between her thighs.
The audience soughs in the dark. Strippers
don't have no union, strippers don't.
O Karen, your smile, cool as a cucumber.



3. Hooking For Jesus

Let us sing the rosellas who
buckle under branches for the paper-bark
blossom, and the far distant shadows
on slate-roofs. Let us herald the
Children of God, the Family of Love,
progeny of the Jesus Freaks founded in
Oakland, California back in the '70s.
And this child, who believes
Bethlehem resides in her fourteen year
old womb. Hers is the pioneering
spirit caught in a spectral watercolour.
There she leans, under the guiding
star of a single streetlight, while
bluestone clouds move away over
St Kilda into yellow, polite paddocks.

4. The Priest Across The Lane

in the presbytery is maxed out
from the exo-bike, beads of sweat drip
off his fingertips. He is purged
of the last house-boy from the
jungle parish in Papua New Guinea, ten
years previous. He pounds at the
peck-deck in his lounge room
wishing the garden hand were an opera
singer. Several repeats of the
pole-twists and his bowels grunt like a
sermon. A final glass of claret drops
him to his knees ashen faced. His
big bath steams plump now, full
as the Jordan river. The one bedroom
light burns on the lemon bush
which holds its globes of fruit like
a juggler stopped mid-trick.

Chelmsford Street, Newtown, Sydney

5. *Corruption Is Glorified Mateship*

It's Bastille Day in Sydney.
The weird man in the moon falls to the
night basket. Stars roll out
another lottery and unemployment raises
dust over the land. *Tout est perdu*
fors l'honneur. Among thieves.
Running with images I whirl out the
rainbow. Spring flutters as the National
flag to salute the pilot whales
herding one more disastrous landing.
Waves roll head-to-head round
the plate of 'The Great South Land.'
'Which way to Wynyard,' calls
the currawong. Helicopters line up like
magi over Bankstown. When you
look up, that old full moon makes you
feel like a cowpoke, don't it?



6. Inner City Camping Blues

under a dusty-hulled moon out
of an empty Hollywood lot placed there
in the out-take of twilight. The
bus families have arrived in convoy.
Stolidly parked nearby in protest
at two suburban parks up for auction in
a depressed market. A couple of
pitched tents and an Information Stand
of press clippings. Kids play in a
refuse pit between tossed aside railway
sleepers. Slung about the Council
Chambers fairy lights all a twinkle since
the last bi-election a year back;
not much in this, not even a picnic.

Tarts & Takeaways

is what he's into, he said &
that's fine by me (William street in
winter and pissing down is the pits)
standing around in doorways waiting
for some totally wasted guy — *excuse me!*
it's a trick is what it is — to
slap his dumb meat between my thighs.
Hey, I'm Jasmine though I don't
feel like one. Mostly bored.
On each hip I've got this tattoo, says
'Allan' kind of smudgy & out of focus
because it's real old. The main
man. A jerk off really in someone
else's life. A lifer. Summer's
shit, more noise and especially groups.
For hours or however long it takes
& I do Spanish & French, but I'm
better at French. Sometimes not much
happens. Idle as a lizard pointing
brickwork on hot buildings, someone said.
I read in this magazine once,
(I meet all sorts) and this guy
says, 'nor can I say I love you
but a gentle calligraphy informs your
brow.' What a whacker! I know shit
from clay, he just reckoned he could get
away with saying nothing. Dickhead!
Guys are like that with money
like it's some fucking secret.

Who Killed Brett Whiteley

Actually, it was Lloyd Rees
killed off Brett Whiteley who couldn't
live the promise of old age,
the calm terror of it. That's what
Rees meant in his letter to Brett:

'carry the torch forward'

and something about being a warrior
for Art. Brett, in fact, was
skittled by a high powered mix of
narcissism & clown. Forget what
he had to, or couldn't leave behind &
anything to do with High Seriousness.
He got caught up in latitudes
of sex where the Olgas loomed round as
buttocks. Brett became his own
myth when he died, and effectively
slammed the door on the '60s.
Maybe some other seascape, like Thera,
suggestive of broken altars;
looking down into the cratered harbour
he might have seen beneath the
lapis lazuli waters, an ivory
scimitar held in the gaze of Portunus,
perfectly preserved, snapped in two.



Sugarbag Carpenter

Them days all you
needed was a blunt saw &
an axe thrown in a



sack. If you could
drive a 3" nail through a
pound of butter

you got the job
and that's a fact — ask
Bob the Builder

who shook the hand
of Banjo Patterson though
no-one believes him.

There's not one
finial or mullion round
Boomi that hasn't

his name on it;
he was there with the ox
& swivel chain.





When he couldn't
make a *deaner* he went *bumper*
shooting in the '30s

way back before
the Great War the first of the
street kids in Ultimo,

and his father
(he'll tell you) saw electricity
come to Tamworth in 1888.

From Tilba Tilba
to Bondi, the last of the
Sugarbag Carpenters.



Aunty Eve

who always kept the Aspidistras
flying high up in her Georgian house on
the windy Terrace from marble urns

had lipstick bomber pilot red
& nails the colour of flame.

It was often 'elevenses' in her lounge
with Gordon's served on a silver platter and
THE GRAND HOTEL, DUNEDIN 1932 engraved

on the rim. 'Another "stim" dear?'
from the mahogany sideboard repository to dozens
of weighty 78 jazz records in brown paper
jackets stacked like so many ossified flapjacks.

Oh she had the most beautiful hands (in her
day) they said, used for 'commercials' in the
Women's Weekly & Booths the Chemists.

Who could forget her gravel voice & make up
mannequin thick



not remember her gin-sweet
breath warm upon the neck? And how some Yank
billeted during WW2 (here) 'ducky!'
thought she was a 'real living doll'.



Oh such beautiful hands she had & the crystal light
streaming forth from those great bay windows

onto the iron railings below.





Harold Lloyd


is stridently hanging on for
dear life from the Big Clock hand
reading 12:30 twenty floors up in NYC
dangling a gibbet jig on the ledge
beneath his girl with the bob cut
screaming soundlessly as he catapults
past the big businessman whose fist
is foreclosed like a bank on their
undying love which against all odds is
saved as he grabs at the flagpole
angled stark as an erection from the
side of the building on the way through
the office window only to upset the
cooler and startle the typing pool
then back down the zigzag emergency
exit skittling the fire-bucket to snatch
the fire-hose & bungy jump down
the side of the skyscraper while the
keystone cops are toppling in omnibuses
furiously toward the wrong address
at odds with the clanging fire brigade
a cavalry charge amongst a confusion
of ladders & outsize helmets
pointing the way into the fray
continuously as down drops Harold free
falling as only a spider can to be
pulled up short one foot from the side
walk under the canopied foyer entrance
as 'darling thing' hurtles into
the stripy canvas awning where Harold
catches her in his stiff upheld arms to
the astonished joy of the hotel porter

Conrad & Wells & Co.

Great to have met Joseph Conrad
or for that matter, HG Wells, who said,
*'Let's go upstairs and do nice things
with our bodies,'* and who did just
that to take a tilt at the waitress.
I saw them once, Conrad & Wells, in
a photograph, standing together.
A courtyard setting beside a few bamboo
chairs. The hour was mild in a black
& white afternoon. Trees, too,
green galleons shipping oars in Autumn.
Conrad had, perhaps, cast off the last line
of a novel: the indigo lump upon the
horizon is an Island: behind it the sun
spilling its treasure trove: the rent
sailcloth of a sea-squall. Anyway,
he could still smell the coast wobble from
the deck of the Tartane, her weight
to the wind. Wells, maybe, was thinking on
socialism & science, and in some
melancholic way of the waitress, she all
ascent. By what conversations did
they measure each other, these two voyagers
who possessed that sense of the bigness
of the world? For Wells, an electrical
spark that arced across the white page, and
for Conrad, each word creaking on
the blocks, the woman pale before the moon,
her eyes black as tornadoes at sea.

Hoppalong Cassidy

nearly topples as the Jaffas rumble
down the aisle escarpment which in no way
disturbs Bully Boy in the back seat
corner of the matinee session on a Saturday
afternoon flick with it might be Bus Stop
Bev with one leg hooked in surrender
over the front seat that you'd think she's
getting shod or something judging by the
whinnying which could be some sort of scuffle
but then Hoppy regains the ground & the
white Arabian stallion muscling to middle
screen his ten-gallon hat gum stuck atop
his head & his pearl handled six shooters
bristling at each hip as he thunders
round the dusty back lot who has just saved
the stage coach with the backward spinning
wheels out of last week's cliffhanging
disaster when over it went packed with
the good townsfolk but it didn't all saved by
the man in the black velvet with the silver
studs & turkey gobble voice much to the hand
pumping appreciation of the circuit judge
too old to take the high jump & this
real paternal dude takes it in his stride
is off next week in search of the Lost
Dutchman's Gold Mine as legend has it but
not for long while Bully Boy will be
back sweaty as a farrier with Lemonade Lil
to catch what he can with Hoppy sure
is a friend indeed when a friend's in need



'Bob Orr'

I called back down the unawakened
dawn of the Tasman sea and along the East
Coast from the pre-dawn light of
my sleep, I called out 'Bob Orr'
soft as the punch of a howitzer to the
Hokianga harbour & still further over the
Waikato's billiard-table green paddocks.
I hailed 'Bob' to the Great Barrier
Island & 'Orr' to the Little Barrier,
but no answer came chasing after. I
sought you down the Harbour Heads &
Hauraki Gulf then all about the Waitemata.
I found a Thunderhead big as a
container-load of sorrows & nowhere hard
by were you toiling. 'Bob Orr' I
called from Meola Reef to the outlandish
fishing-tackle cranes along the docks;
to Jellicoe wharf, Bledisloe wharf,
Marsden wharf, Captain Cook wharf to the
Admiralty Steps hoping I would find
you gazing out upon the glaucous slick of
trawlers, or catch you guiding a snub-
nosed tug under the Western Viaduct.
'Bob Orr' I called down the unending
roadsteads to Motutapu & Rakino Islands,
back behind the wave screen at Okahu Bay
to Freeman's and St Mary's Bay. And as
I called into the Schooner Tavern &
sought the drear interior of the Wynyard
Tavern & the sailor's talk told me
you had fitted and trimmed your craft
against every dire prediction to set sail



on that other sea, Bob, the one that
has no name & no horizon & is drowning you.





Dave Spencer

'lived his life like barbed-wire'
is what an old girlfriend said, man of
the river. But then, life finished you
off bit-by-bit though couldn't pluck out
your dingo-bright eyes. Let's face it,
you were pretty much an arse-hole
to those who knew you. Most of us just
bash the trees without seeing the kangaroos.
You saw living mostly for what it is,
a part-time job with bugger all security;
the occasional softness of a woman,
maybe, and of course grog by the bucketful.
What was it you saw at the last, Dave,
when passing through the ripped canvas of a
thunderstorm, lightning flashing down the
Hawkesbury, a good belt of rain after?

You Don't Remember Dying

least, that's what the Old Londoner told me who didn't learn to relax till well past fifty, seated alongside his two mates: a Norwegian: 'You're not the same person now as you were ten years ago.' And the Irishman: 'I like the music it's the noise I can't stand.' Each one, orphaned & aphoristic, deep into his sixties. NZ born and much younger, I offered: 'You're not the same person tomorrow as you were today.' And then, 'To your arrival in Melbourne,' they singly toasted. (Great-grandfather, MacCormack, arrived here in 1851 & 26 years later, in 1877, set sail for Dunedin aboard the *Ringarooma*). So our tale of the two cities unfolded: *Sydney is get what you can. Melbourne, what have you got to offer & are we really interested.* The afternoon floated by as did the trams with dry, asthmatic rush in this mellow town of bungalows & brass.



Graham Clifford

After THE DUKE HOTEL's demolition,
(*opp.* Perrett's Corner) one last joke: one *DB*
beer bottle ringed by ten green cabbages

as roseate or wreath for an empty lot. Close by,
the mad bucketing fountain of Cuba Mall
played on. Meanwhile, at his Manners street

studio above the music shop, Graham
Clifford, renowned for his *Figaro*, ululated
profoundly through the scales. A window framed

trolley-bus poles that, tacking, flared blue-ly
along the wire. The *maestro's* voice floated
over harbour & city, capital & far-flung country,

far from Covent Garden. A 1930s London
partied on amongst black & white photographs
plastered to the wall above a battered Steinway.

On Brooklyn hills *toi toi* waved war plumes
to the southerly gusts with unceasing applause.
Through a hundred, sunblown wintry afternoons

he coached opera singers, actors, newsreaders,
plucked notes off the yellow stained keys: —
he guided, rolled golden vowels, before them.



Bruno Lawrence

Bruno, do you remember the *Me and Gus* stories, way before Barry Crump got keen, when a cow cocky was a bastard you met on gravelly roads? Recall the nights playing community halls, and days making a few records, only to break a few more? ‘Ricky May’s Jazz Combo’, ‘Max Merritt & The Meteors’,

‘Quincy Conserve’, plus, the all-stars-road-show *Blerta*¹, travelling Aotearoa, through khaki paddocks, down thistle blown highways in that diesel bus — seasonal rhythms you doubtless gathered, drummer extraordinaire, on your final journeying off Cape Reinga, the spirit freed to ride the rain — you backed

the loner to the last, death the bottom line to stave off cancer. *Bruno, you did that thing*. R & B, jazzman, film star (didn’t Jack Nicholson say get on over to Hollywood?) but you preferred back blocks, sought small towns, river shingle, the hollows of the land, and a home around Waimarama in the Hawke’s Bay.

A shifting romantic, hoon & hangman, a real joker you played yourself sans bullshit in a heap of movies; *The Wild Man, Ute*, you leapt from life to art without a hitch; *A Bridge To Nowhere, The Quiet Earth*, how you loved women, warmth by the bus load, produced that classic — *my 12 inch, record of the blues*.

¹ *Bruno Lawrence’s Electric Revelation and Travelling Apparition*.





II

The Still Watches









I

Autumn tinsel floats gold on
July leaves and up goes the memory
flare. The carbon rod of winter
burns low and the dark is a mammoth
locked within ice. Watch the simultaneous
reels of the seasons spinning before
your eyes. A plane passes, and
upsets the late sun to a shadow-print
upon the wall. With barely a
movement we come from the bleaker months
to where the picture pans briefly,
dissolves upon the softer ores
of spring. Ah, but the Captains of
Industry are wheeling! A building boom
amongst the trees after the first
few casual blossoms had fallen along
suburban driveways. Observe the birds
investing in the green shares of September.
This side of the documentary we
view in armchair safety, 'Our Planet':
a well heeled cloud pads across
the moon's surface, under the
vast drift-net of the night tuna boats
swing light probes about the arresting
waters another country claims.
David Attenborough journeys through
deserts to break the ancient limestone
tablets, and proclaim that fossils
are the visual memory of stone.

We observe in awe the Environmental
Mysteries and ask, is the sun's bald glare
through the Glory Hole truly the
pointing finger of God? Laurence Olivier
puts on his final mask, looking
deathly, 'Tell my friends that I
miss them,' and then fades from the
ramparts. I name two from the camp
of Good Attitude, builders of the beauty
of this planet — the givers, not takers
who direct our gaze upward from the
burning footlights of the closing century,
toward the language of our Common Future.

II

The seeing wears away the seer:
twelve years further on Voyager 2 putts
out through the pinball solar
system, past Neptune and beyond the
reach of time. Another day in
the round and the cliché of uneventful
incident has not yet arrived.
The balloon that is so majestic on
the plump air tumbles as heavy
as a plumb-bob onto the countryside,
trailing its fifty seconds of life
huddled to impact. The cattle
scattered, the sky did not change but
released names into the wispy
afternoon. Then all is as it was
before the tragic flight, except
the calm that betokens fear.



And clouds rich as coalmines gathered
from the chutes of mountainsides, over
the belts of grainfield to boost
the corporate climates, and to market
each end of the world gyrally.

A blotting paper sky, the soft
tear of thunder, then lightning. Who
would demand of the wise a word
to steer by? Nostradamus throws his
hands in the air after the event:
'Mark well my words, I told you so.'
Backward we look upon his bag
of tricks, and with each new calamity
a surreal rabbit lifts before your eyes.
Ribbed streets! Pneumatic heartbeat!
Prophecy is the Art of Boredom
for one who cannot stand his own company
from one moment to the next.
He pulls the hat trick, feigns the
future, argues the task of his breath
wearily on its way. Some ravel
dreams to cat's cradles in whose
uninhabited solitude, slowly as a yawn,
wish to pull forth the superstrings.
Call it a living, this space
between meetings. Those encirclements
that bind us together temporally.

The distant applause of rain
and the weekend screaming of a girl.
The screech of a train's brake
as if a fire were being extinguished.
The exile's brain is a frozen, grey
sea-storm; from wave to wave
he stares down the barrel of the moon.
It is morning and the sun spreads
over Nicaragua slow as the slitting
of a throat. Consider Ernesto Cardinal
as he rises from his bed, how
he stacks his images practical as planks.
Ay, the rose's blood dark as diesel!

VI

He will come urgent as a food
riot. Beware the man who sheds tears of
mercury. His cough alone will thin
out the ozone. He grips oceans with
the black fingers of trawlers.
His voice is a slow leakage in the Third
World Night. Beware the Waste-Broker.
He comes to paint your wellsprings
ivory black and chrome yellow. You will
know him by his industrial oath:
'\$40 a drum! yes, only \$40 a drum!'
Senegal, Nigeria, West Africa,
the sun dangerous as a forty-gallon drum.
Drums stacked on rotting pallets
in the back yard of tropical forests.
Drums swollen like the bellies
of starved children with toxic waste.

The Berlin Wall is falling down,
each chunk a souvenir sponsored by
Smirnoff. Who was that poet who
whispered, 'Death is a maestro from
Germany.' Away in America,
Raymond Carver, as the provinces of
his body revolted, gasped our
daily losses from ruined lungs. 'It
comes down to love,' he said.
What we hear is anger in its orbit.

Falling piano notes. The last
of the rain down brickwork. Guttering
full. Something like sounds of
water hitting a serving dish. A couple
of taps. It's that hour. A train,
of course, fading in and out of suburbs.
Time running off everywhere.
George Moore shuts his green door
against the catholic glare of Ireland.
A sense of things erased. The whole
night sliding down. Lamplight.
Gumleaves as strips of plastic bright
through a casual breeze. What can
later researchers make of this,
the Age of Rapidity? Things made which
had small use then cast aside.
The mirage of modern love. Something
swapped for something else. Made better.
And that charge of energy
varicose-veined as lightning, a little
kindness left to hover, unquestioned?
We know it as we get older.

O Bougainville! Flying foxes
plentiful as copper, gone in a waste
of tailings from the Island,
forever. The 'most pure black race on
earth' in jungle fatigues armed
against the ravages of the Corporates,
wading the chemical rivers,
a cackle of gunfire to make the ABC
stringer's dispatch. But not the
words of Randolph Stow: VISITANTS:
'My body is a house and some
visitor has come. My house is echoing
with the footsteps of the visitor.
My house is bleeding to death.'
O Bougainville! Your burnished blood
flows from the split chest of
Treasure Island. An opencast land
and an overcast sky. I think
of my mother and her breastbone
snapped back. A row of Xs marks it.

The sky: one vast, curving blue
wave. 'Blue was; then painted itself
into Time,' sang Rafael Alberti
to the Bay of Cadiz. The day
a slow melting cube of ice. Bright
coldness of frost on the window,
in the silence, late at night.
The level rhythm of the taxi
down the street of streaming lights.



III

Who can offer words unsullied
by the Age like the sad integrity of
a Graham Greene? Generations
pass on into unchartered waters, the
lights out along the deck.
Behind, the floodlit logging of
Malaysia gluts the Japanese market.
Ahead, seals choke in the heavy metal
swell of the Baltic sea;
or through a destiny as choppy as a
Berryman sonnet, the earth
seemed unearthly in a hold of love lashed to
the bulkheads of youth one time,
O it was sometime ago. But now,
the hour hangs out centre stage, a
cat whiskered moon doffs into
darkness and ushers in a Qantas Jumbo
to Kingsford Airport, down the runway
to Eastern Standard Time, and a
continent the memory of elsewhere.

Welcome tourists to the whirl
of Kings Cross, a caged fan spinning
the night through, shredding the
Sydney Dreamers. Out along THE WALL
you can solicit your nightlong
visas where the bare chested boys
thrust hips from the bonnets
of old Holdens. High up on the
bulging stonework & boldly sprayed:

'It's going to rain tonight, so
take a bullet proof vest;' and,
'No war on the way, only a change in
the weather.' Welcome the
eagle-eyed predators come to roost
in the coops of the cities.
Let us go down to the docks again to
the fat silos that overshadow
Iron Cove Bridge, toward the inner-
harbour, where craft coloured
and alive on the paintbox waterways
streak around and about, caught
up against the shark-net constructions
of Patrick White. Welcome the waves
of early morning fog that break
upon the sky-gardens, and the iron clad
poppy of Centre Point Tower.

IV

Lights ablaze in the House of
Europe, and the Party rolls from room
to room: Poland, Romania, Germany,
the black triangle of Czechoslovakia.
You can walk Europe comfortably with a
plastic shopping bag, Western
Europe, that is, forests and country
neatly manicured. A Sunday
stroll sort of feeling. In Eastern
Europe you can do the same thing
though must lift your steps higher,
over the rubble, that is.

Under the red copper basin of the sun,
under the broken crockery of stars,
Senegal, Nigeria, West Africa.

Meanwhile, George MacDonald flees
the Evil Wood through the unreflecting
mirror of 19th-century time, a
prophet of the cinema. O cine-romance!
Tony Curtis (sword glint of light
off teeth) and Natalie Wood, beautiful
in white tulle (lungs not yet waterlogged)
in heady love. Follow their laughter
with an open-topped Lagonda down the
white-walled mountain roads of Mt. Aetna
to the Port of Catania in a blood-boiling
swerve to the red-chequered table,
and the fishing boats in the blue dusk.
Woody Allen steps from the screen
to the dead crystal lakes of Sweden. A
floppy disc of moon lies reflected
there in an Excalibur beam of light.
Clouds, too. Those ancient purities
across my triptych window-view-of-the-sky
package air as light as styrofoam.
The lighthouse beam chills the sandhills
and oceans gather up whale breath to
cloud. Our civilisation bartered on the
whale's back. Love undrinkable as water.
The silent film of fantasy which is night
plays out through the ivory keys of stars.

VII

Abe Nathan dons black and says:
'Nor shall I change the colour of my
dress until peace is declared in Israel.'
He flies over Egypt to bomb Cairo
with flowers. The scent dispersed upon
the breeze the breath of the PLO.
He would dream the muffled explosions
in ancient streets the thunder
of looms and the moon over the Sinai
a *Lady of Gallant Memory*. He would dream
the sun a copper scroll, and of peace
perfumed with cedar and cypress, of
pomegranate, bitter herbs and balsam.
The thought that catches in the
throat wakes him — the shout of
Iraq. 'I will waste half your country
with flame.' He wakes to the taste
of Saddam Hussein's binary spittle, rips
his garments in grief. In this clear
cut country, snap your fingers,
watch sound bounce off rock. He dreams
that one profound thought unspoken
will change the minds of humankind.
O America! a poet is a detective
shadowing himself. Dashiell Hammett,
your success too late, success too soon.
You didn't find sufficient fog in San
Francisco to cover as the Great American Op.

The McCarthy era burned you off
from the '50s, left the last twenty years
of your life a shredded, dud cheque,
the profound terror of the final breath
made thin the man you knew. Patriot
to the country which disowned you, your
last gasp became that of a silencer.
America, you try to cheer yourself up
but you're too easy on yourself.
Watch the coral reefs off Johnston's atoll
grow the black scabs of car tires.
Watch Hector's dolphin drown in
the gill-nets off Banks Peninsula.
From the North Sea watch the slick seals
wash up dead on the Island of Texel.
Watch the Pacific united all around us
lie snug and blue as a body bag.

VIII

Surgical strike of the stars at
the Persian Gulf. Romance of the World!
How deadly our longing for peace
on this earth round as an Ideal.
Delicately, we remember WW2 bombers
romanced in archival film-footage like
forks tossed across a transformer dark sky.

David Niven steps lightly under the
arched stone bridge, he brushes
the dust of a crushed building from
fingertips by the flares of a London
sky. 'Childhood is the last-chance gulch
for happiness,' he says. Havel
plays the Pied-Piper astride his multi-
coloured cavalcade. A wave of the
hand old-fashioned as anger, and he goes
home to the Democratic Mountain,
civilly. Salman Rushdie rides the magic
carpet quicker than Qantas. 'The World
is surreal,' he cries, 'tis no more
than a game of hide-and-peek,'
and whizzes past into the future.
Lange gleefully corks the evil jinnee of
Baghdad, then flies onto the green embrace
of Aotearoa with the freed twelve.

Where once the melancholy bombs
from heaven fell to glut a village, 1000
grey cranes have returned to the Mekong
Delta in the month of pure light.
One herd of elephants also returned to
the tropical jungle where before
was none. A pure green is that light
and not the green of crouching camouflage.
I bend to my past, for there is
a corner of the sky forever my childhood:
Rupert Brooke frolics through the
soft Edwardian light with Virginia, and
dreams of fish-heaven. Bad William
thumps the shit out of poor Aunty Ethel.

Every poem is the last will &
testament of the soul, and every lover
who breaks from lover — a crime unto
passion. Romance of the World!

IX

Sun shines metallic off Footscray
and out across Westgate bridge. Silver &
green office blocks rise from a
dun plain. Superman, bearing a stash of
old money darts over the dockside
and the hidden sea home to Melbourne.
The thought of you adds weight
to new memory — sad as lamplight on rain
sodden guttering. Sadder still is the
Romantic lapsed to obscenity,
the swine tides that clog the spirit.
Again, I drive my centre to the eye
of your hurricane. Remember how
the senses wrangled, anger like a vicious
exorcism of betrayals not worded?
To run is to hide is to freely admit the
hidden hurt. Volscian woman, we flung our
fire at each other heavy as fists.
The old man sits in the park feeding
pigeons; like his memories, they are
grey-blue and flutter about him.
My memory of you from any perspective falls
along the flat face of this earth.
No lamp lit up our consciousness,
only the blade figured the light, Psyche.

‘The funeral of the sea’
sings the Italian documentary. The
world’s rotting oil-fleet blanks
out the Mediterranean from the French
coast to the Bay of Naples. Six
hundred burning black candles turn crude
the Arab night and Red Adair pots
another well. Oil Magnates!
Corporate Cowboys! Have you built your
little ship of death, O have you?
And there in the deep the Great Underwater
Colonialist, Jacques Cousteau, laments
the dark night of the sea, his
eyes are the colour of basalt.
Today we have part-time cloud & the
hours work at it cruel as barbed wire drawn
across the face of the moon.
What then is this other? It is
the shadow personality, ‘evil comes from
the power of evil.’ It is the third
presence. O Romance of the World.

X

Crack of whips in substations
and the horizon lights up like a
Lucas/Spielberg movie. Tonight toward
Blacktown helicopters make astrological
moves sideways. Earlier, a trailblazer
made one Caesarean cut along the western
sky. The 6 O’clock news brought with
it race riots & rapes, an eclipse
of weather which threatened the following
day, the unsteady peace of tomorrow.

60 million hectares of saliferous
planet, and a new desert creeps toward
Central Europe. There is salt in
the wound of the earth. Closer now comes
the yearly pilgrimage with candle-flame
of lava to light up Mt. Fuji in ninety-
nine turns of the track. Refuse
of light and all that glitters. As the
Stealth Bomber slides East night advances
swift-footed over the Empire, over
the roll-call of the New World Order.

Watch the southern sky shuffle
the South China sea & galaxies thick as
krill. Japanese fishing boats stack
the decks with amputated fins by the tonne.
Sharks loll dumb as torpedoes on waters
frenched in blood. The Yugoslav
Republics grow tired and another 25
frames of tankfire roll off the screens
from Croatia. 'Pain is the visible
urge to memory,' says the Anchorperson.
Radio KGB hits the airwaves with
a global countdown from Tass and Reuter
& AAP. Back in Ontario, escalators whisper
to the underground shopping plazas
and the Gallic snows fall loudest on Quebec.
Frost at midnight lies as silent as
The American Dream, and all along
the border night moves. 'This train
don't run no more this train. Yo! This
train don't run no more and Canada's
cut in half,' calls David Suzuki. Hush now,
the cyber-freaks sleep. Soundlessly,
the Hubble telescope gears its focus.

XI

An extended mobile of galaxies.
A prided installation. The dark, invisible
matter of a riot in L.A. Three thousand
buildings ripple out flame in the
city of Lost Angels. And then an open sky,
a banquet of beads after fire hoses
roll out the light on any upright
surface. Hollywood Hills are alive with
the sound of security locks. The CNN
anchor-team is too well dressed for
the maddening flames, in the sear, ongoing
segment of a news flash. In the break,
gathered the rain as pure as static,
unseen, but imagined whitely and curfew-wide.
Along the crippled streets in the blood
blare of sirens, night arrived under
the guise of the National Guard.
Heat rises from the grid of these sidewalks
and the spirits of the Indian, afraid
enough of death to die, whoop it
up around the big campfires. I wake,
uncomfortable in the lurk of a dream, and
my breath draws up hope like an
anchor, lifts my thoughts into the day where
I follow. Let us go (you & I) into
the glow, hand in hand with Virtual Reality
and idly make up war-games. Let us pray
that a supreme silence will be down-loaded
at last. Moonrise, and a luminant coal
sifts through the western grate of the world.

In cornfields elsewhere, so remembered
though not so high as an elephant's eye,
images pressed round as a hotplate
suggest some mystery or midnight vigil;
this is what we wish, to stamp threat onto
the inexplicable, seeking out totems
and to hold the dance of the primitive sacred:
this city, too, let it stand as Icon.

XII

O to wish upon a falling space
shuttle! The sky tries hard to reveal
itself as bluestone, but temperature and
wrappings of cloud are against it.
Rain falls hard as luck. Here you will
see them lift up, a squadron of
pigeons swinging to gun the light, wings
ablaze, the bulky horizon thunderous
where thunder lies cognisant.
The Great Dividing Range runs this way
and I am on the leese side toward the
sea. The setting sun awakens our
ancestral demand for bonfires
big as cities, and a leisurely parade
of gulls passing overhead mistake
the darkening hours for seacliffs.

These coastal towns boast the best burgers,
the newest surf club — while the RSL
bends to the heavy metal swell which
runs the raft of every sea-slap
every weekend. The short, broad streets
are abandoned early to the blue
phosphorescence of the TV and the evening
rustle of newspapers. Tomorrow,
of course, is uninhabited and fresh as a
child's drawing. Further on through
the minutes someone is hard at a hammer as
if wanting to be let in. A news
bulletin tells of avenues long as decades
in a steeped town where tanks gather,
ready to break through a hay barn
in Kosovo. (Remember the Revolutionary
Poet who broke through a crowd?)
No, this is only a rusted keel upended
in the quarter-acre back yard. Not
by some turbulence round Cape Horn but
the tedium of a bankrupt dream loose as a
cloud. The family seams have now sprung
apart and the kids school the public
bars. A day in the round for the father who
breaks through the top-shelf like a
picket-line. At the local cinema watch the
astronaut yawn, unaware the alien
prepares to storm the spaceport wordless as
a threat. It's dusk here, mist drowns
streetlights, the earth for a time puts aside
its hunger, and a delayed flight
fills in for the evening star of Autumn.



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