

SULPHUR CRESTED

Sydney

A blaze of creamy handkerchief white
as raucous as their cries, drifting across four lanes
then in among these shoreline gums in the noontday heat
as if opened out of a hat, like magic —
never seen before. Jet lagged eyes wrenched
into their left field, dove-white but crow-raw
with their yellow mohicans, emissaries
of their own light: birdsong becomes bird romping
as they gang, sailors just landing
dawn-criers, winged, dove-cockerels, cockatoos
that can peck your patio plants to bits
and be docile as doves under this rusty fig tree...
with its great spreading branches, near the end of our dream.

LOREKEET

Upside down from the veranda awning
hooked orange beak peeping over
head inverted — am I?
Those seeds you spoil him with...
then the full plumage —
flame orange breast, indigo blue head
lime green cape, beak matching breast
flipped the right way up and preening
his body on the handrail, head
half tucked under green sheen of wing before
he flies, whirrs, back up again;
and that plaintive cry
that's universal, child for parent
in any form (feline too)
and is *creature* across all divides
calling division down.

BANGALLEY HEAD

The wild sea shore is an oil painting:
a single white house with a red tiled roof
perches on the sandstone cliff high above
where the hermit (in a parallel life) lives alone

The morning sun so bright
as it streams across the sea in its path
blending with the slate grey rock it reaches
like lead, effulgent, illuminated...

A single yucca stick silhouetted
rising from its pod of leaves below
reaching up into the rarity of its blossoming
(as on Malta: Blue Grotto, by the side of the road)

Sydney like a futuristic dream
hovers over these ancient cliffs
jutting out into the sea, steeped in bush
in their own imagining...

We walk with the city behind us, no looking back.

Tell us the names of everything again
that we've never seen or heard before
in this new land of Australia
ketermina, paper bush, flag iris, banksia

Prehistoric cyclads fan under our steps
packed mud up trees clinging on like koalas
— termite's nests

And through the thin screen of bush, the cliff edge
where he proposed to you

St Michael's Cave plunging below
the wide sea shimmering with candescence: *infinity*
of the gift of life in its dancing

In the asking, the Yes we want for it
more precious than any ring

We stand on the roof of the world
where awe is our only mooring.

Returning to the path, Indian file,
where bare feet have walked for forty thousand years

no one trying to change anything
only to live rightly within the awe

the termites still building their nests
grain by grain, as you say

if this is the way we could lean to live again
our cities alive like bread...

This gum tree blossoms its warm resinous scent
its flowers fluffy as old man's beard, but honeyed

the sweetness of what was intended
hidden under our forgetting

It takes a massive remembering
that is our disconnected Dreaming
where the green world speaks to us again;
and then it takes fire, rising inside us,
to see with eyes that have been blinded
knowing what was meant.

We are facing the city again
and we must go to it, as lightly
as we step back down the path to where
the grass reaches with its zig-zag fence

above the sea of our being, and in our blood.

BILGOLA 1.

A rectangle of lido siphoned from the sea
under the rockface with its steel netting —
safe in its shallow end and walkways in,
even in the deep end, you can touch down.

The sea breaks all around, sliding
over the rocky shelf beside, and onto the beach
where the wind stretches the flags taut in the sun.
The lunar rescue buggy waits, between them.

Three women launch forward diving into the surf
their bodies briefly backlit in transparency
as it curves its frothing edge over them...surrendered;
thighs, arms, breasts, hair, eyes smiling flung.

You plough your lane lengths for fitness' sake
you venture in with your child's first steps
you wade up to your waist, and hesitate
and all around us each wave of our lives waits

the smaller, and always unforeseen, the great.

SHELL

Speckled, splayed on the beach here
in the wet morning sunlight: the heat rising
the fine filigree dark lines
etched into its sand-yellow brightness;
three rays fanning among them
spider web, sea shell, and butterfly
hatching in the air simultaneously
and quivering there in your mind's eye

as they wait to continue the filming
three castaways in eighteenth century clothing
running past a timed explosion
as it cracks with its smoke-puff — a gunshot in Paradise —
the black 4X4 inching along beside them
all a dream forever in our minds
life after lifetime drama dissolving
as we sip cappuccinos in the shade...

BY LAKE MAQUARRIE

1. wharf

North Nord, and the waves a cold grey
wind raking over them under the cloud

— a forested island far away.

A few moored boats bobbing
yours with a blue line for a blue day.

Last strip of sunset sky — a gash
of vivid crimson pink against the grey;
a pair of birds flung black in the fading light
as if by a hand, released like a boomerang —

A band in a garage nearby
tuning up, longing to play...
adolescent-tentative. It won't quite translate.

2. woodland

We take the sandy path for an hour's peace
relieved when it becomes a real one
leading out between the trees.

Your silent steps and soft tread,
the morning light as fresh.

Shedding. Words. Layers
this gum tree with its bark
in slats all round its base, discarded

its naked skin dusted orange,
your corn gold hair in its tresses.

The silence we need
to find each other again
in otherness, beyond routine.

How we need this unknown time.

Further away, and further in
not looking behind.

Reaching the lakeside with its tiny beach
of dried brown seaweed and white clams,
you sit on a fallen tree, gazing.

A rough tarpaulin shelter among the trees above,
no one around.

Alone together in our spheres of silence,
two halves and two wholes.

I place an open shell where you've sat
winged like a butterfly.

We climb back up,
and for a moment I find your mouth.
It is enough.

The trees are singing in light
trunks all uplift...

And there among the bushes
— with your pencil sharp artist's eye —
a flash of kingfisher blue
turquoise, jewelled, vivid
wren-small, twittering and hovering

a secret revealed and concealed.

Three of them.

Two gums, one stripped one clothed
yin and yang, moon and sun.

And as we reach full circle
a white sail through the trees on the blue,
under the blue

the air charged with birdsong
as we sit on the bench and listen
where listening is all there is to do.

3. shore

Places we will never see again,
these houses on Government Road
and the track beyond them leading down
branching left, ending in wild vermilion-red flowers.

The tiny concrete water station below
graffiti-encased, its green aerial lamp post;
a bleached dead tree beside it.

Purple trumpeting bindweed in the long dewy grass;
ah yes, Morning Glory.

The lake edge lapping below.
Big fish shy from my hunter's shadow
in a wreath of twisting shadows, moving out.
Tiny sandy translucent minnows
rippling the surface the sunlight catches
its wavemarks mirrored in light lines beneath,
these lines if I could make them...

Liminal edge of being,
wavelets edging fine brown shingle
bronze-wet to dry sand as I stand, sit
breathing the water's life...

The lake expands for miles.

The speedboat crashes through the silence
in its accelerating churring of backwash —
shrill voices in a tied dinghy behind
on its umbilical thread, being given a joy ride
as the boat twists and curves, at either side —

the thrill of these creatures in their main event.

Moments later, the whole lake edge disturbed
with its incoming waves, the light's reflections blurring,
no fish to be seen —

only these two large paw prints
that stood in the dawn or early morning
before Man was awake
and came to claim his lake
against its own Dreaming — disconnected, fake.

4. on the water

By the wharf, the deceptive soft mud conceals
something your eyes would never see
if you didn't know to look — and even then
seven eighths submerged in their element
just its razor shell edge barely showing
brown, gashing open naïve bare feet.

You pull one up and bring it over
the wings of its shell vacated
as we wait or the little steel boat to reach us.

Razor fish. The lake's own teeth.

* * *

Ferried full with food bags and cozzies
the rear of her, a climb past a ledge
and on to this spread soft seating
sun-shielded, the prow in full light
and the roof scratched white.

The lightest touch of the wheel; and the two
levers pushed forward revving the engines
into a steady forward speed, steering
by the front railing, by a piece of wire
towards Paulbar Island's packed trees.

They tried to raise emus there. Imagine
being pursued by that bulk and that beak!

* * *

You fling yourself into the water
with the fearless abandonment of spirit
that's pretending to be your body as well —
and being young, being it
like your brother, and your red-haired sister
and now your mother, and father

and you're all in the water, treading it
laughing, immersed, unthinking
as life itself in its gift to us

only needing
to keep breathing air to be free

to be the smiling face of the deep
thirty feet through to green misty water beneath.

White kicking fleshy legs. Plenty here to eat.

* * *

We saw one circling as we closed
golden brown, shimmering against the tree tops
and then another, a dark speck against the blue
wings spread wide, full, floating: eagle

Eagle-eyed in studied flight
then a second joining it, as they near and part
its mate, like a sign. The blue so vast
nothing winged can encompass it
only swim in its ocean of air
that is the wilderness above.

The island below. No emu now, just bush
the children are leaving for —
the treasure of all their anticipation
freed from our watchful eyes.

* * *

You talk about the woman accused of killing her own child
snatched by a dingo —

How little we see unless we see right...
How blind our eyes are
trapped in our minds.

* * *

Driving again, over towards Murray's
another boat behind us cuts through your fishing line
— or so you anticipate.

And it's brand new. Code of etiquette broken.
Reaction flares, in spite of you —
until you feel the line intact.

You let it go as quickly as a fish unhooked
steering your own action. *All good*

walking the line as it pulls
reeling it in, reeling it in
petrol, diesel, rocket fuel

* * *

The women talk, the men fish
the cricket on the radio sings

The transparent line hooked with a shrimp
disappears down into the darkness
from the spool —

The merest tug on the line is *it*
(reel it in, but not too quick...)
a tiny staring silver bream you hold
to carefully free its mouth
before tossing him back in

He'll be alright, he'll be fine
you sing as he sinks as if lifeless towards the depths,
with no memory to forget...

I let him eat the bait again
happy, as you are, to be the lake's friend.

* * *

Measuring the distance back to the wharf
to swim ashore or stay on board
as you go in to the water like a shoal —

A family of fish, safe in your breath
the water calling like the day's end
where you know your home is real

The lake its extension, a water yard
of depth leading to shallows
only fed by the sea and by everything
the water dreams as its own.

coda

You show us his mangled remains
pornographic on your mobile phone
a mess of raw disfigured flesh

Nine years old. *Shark bait.*

Meanwhile just last weekend
a hammerhead and a bull shark
nose into the neighbourhood

Whose water is it anyway?

The biggest inland lake in Australia
is after all primordial
for all its domesticated edges

and today is always the day.