

John Jenkins

POEMS



DARK RIVER

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John Jenkins was born in 1949 and lives on the rural outskirts of Melbourne, on the edge the Yarra Valley, where he works as a writer, journalist, editor and teacher. This is his eighth book of poetry.

Also by John Jenkins:

Poetry

A Break in the Weather (a verse novel), Modern Writing Press, 2003

Days Like Air, Modern Writing Press, 1992.

The Wild White Sea, Little Esther, 1990.

Chromatic Cargoes, Post Neo, 1986.

The Inland Sea, Brunswick Hills, 1984.

Blind Spot, Makar, 1977.

The White Wolf, Contempa, 1974.

John Jenkins has also co-written a number of books of poetry with Ken Bolton, written/edited two books on Australian music and edited a book of travel stories and two collections of short fiction.

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- poems by -

John Jenkins

Five Islands Press

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Author's Note: 'Why I Like You', 'I Like You', 'Rainbow', 'Map', 'Nuclear Waste', and 'Unsolved' were based on several early and unfinished poems. These re-minted version are complete and definitive.

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Long Black

(For John Anderson)

It turns my glass black. Silence
is filling it; night on the lips
of the hills. No one to follow
you there, knight of silence, folded
into your final shadow's keep.
The glass turns in my hands.

Here, on this distant ridge,
framed by declining day,
a city slowly appears –
a confection of money and light.
You say the beauty of life
is like the grace of nearby
horses – simple, yet difficult to know,
and no easy illumination is
pasted on darkness – no flaws
or towers to read against sky.

How much further must you reach,
cold fingers of wind,
before rain returns? Or spring, or grass?
How good really is this earth?
For one, it is night always now,
and forever is a voice. As days
turn to stars, a star turns in my glass,
the distant lights grow sharper
and the valley darkens as it must.

I watch the long black drink
turn in my hands: You say that
where you come from is where
you go to. You say the nothing in
everything is just nothing again.
Air fills the winter trees, but their
cold leaves can't bring you back.
You say: "It is simple here,
just take this glass and drink."

Walking on the Water Tension

Pointillist sparkle above the water
column, like random notes abstracted
from new schools of composition,
dazzle and compete with a micro vision
that suddenly becomes immense as you
focus on shadows thrown by tiny striders down onto
sediment below. The browsing boatman rows through
an immense refreshment of flow and drift,
long legs striking backwards. A beetle
ferries a tiny bubble through austere orders
of up-thrusting columns: stems of spikerush,
mud-anchored, waxy, heliotropic.
Diatoms elaborate their simplicity,
form rope worlds, long tenements of slime.
Mosquitoes are just flecks of wriggling
zinc, and make Act Two a quirky upside-down
Utopia, as breather tubes perforate
the surface shine. A tuxedo stage is next.
As raffish tumblers, they will demand a deluxe
coruscation of wet wings, a side-splitting
jettisoning of former selves. Dance!
This four-part invention mirrors their element,
precisely as they escape it into air.
The water cycle revives like eggs in silt.
In spring, petit-point adult whisperings set ablaze the wind.
Oh little random harvests, of tiny dragons
and damsel flies, what armoured adults emerging
into fire! Energy like a lighthouse freshens
the census with a billion compound eyes. Fungi
and the yabby turn over carrion in the mud,
turn scum back into life. Light on porous
wings, ironically drowning, where sedges
double-dip, all budding from their corms below.

Shine to deeper nodes where stars split off,
where Stentor, a tiny ear trumpet anchored
by one foot, sucks in dumbstruck life. Here,
Hydra and Paramecium cut the millimetre
down to size. This bright lens makes
theatre of a droplet on the slide, notes the
imaginative taxa of unheard-of music,
where each golden galaxy uncoils like a
helix. Many-levelled music of being
here finds motile form. Leaps up stairs and airy
colonnades, as your eyes drink summer light.
Imagine it a mobile, fragile lattice, uncoiling
forever in a pond. Imagine each knot of
fire, each strand crossed in the net of being.
Then dissolve all this. Sink like a stone.
Be low again. Complete the circle. See
strange harmonies of scale. Or rise above it all,
the golden wire at your feet again,
balanced on a thin membrane of light,
uplifted on the starry maps of summer rain.

Middle Yarra Tributary

Its thin blue line snakes between a web of roller-coaster contours, probes a brief and legendary trance of life. Dew climbs ladders as it hits the spider silk and pasture weave. Tributary 12,023 pours, downhill all the way, out of the unfolding map of light. Watch it from my window, through the winter rain, silt weeping yellow under water sheets.

Gully-fed, a drainage line, not even creek, with just one permanent, year-round pool, it scarcely runs for weeks, even in wet years, after spring downpours turn the hills to sponge-cake, and you can pull the cape weed effortlessly, like candles from green icing.

Ink-edged reflections are inverted into liquid silver, stars shatter when green bulls make their dates out on the hop. Ewing's tree-frog is small but loud. Poised on the brink of summer, he stakes his band-width in a nightly pitch for mates – another jumped-up tenor in the aleatory chorus for ratchet, click-toy and pobblebonk.

Dead white bones of trunks stick out from broken circles, each water-widening base. Little cormorants dive, blue cranes wade and dip. No one knows who introduced the roach, an English sporting 'coarse' stock: a larder for the wading birds – no lazy stirrer like carp or goldfish. A fringe of ragged sleeves and hollow arms poke through, leaves shift random sun-bursts over water. Here, bats compete for living space with bees and parrots, owls with sugar gliders in a brilliant stag.

Old sun-bleached arms multiply in water. Annual insiders have first choice. Swallows skim and lift for dragonflies, wrens seek sanctuary in the rushes. On its day, and in its own sweet way, the watercourse flows through here. Trees stagger onwards, down

the valley sides to an unseen river where cockatoos,
those volatile alarmists, screech and weave, just
missing trees. Or, wham! You pull your head in suddenly
as ducks whoosh past your ears. As they buzz you,
you duck low. Twenty pairs of feet thrust forward,
skid water, ski to a stop. The ripples widen, like the
day does, and everything suddenly shivers and then clears.
Distantly, a concrete mixer chugs on the new estate.

You could hear it then, at times, calm summer nights –
the river is almost two kilometres from here; from our
semi-detached little pool of it. The horses, when they stretch
and drink, barely crease the surface of the dam, hardly
ruffle water with their breath. Tenemented birds and nesting
ducks ignore them. Worlds blink below. Dew drops fall
from lolling tongues, breaking the meniscus of taut light.

A planes slides over Middle Yarra valleys, its shadow
leaps the track a Kato leaves, crawling on tank treads
to the new estate. A spare bucket lined with teeth
swings from a chain. A spike for splitting mudstone
terminates its mantis reach. Neighbours have installed
‘the new pool’ upstream, on their side of the wire.
I’m downstream of their dream, which now includes
a fantasy of Spanish opulence, plus two blunt pipes,
black cylinders, the filter unit. A motor hums at night.

The gully still looks healthy on their side. I’m amazed,
and wonder why. They may be simply ignorant of how
to empty it. I imagine council rules, guidelines from the EPA
remain unread. It’s just water. No big deal. Recently,
I crept across and fished two plastic tubs out of the
ooze: chlorine and fungicide, for ‘healthy swimming pools’.
They won’t speak to us since we complained about their ‘pets’.
Five chained and half-wild dogs, barking stupid at the sky.

Tick them off. I've piled logs across my side – Fortress
Wildlife – to help check the rush. There's no chlorine scald on
turf below their pool – not yet – but raw roads
and excavations on the new estate have increased flow
this year to a rapid, turbid yellow. Since we put the cattle
off, there's been 're-gen.' on our side... That's one big plus –
swamp gum and blue box toddlers now lean on gully sides.
Tucked up in plastic guards and weed mats from recycled
pizza trays, an infant army guards the ephemeral lifeline
I've planted – lots of sedge, poa, spiky mat rush; really
tough and daggy stuff, stuck firmly in the mud; thickening
clumps to sieve, return lost oxygen, divide run-off
into micro-flows, to slow things down to last year's calm.

It's said some native plants can break down poisons,
lap up truly noxious stuff – like formaldehyde – if it doesn't
kill them first. In summer, they'll stand dry and thirsty,
making 12,023 good habitat – flattened mats of native grass
for roos, until the rain revives the silver blur of seed,
green and yellow whorls, the microscopic wonder.

Recently, we sent out invitations, had an annual
picnic here. Locals say it's more like a soak
than ordinary dam. Stays full all year, has always been
refreshed with groundwater from deep beneath
the Yarra's legend, the bones of these enduring hills.

Zooplankton

Sun-swirl over shell and setae,
like dust falls in air or fire-stars
float in space, spinning free from cliché,
the cuirass of the water flea pricks
at light in immense sports auditoriums,
swims in a jar lid. Beneath rings of solar
wind, are larval thoughts of winter,
strange beauty and sudden death.

Brightness creases Daphnia's seams –
she wears all her bones inside-out.
Through their thin white windows,
you can just see time, her heart
tick, live young peep, each hinge flick.

When the frost melts it is the colour
Azolla makes of an immense synthesis
of light – a green world newly made up
scrolls to the trance-line of a liquid graph
where the pencil dips in Eden light.

No mind less in love, and no mind
more unlikely, could imagine the twin
moustaches churning water, deft cilia
sifting oceans below too-quick bubble
eyes that pop and leer from stalks.

No primate god constructed
such subtle cinerariums for the water fern –
sunken moonscapes, where worm heads
peep and weave from tiny silt-edged cones.
Here, the phyto-mass is legion, its robes
turning dead things into living sugar.

A storybook ripples open, pages float above
foam-jets; drenching spray and eddies
ablute the dark harness of the caddis fly.
Feathery ganglia sweep where swimmerets
quicken in an onslaught of innocent light –
such webs afloat, the level starry foam of your
crowns, Cyclops, golden in an omniscience of dew.

Here, the platypus prods and turns,
tracks electric blips and yabby Braille.
The monotreme straddles banks and taxa,
pools snap with these pirates, pincers instruct
brief life, days grow fat with mats of bubble-eggs.
Observe now the mud-eye's elementary
stab at locomotion, it's gill-lined rectum
shooting water at the rational, the dull expected.

Depths naturally strange and dada
quicken innovation on the factory floor:
nightly, flat-foot water snails elevate
to surface air, living clocks wound up
by moonlight, anticipating tides.
Spiky mandibles tear at Hydra:
a comedy of maxillae set in reverse
to daylight, the riparian jest of flood
and drought, the edges and the objects
all broken-up like fire-stars in the pure swirl.

Map

Between Antarctic fire
and desert ice,
Melbourne
bites at the coast,

dreams of Europe
and bad weather.

Bad weather makes
glaciers bump
in Port Phillip Bay,
tar melt
on Melton's tarmacs.

Drive north,
and sand slides into view,
your duco bubbles
in the picturesque glare,
lights on the blink
blink out the last mirage.

The Last Mirage
fades at speed
like stars around a brandy cruster.
Your asbestos suit
fills with sweat;
oh next room of air-con dreams
fake your snowstorms bright.

Level luminosity
ignites your face
as lightning would a potted palm.
The window shudders with heat,
a modern view, new pool.

But the fish tank explodes, leaving bits
of coral all over some ute.

At the ancient reef, the surf is 'down'.
You're just some
30 million years
too late.

Try to
notch up one degree
like an ocean does,
try to sort the shellfish
from the biros.
Some were fossils and not
that well adapted.
Others leak and run.

Not that well adapted
here,
you're like the awkward smile of
an Alaskan guest
who packed his snowshoes –
pacing out this lovely place
of space and heat.

Trek the inland sea
before lunch, or global warming's
sharp, pure colours
blur and spin behind
your eyes.

There's time for water slides,
rev up
your great whirling cosmos
of a brain for endless rounds
of mini golf.

Then fill your tank with dust.
In dust we trust.

An MC with a megaphone
joins the dots up to the top
of the end of isolation
shadow-boxes with Ayres Rock.
Out here, at such close range –
a big target hard to miss.

A knockout sky is blue,
the desert red,
black stump a myth
and place in one.

The last Concorde a plane
that crashes into cerise dust
somewhere between Kings Canyon
and your ears.

Between your ears and Kings Canyon,
there is little equivalence. Yet both
leap close when boulders roll,
flatten against the scalp.

At Tennant Creek,
whisky chasers nail
tourists' funny
money to the wall.

No fear, another beer.

A roo-paw opener lends a hand –
atrophied again,
in the land of the pub and the scrub.

Reflect
on cave art
and vanished time,
extinct marsupials done in ochre.

The extinct ocker, too,
our trade links with the north.

Like a Jaffa in a martini,
your head turns faintly pink.
The sky glows like Kakadu.
A didgeridoo drones hello
in stereo. The horizon
throbs the endless sunset red.

Kakadu sunrise, orange
juice, E-mail, pay-TV...
And surprise exchange rates
to rattle the Big Croc.

The plastic dollar
freezes in Beijing.
No yen for coal or steel. Now coke's
a joke. Before you can prise
it from the ice
someone wheels the barbecue
too close to the snowman,
and he melts.

Now is liquid, times they change.
You order marbled steak, the yellowcake.

Or squid or sushi years later,
wake up on deck,
not quite the quid.

Hot air balloons
rise above ice floes.

The last whale factory floats past
full of Japanese PhDs
who flense a mean sashimi
all the way to Mawson's Hut.

Because the desert is a barbecue,
time tough, life short,
you must get in for your chop.
So ends Darwin's tip.

Only ice stays cold and still
waiting in your glass
when you hitch-hike
the glaciers south
to Hobart.

Again, it's summer.
Butterflies alight on your lapel
at Royal Park.
Your bow-tie is askew, you sweat it out.

The humid zoo cement is
freshly painted, winter-white.
You win friends here, glare back
at irate penguins
on their bit of sunlit whitewash.

Double Landscape

Tips sting the light against
this coastal sweep of blue asleep on blue.

Xantheria Australis is a sphere
of spears around one long thin stick
dipped in knuckled seedpods.

Stubble of stunted green arcacias,
with mixed pigments drawn from salty soil,
all flow and grasp together, tugging at their roots,
bent and rasping on the brine wind.

Air is a sable brush that worries
the shapes of birds, dips into sun
and nibbles at tiny blue flowers
between Banksia Marginata.

This barrow of softness spills
across hilltops and the darkening cliffs,
steals the grey from a galah's wing

and pink from a raised sleeve,
where two tiny figures, all angles against
the sky, have to be imagined.

Their eyes are creased with sunset,
and they colour in the night.
They are pointing at you now.

Liquid Landscape, Trance of Light

1. *Liquid landscape*

Highway markers are a jutting text
we read at speeds near silence –
huge words, a heart-beat later,
wham their whispers to your mind.

We will press on with this trick
of *whoosh!* and image, this delight
of colour-fast light. We will meet
on the tongue or ear like a kiss.

Imagine, each time you speak,
that we never drop or weep,
and meanings don't decline.
Are we apes or cobalt clouds?

It might be heaven – swept up
with sky in a Franz Kline stroke
of pure pigment – from the blues
to a deeper wonder prior to names.

Elation, this void, be endless...
A bright force inflate each line,
and its light airbrush of the real
turn the blind day into feeling.

Rapture confined only by empty sky
takes you straight out to its edge,
from one horizon's pulse directly
to the next. I mean, this bliss, this rush,

right out of yourself, to the hills and
flat-out space. Here, joy's stern
rave rises from the night's abyss,

nerves belted by a morning coffee –
A wave's blue radiance jolts
the headland, shaping air to fire.

2. *Trance of Light*

And yet, the blues – the blues –
make endless miles a trance of music,
and time blinks, and each bright
link in this trinket of becoming telegraphs
not here, not yet, across a paint-kit sky.

We are tiny and surprised in our tents
of skin and hope, but can't contain the
balloon edge of outward-wheeling stars.
We wake to parade our brave, pathetic
uniforms of self and let the daylight in.

Lost in outback ruts and tom-tom
bumps, names knock about like the sleepers
we become. We cross and wake, and drive
alongside rails that telescope to *somewhere*
across the endless flat-land sheen.

Back on black-top, *whoosh!* our destinations
are the same the city lights ignite, one way
to a spread-thin suburb's dream, foot-down
to the endless white-line *now now now ...*
Green go! We are become liquid, minus effort.

Big glass walls melt past like music.
Flat aerodromes and factories compact
into distance that smoothly disappears
and *blinks*, as windshields peel off streaks
of time-smear'd light and down the lane split

strips tack up their lurid freeze-frames.
To the west, vast commercial corridors of radio
chatter accelerate into brutal butane truck-stops –
white-shield highway markers reverse at high speed.
Your next stop getting closer, the thin edge of the sky.

Sydney Road Kebab

*(The kebab is an ancient Persian verse form
similar to the pantoufle)*

On Sydney Road, kebabs revolve through hungry air,
round the corner from the milk bar, two doors from the pub.
Turbans tangle with tampons in silver glory boxes,
slivers trimmed by skimming knives on Sydney Road.

Fat cylinders of meat lashed to revolving barbecues
choreographed by ratchets, motors, little wheels,
where the traffic is abrasive, grinding slowly to the lights
round the corner from the milk bar, two doors from the pub.

Fat cylinders of meat lashed to a long steel spindle –
cuts of delicious fat, sweetmeat piled on copper plates
slivers trimmed by skimming knives on Sydney Road –
rolled in a flat bread sheet, beneath a dangling cigarette.

A rotisserie turns Sufi circles through the endless days,
on Sydney Road we feed our flesh with succulence,
with flesh cut from the fat and thick-seared cliffs –
the cylinders of meat lashed to revolving barbecues.

Traffic aches in smoke-filled eyes of Sydney Rd,
saliva on the tongue, fat and salt, then chilli sauce,
rolled in a flat bread sheet, beneath a dangling cigarette –
our hunger hangs on air along the gun-barrel strip.

Fat spits behind the sweaty miles of Sydney Road,
on Sydney Road we feed our flesh with succulence
and your meat must take its turn to face the fire –
rolled in a flat bread sheet, beneath a dangling cigarette.

Sweet street, may your kebabs long revolve in scented air
round the corner from the milk bar, two doors from the pub.

Brass Sphinx

There are 'heres'
in obvious places
no cartographer could map,
or crowd overlook.

Your crown is a dog-eared star
Your shoes are wounds
letting in rain.

Your true stranger
the earliest lie.

Show Day Enclosure

Some eggs have hatched thin legs, the skinny toes
prod air and tiny eyes behind each shell peep
out as light bursts in, but see no more than glare in all
this raw and trembling.

So many crack and scramble in a piddle-rap and flap
of tiny drumsticks, it's hard to focus as dyed-yellow
debutants pop up everywhere. "*Look Miss - Ha ha!*"
Yolk seed-beaks peck a fast way out.

Two angled legs push through the bottom of
an upset Humpty. Then he's off and running,
blind to the jokes and kids' soft lovely laughter.
"*Look, at that one go, Miss - in its googie-car!*"

They watch the egg with legs run amazingly
amok ... treading backs for purchase, barging
huffy huddles already settled down to
a serious peck-order strut.

Crowd closer and look in, before your breathless
breath against the glass goes all misty white.
Farm smells rise up from straw. An incubator
chirps full of casual puffball life.

Next in the showcased glare basks blinking.
"*What's it gone and done!*" means "*Welcome!*"
from all still alive to this sweet peepshow.
We can share some tenderness

now it's case-hardened. That's how we
have matured, from delight and easy laughter
to the vile battery sheds. 'Only natural'
to be resigned

to aisles of grinning cages,
cast off delight, and of this desperate bursting into life
hatch a hard-boiled joke, wedge politics,
deserted hope strung out behind the razor wire.

The Wine Harvest

1. Cold press

Noir skies above the Yarra Valley, thick rain
curtains and cold seams, then sun-shot.
A neat stud slides out to free steel jaws at gelid
dawn-start. This is how we put the wine
back into winter. A day (another day) upon the ridge
with the patch-work itinerants. More sheer
and smoky light is poking through the weave than
yesterday, when you wounded a riot of sleeping

cane and repaired its latency with structure.
The long mounded tillage is punctuated by posts
and the dumb dormancy of vines. The sap is falling
to a root mass below these chocolate acres,
curled roots, stiff hands, dull fingers in the earth.
Curt work to toss the curly cuttings anywhere,
rain weeping down our backs, in this mud-splattered
surgery, where vintage is asleep beneath the happy

splash and patter of weeds against your boots.
Elegance cannot be cultivated without us.
We strip excess from aisles of skeletons, leave
bone-arms in our wake. Main canes thrown wide,
twisted over wires, then end-tied with a clip.
Start to see the shape of things to come, when the
scribbly disarray of waste is deftly edited. Each plant
becomes a trunk, with two arms lashed to the fruiting wire

upholding ten short stubs, of three buds each,
poking up from the old wound-wood like blunt thumbs.
A tractor rolls down these rows, its whirring blades
held high to rubbish, the canes confetti in its wake,
followed by gun pruners, the grim gangs, with jobs
still to do, only just holding on to their human edge.
Machine pruning is too crude for premium wines,

and the old hands sculpt endless hills of skinny
Christs from the vine mass, pull out moons-and-back
of tangled canes to make a topiary of daylight.
Crab slowly down these rows with me – tense against
your own bent back, in a sullen muscle-trance,
worming down the automatic aisles of day,
a slow stagger to the dark fugue of fatigue.
A simplifying landscape stands out like Granny's
tooth between the cold, cross-hatched cordons.

Each vinous trunk a fist pushed up from dirt,
grasping at the light with new leaf and tendrils,
its story told in scars, lopped arms and leathery
layers: the new wood seals fresh tissue spilling up.
Follow with the gangs, back where distance blurs...
Sandvick shears are elegant and French, with
roll-handle action, to adjust wrist strain, all day
and back, up and down the lead-foot, mud-slack rows.

The reek of sweat and a dull ache to your feet:
two scarves with a silly floppy hat and creeping
bone-chill. You are a hot then cold and concentrating
cipher. The spring compresses with each cut,
beak springing back for more, and metal slides on
metal as it bites, hinging on an easy pressure bolt,
snap-happy with a thin grin, closing on vine fingers.
Remove dead wood, nip unwanted in the bud.

The canopy is divided into 'Grecian lyre', or 'Scott Henry' style, or 'Ballerina', so leaf faces are offered to full light, air circulates and vines stay free of spoil, the new shoots promised perfect fruit. The day ends with a beer. We have opened a thousand wire windows onto winter hills. Thirty buds are left to rise, vertical as an ideal, to light green fuses from each living candelabrum.

2. *Ragged fruiting body*

Every night, Coldstream, aptly named, showed the deepest lows on the TV weather map. Winter, and dark, no dawn light in the valley when you front up to the little agency, 'Handskills', with branches, says the stationery, in Blacktown, Brisbane, Mildura and the Riverina. This valley could be greener.

"The white copy comes back to us, the client keeps the yellow one," says 'Hi-I'm-Dave-sit-down,' who hires me on the spot, after a few desultory questions. He's a dead-flat blend of fizz, the sparkle and the bubble long since gone. "A poet, eh? You keep the white one, with your hours for the day and weekly total. We charge 15, pay 11. That's it, then."

Dave says, "Your first job's *Marion Rise* – the 'silk department', eh! The boss is Dr Pete, 'the maestro'. Coldstream, right? West Road, then service station, turn left, S-turns on the ridge, no sign, but the gate says 88, dead centre, a long steep drive, 300 metres, then right-hand bend, buildings, winery, pickers' sheds. Start at seven, don't be late. Luigi is the manager, a real nice bloke. You ask for him."
A wink, a grin.

"Got some pruning for ya," says Luigi, who is loud, big-bodied and potential to mature, though I sense a disappointment in himself, a hint of acid only he can relish – perhaps aspires to his own vineyard, Sangiovese cuttings. "I manage all of this," he says, "and I manage! Ha ha!" Volatility all his own, with a mobile phone.

Next week, *Black Riding* – complete with cottage, cellar door, small gallery and miles of vines that have fruited only once. The manager is Rick, a gnome in beard and buckskin, a sparkling wine, perhaps a burgundy, to account for his earthiness. He throws some beers around at knock-off time. Rick’s 2IC, ‘Space’, doesn’t look a hippy. Strong in character, austere, short hair. “Why are you ‘Space’, then?” “Hey, man, I’m everywhere.” And he was, and you knew, with an eye on you.

Cassie is small and pretty, as blonde as sauvignon, yet tough. She’s a trusted hand, half ‘adopted’ by rich families of the vineyards. Though painfully reticent, Cassie’s one of the ‘elite’, along with Rick and Space, trusted with electric pruners. “Cassie scissor-hands.” Power pack upon her little back, triggering quick steel. Jaws blink, the next cane drops, could lop a thumb before you know it. But Cassie knows it.

Further down the valley, *Block 275* is owned by *Northcorp*. Fruit in tonnage, all trucked off interstate. (Picture bright steel tanks, projecting pipes, steam rising from the towers.) Des is manager here, who meets us in a dustcoat at the gate. He points slowly at the hills. “That’s 275 and my name’s Des. Now, do your worst,” he says.

Old Pete’s broke, “slowing down a bit”, bad cough. “Who’ll hire an old bloke?” No one makes an offer. More vinegar than most, already corked. “Miles to go before I’m pension age – don’t think I’ll make it,” he reflects. No trade, no prospects.

No one teases Preston when he tells us he's a ballet student.
(We're all in this together.) He's a natural athlete,
now living with a mate after fighting with his parents.
Dropped out from the upper middle class, "just temporarily",
wants "some independence" until they accept, "well, *a lot of things.*"
We all nod. He's 17 and his brother ferries him to the vineyards
in an old Jag. Preston has hands, is very fit.
"I'm enjoying it!"

Ray's the gun of course, whetstone in his pocket, pairs
of polished shears in a green felt case, with oil and cloth.
He's sharp, piquant – a hint of flint. Ray sets the pace,
no one keeps up with him. By afternoon, he's rows ahead,
a dot of workmanlike attention, still gaining speed. Lean
and sinewy, each vine perfect in his wake. Lets no bud slip.
Won't lose his grip.

3. Preparations

Sudden view from Breakneck Road where Yarra Glen
opens like a gate below the tar and a valley leaps
to 'vistas' Sunday painters sweep up in one brush
of rain-blush paddock, blinking dams and cow-dots.
You stroke a brilliant blue above the creaking beds
and silt wash of a million years, where the Yarra
wanders through its flood-plane billabongs, between
Christmas Hills and southern-grazing folds
of the Great Dividing Range.

Worms nibble in the cemetery below this little town –
vines get their just desserts. "First rows on the right
were scions back in '38, the soil thick as chocolate,
you could eat it from a plate." The bloke who sells
me petrol tells me this. "Back then, mate, as the century
turned over, we had 1000 acres under grape. All knocked
out by the big collapse in '21. The vineyards all ploughed

back, before table wine kicked off again in the '60s."
Tourist cars drink up a landscape.

At *Marion Rise*, we snip and measure cuttings,
dip the ends in 'rooting powder' (no jokes about
Viagra) to make new vines for spring.

There are seven buds per stick, three in the loam,
where the nodes transform to hair-thin rootlets.
Each cutting angled at the top, so the rain slides off.
Trained up lengths of string, new tendrils climb the
columns of their own fibre, springy corkscrews
going for baroque after rain and bud-burst.
Vigour sleeps inside the root until it's ten
degrees at ground surface and the clouds burst.
Hard bullets are exploding with green acid.
Sap is a slo-mo rain, rising from the hillside,
up this clever rope trick. A whole vineyard fast-
forwards into spring. Clouds drop sweet music.

Buds burst from a sappy trinity – the one primordia,
leaf-flower-tendrill – burst out in woolly coats,
as they differentiate. Flowers push layers of gossamer
from the axils, swelling at the end of stem and pedicel.
A maid's cap or frilled calyptra shelters flowers
from harsh weather. At cap fall, her flower opens –
'wild' hermaphroditic, or 'cultivated' female with
full stigma, anthers atrophied. (The male has a tiny
womb, fringed with erect anthers.) A nectary swims
where ovary swell and pollen dandles over wells
of honey. Insects hum, but berries stay hard green
for months. Soil aches and the weather lengthens.

The leaf is a sugar factory, swelling out from bumps
on the surface sheen. Canes grow hands of chlorophyll,
tug at hormones, CO₂ and water, make shoot-tips
out of solid light. A million tiny pores breathe life
into the chloro-mass, in palisades of tissue. Gas links
with water from the roots, through spongy mesophyll.
Here the factory is all oxygen, when days become

a third part sunlight and ragged, multi-pointed leaf
a sigh of transpiration, respiration, day and night.
Look at the yellow veins, little rivers sending
tributaries into the map you walked to this estate.
There's a fainter subdivision, hair-threads fencing
off their pigment blocks, as from the air. What's
close is always far away beneath a swallow's wing.
A ute bumps down the green-lit avenue of days,
the leaves are whisper-cool against your face.

A caterpillar's black-and-yellow bands shout poison
to the sky. Rows of legs ripple-step in pairs, backwarding
to a bright caboose. Delicately, a concertina opens,
this eating factory mines its salad days: first egg-speck,
then fuzzy fly-by-night around the moonlight paddocks.
Black tufts on toxic barrel-bands catch light. There's no
doubt, this fella came to eat: yellow scissor-head saws up the
greenery for tomorrow's moth. Back legs are squat, with sticky
pads, to push the head-end up, snake to and fro, and take
another automatic snack out of the yummy zig-zag.

Phylloxera free zone! A giant painted bug leaps
from a vineyard gate – half dinosaur, half saber-tooth!
Dread inflates in a pinprick louse. *No vehicles or
visitors will be accepted from...* leper places kept at tong's length
from the Valley. *Wash your boots.* Beside the picker's shed,
a tractor with sealed cabin, barrels of Barrack, Bravo and
Defender.

Chemical warfare drifts across the sighs of rust and fungus,
of vigilance unending. *Don't touch your eyes.* A dirty
job and dangerous. Wear a mask, a respirator, slick raincoat
on the hottest day. *Wash your face.* Don't breathe!

4. *Veraison*

A sea of nets over early autumn hills,
like spider silk on cool mornings,
float contour and ridge in fainting mists
the sun burns through, roll their insubstantial rivers
down the valley mouth. Grape Lazarus beneath
the winding sheets, about to spring to life –
echoes of winter frost, in such late ripeness, hills
like great round waves of arrested rolling.
Up close, nets are a white, coarse weave
of nylon mesh, harsh and unpleasant to the touch.
Each protects a pair of rows, tucked in tight
with plastic pins, hairnet on a riot of tresses.
Poles poke up at top, lifting fabric into spikes
and valleys of a stretched geometry, yet strong
enough to fish for birds, which flap and panic
as you free them – panting in dense leafage, or they
find their own way out, or find they're carnage
in a feast for foxes. Under nets at night,
a summer menu, ripe fruit and wild-eyed bird.

Bunches fatten in a warm air, hang skin-tight
full of juice, like tapering scrotums.
There's a buzz of bees and wasps, sipping
wellsprings of loose sugar from a thousand
random wounds. Dark bullion of mature fruit,
concentrates the excitement of a year-long wait.
Berries ripen fast, on the verge of rot,
fit to burst from tiny stemlets, with a mist
of surface yeast a finger wipes away, to disclose
black sheen, the polished skin beneath.

Nature studies the geometry of spheres,
shows how to pack the max around a stem.
Grapes are balconied, press out in rows, all
down the bunch. This summer will not come

again, its sugar bundles stacked and angled,
ripe now for the bucket. One by one,
the whispering nylon nets are slipped aside.

5. *Taste*

Head high to harvest beside mead hall and pickers'
sheds, we amble down to test the fruit – no thirsty
work, this – still no trace of *beaded bubbles*,
not a wink. Take plain fruit and test its weight –
let your teeth crush into pith, the little juice sack,
the crack of bullets pepper up your palate,
and loll the glassy texture of softer, yielding
jellies on your tongue. This is an art called taste,
skin of your teeth the instrument no gauge emulates.
Ah, a sweetness so intense it's almost sour
or sharp or pain, pervades saliva lakes breaking
through the parchment, furbuds standing up
and zinging. Such drenching, soluble sweetness
only cattle know, head down in molasses bins.
A sugar fizz froths up your mouth's insides –
throw your head back on its jolt of ripeness.
Purse your face, half close your almost-watering
eyes. This is the real feast. This is the harvest,
a tin shed's song of plenty, big catch dragged back
to the fire. This is delirious consumption in the super
market born of excess, gaudy celebration of the ads
that says we have enough, and more – too much –
this is our feckless culture and its roots: ecstatic,
attic, comic grimace on an ancient coin. It's best
to stuff the dripping lot ripe into your mouth –
then you're really drinking grapes. Bathe your
palate in a rush of flavours lifting from the sugar,
dribble out the chewy skins, your back propped
on a post. Spit the pips, sent spinning. Soak it up.

6. *Late picking*

Two days to go before the truck arrives. It must be *now*.
It's all *go go go*, the perfect sugar. See that man on his
mobile phone, as he patrols the rows. Hear him haggle
now for dollars, feinting over volume, over quality.
A year's work hangs ripely on an answer. Big bins
full of empty glare say *go*. It must be *now*. You can't pick rot.
A talked-down voice at last gives in. Winemaker wants
the lot. *Crop?* The pickers? *Yes!* Like an instant cast
for tragedy or fete, stand by the anxious nod. We start,
like sunlight blazing through the leaves, green glass
splinters into joy around our hands. It's suddenly
a flash and return of smiles, the harvest debut gala.
Neighbours are recruited with the best and worst
for this picnic at the year's end. Fan out in rows,
face-down to the grape in sweat and splashing light.
Drop tickets in each bucket, new empties thrown
by a tractor down the rows. All mad to pick –
we're paid by bucket. Our elbows bend and snip,
and the day becomes a Breugel, copied by Seurat,
silk-screened in a hurry. Fill the next, move on,
no bucket bottom bare for long, eclipsed by a
steady grape rain, day breezy with the way we move,
the flop and plop of picking. As Cassie sings, a dog
trots at her heels. Jump-cut to *leaf*, to *face* to *hands*.
The scent of grapes and vinous ooze from stems
makes summer and canopy so close, there's no
separation, no *thought* no *work*. You pick a blaze
of – *plop* – sunlight in the soft – *plop* – brush and swish.
Look before you leaf! Pull away a soft abundance,
pick faster in a frenzy, the crop is ferried to the sheds.
We want to win the tally, heaved into steel that's
not so stainless now – its piled-up night a fly-buzz
from the entrance to the drive. Tonnes of ripeness sprawls
against a metal lining. The timing must be perfect,
right down to the wire. Bins groan with weight there,
not a grape too late. A truck arrives, hands paid,
are shook or shaking, and it all goes to the crush.

7. *Vat flies*

I've given vines a caning on the sugar route,
ripening here from bud to fruit. As the acid is
consumed, our wine preserves a balance between
childhood and surrender. Summer lends
a shade of mortality to our days, and lengthens
like tannin in a glass. The palate stretches into
autumn light, pale oak or cooler dusk, to fortify
our youth, seeking new complexity, or delicacy
of climax. Lean or floral adjectives leave equally
a residue, a morning-after on the tongue.
Baume conspires with yeast and water, turns
our juice to fire, burns tomorrow with blue flames.
We luxuriates in vats, with a nutty relish nurtured
from the Yarra sand, the river silt and friable
volcanics. Summer on your mouth translates
new wine drawn from waters clean again.
Space the shoots so the canopy can't rot
and shade the fruit, make wonderful the vine.
Growth must decline, so make it new again –
the power pours from lips or spills in passion.
Vitus vinifera silvestris that scion of the classics,
lends oratory to slick Naptha Valley root stock.
Latin, crisp as Ovid, blends a subtle pedigree with
razzamatazz on jazzy labels, parsing meat and wild
berry with a velvet diction, smoother than the glass
you lift. Oh, oak-matured, leathery red relish
of Cabernet days, let's watch the weather vane spin!
This season and this summer will not come again.
Hear plummy Merlot accents in the wind, late
summer slippage of liquid bellbirds succumb
to a solemn buzz of vat flies. After the after-glow,
bottle age will speak again in tongues of smoky
oak and verdigris, and with ease recline – hard
labour breed finesse and pepper from the spice
mill of the Yarra silt. We belong to the billabong
and plainsong, yet long to stay erotic as Verdots,
smooth as our flashy neighbours, the Malbecs –
Flutes sparkle between one day and the next.

Why I Like You

Just let me say
that I like you because
you fell from the sky

as beautiful as a tropical
avalanche in a glass full of gold.

Another reason
is your energy

It often happens...
Before I've slept in after breakfast
you've already showered, walked the dogs,
and made a little aeroplane out of an ice-cube.

Should I also mention
that you remind me
of starlight pulsing
between the spokes of a bicycle?
You whirr around so fast it leaves me breathless!

Or say, "I like you because
you celebrate the motors of flesh and air."
Should I also say that?
Well, I couldn't imagine you ever earnest or dull.

And is it really
a coincidence
that *le douceur fleurie des etoiles*
(a quote from Rimbaud)
also reminds me of you?
Is it just a coincidence when
lost in our husky sled
we could wake up any moment in Cuba?

And really, I'm wild too
about your little joke
when you dip the entire universe
into a can of blue paint
and it snaps back in my favourite colour.
Yes, that's a good reason to like you.

I also like you
for your teeth
which are useful for untying knots

and because of Tasmania,
the love-shaped island
between your thighs,

and for your eyes
which rhyme and are
two green lights
going *yes yes* when we kiss!

Detour

(i) Near Yoshino

A train roars past this lonely
place. An old stone Buddha
where petals float.

A smile almost lost
in his reflections. Many
water-boatmen skim.

Snow still clings to one
stone shoulder. Spring will only
confuse the wind!

(ii) Four Tokyo T-shirts

Act golf, be more club.
Take it easy, happy swing!
Something shines! Fairway!

Harmony robots.
Funky metal fusion walk.
Extreme spooky joy.

Hotel forever.
Big neon gates in drink town.
Sex makes hair happy.

There was the wind, there
was the stars. Branded on my
mind – stamp collecting!

(iii) Busy

Slam door, late again.
On the car roof – a coffee
mug sits, still steaming!

A wing tilts – clouds then
toy-town leaping. Grip as black
runway slides under.

Walk fast, deep in thought.
Dodging cars, ten streets later.
How did I get here?

Who Am I?

1. *Fame*

Who am I? I was born of poor parents, in a tent,
which is now in a museum in Petersburg.
My first memory is of steam, boiling yak-butter,
the distant Anapurnas white as bone.
At five, I collapsed in a snowstorm
and was given five hours to live. My survival amazed medical
science, and I died of something else. Fowlers English
Usage owes three words to me: *gizmo*, *gleet* and *yoyo*.

Who am I?

Went on to become the only Olympic one-miler
to correctly measure the gravitational attraction
between Venus and Mars. In 1970, I sat for my controversial
Nobel portrait in an electric chair. *The Dictionary of Philosophy*
reports my now-famous conversation with Bertrand Russell
in which I say: "I can prove now, Bert, that two
human hands exist. How? By holding up the two hands
and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right
hand, 'Here is one hand', and adding, as I make a certain gesture
with the left hand, 'And here is the other.' "

Who am I? In the 1960s, during a ski holiday in Lemnos,
I met my third wife, Nancy. We had ten children, who were all
swept out to sea during the April Monsoons. Biographers
now see this event as being central to my 'Doomed Fugues' of '68.
In the Seventies, testing the limits of human endurance,
I became the first poet to win the Kentucky Derby
without a horse. I donated my brain to science, now pickled
in a bottle in Disneyland,

Who am I?

2. *Mystery*

Who am I? I was born in Melbourne
on an overcast day in 1950. I live
a quiet life in a weatherboard
in a leafy street. I have
a wife, two children and a red dog.
My favourite saying is, "Let's turn on the TV
and start living."

Who am I? My whistle is famous around here. I part my hair on the right side
and smile a lot when the lawn sprinkler scares the sparrows.
As a three-year-old, I could already hum the words of *Twinkle
Twinkle Little Star*, and developed my famous liking
for chocolate biscuits. Seven years later I played
senior football, once, and was noted by our school coach
as "the plucky trier who scraped his knee".

Who am I? In 1968 the local paper had the picture
when I beheaded a snake with a shovel.
In any club, I do the books. My car is white, five years old
and has tiny bubbles of rust just beneath the door.
My hobbies include a light ale watching sunset,
and collecting matchbox tops. I have worked
for 28 years in a thriving local industry – brass fittings
and safety switches. Five years ago I was made foreman,
and we had a party with streamers and cake. Who am I?

Who am I? In 1972 I went to Bali for three weeks, and bought
a red sarong and a colorful devil's mask. It
now hangs on my wall. I have learned to clear my throat, scratch my arse
and read the papers. I stand on snails, but don't like the crunch.

Who am I? I once stole four metres of plastic hose from a council rubbish
skip. That was the closest I ever got to a life of crime. Since

1960, the bulbs I have planted – crocus, daffodil
and grape hyacinth – would total more than 300. I remember
dreaming of snow, once. A family furore erupted the day
we announced my vasectomy. My wife is president
of lawn bowls – white, with sugar, thanks – and my youngest, Ben,
is to be an accountant.

A year ago, to celebrate my birthday,
I caught a train, stared over my right shoulder and ate an ice-cream.

Sometimes I sit in the garden and watch the sky.

Last night, I noticed I had left the garage light on – *for a whole week*.

Who *am* I?

3. *My Story*

Who human I? Why so mal-born,
to caste my cloudy dice upon this city?
Still, in one fine sunny daze
I long to bask, with a quiet life and sprinklers,
in a weather-board with fax,
in a dreamy-leafy street. For this odd
shine is mine. And I am me.
My favourite saying is, “Let’s sign on with the IV
and start breeding.” What a joke (since my vasectomy)!

I am all eyes here, in my garden.
A whistle shrill, beyond flame trees,
where us round here say “Car is star,”
so I err on the foresight side
when planting. Am me in this.

And smile a lot, on frosty lawns,
where a forlorn spirit I caress
cares for the spare rows of trees along my drive.

As a five-year-old, Katy Did, I recall,
well, this and that.
I could really hum for you, oh *Twinkle*
Twilight, peanut brittle, perhaps.
Swore at senior football, and once
was spooked by a creepy ouija board
that warned ‘beware a chucked discus!’

At school, was cool, but inside floated
when called “the plucky trier who scraped a first
in maths, a many-sided paragon.”

Who am I? In 1968? In now?
That apocryphal picture, that paper...
don’t believe it!

I remember, a club, a cubby,
and the book you carried – white!
While eight years old!
This life has tiny bubbles of rust
on all of it, I guess. And most, on memory.
So, I’m near your door again...

I have a watch that tells it’s sunset,
where I have worked for 28 years
at, as they say, Arriving Late.
Twelve years ago, in a local industry
I was made fireman in
an emergency.
I ate my just desserts,
all afire, with streaming candles
at my send-off.
None was put out when I left.
Who am I?

Council gibberish
on a sign opposite my garage
makes me want to skip across
there with a spraycan, in the dead of night.
“No parking.” Ha! No parking spots, more like it!

There’s a little van in a field
where I planted snowdrops once.
I dream a sort of snowy-ice dew when I see snowdrops.
Do you? A family furore the day my uncle broke your famous vase.
It was white as anger, and my youngest, Ben,
counted the pieces on the floor.

Last night, I noticed I had left the kettle on – for a week.
Imagine things.
Are you from ‘Home Care’?

Who am I?

Home, Two Years Later

(For my late father)

There are mysterious barricades,
as Couperin knew, as hands discovered,
touching each note on the keyboard.

And rough weather sweeps from the hills
where leaves fly in obvious arcs.
This ornament completes an afternoon.

You look at winter flowers and feel the stab.
Time beyond the white scent, falling
like cold, invisible rain. A glass stands full

of white buds by a bed, hand on the cover.
Impossibly pale, though real,
outside any observable spectrum.

Colours inferred, in the blind mirror
of an afternoon, where your eyes,
at one remove, are still searching mine.

But I am searching the blue hello
or goodbye that transports light's shadows.
Above the garden, fresh daphne blooms

or lengthens over evidence, scent piling
up with coils of wire and cuttings in a shed –
small things that chafe or bruise may also heal.

You think of someone and they call; a
song or dream later on the train. In the traffic,
a mild rain runs down the glass, then distant clouds

leap from a novel you write in your mind.
What you have long suspected now
becomes clear. No place or person made to last,

it stays a feeling – the ‘way of the hands’ on a wheel
or keyboard, when thinking flows underneath
your nails, everything that must be done.

Pages float between the lines, or are
just left blank, become the shadows of these notes
all flowing – though not like rain, but

sure cascade of light, pure resonance,
as clouds tease apart then dissolve
when you look too hard at them...

or long enough, sustaining a weight that dissolves
l’art de toucher, the dance of your hands, Couperin.
(You said your hands were moments.)

Directness can make an easy fault of light –
and solitude ‘a theme’, or worse, just ‘local colour’,
paint details of a day, seeking hopelessly to tell.

Grace notes are the toughest, not
a precious trill, a leap or fall, set in a moment
that reflections might dissolve.

You keep up with the morning traffic
and wear old paths deeper, then turn to cross
looming and familiar maps of dark.

Of course, nothing’s really changed,
only a stab you might not have felt yet.
Tins of nuts and brushes spilling from a shed,

falling with a crash as you stumble about,
below the red and white *blink blink* of a plane
bringing low clouds closer, they might dissolve.

Then old Couperin comes to dinner,
to settle in groundcovers and the winter rain.
The things you love are in the dark again –

their barricades of wood-smoke and small stars
are everywhere, like lemon blossom or faintest
birdsong, time piling up the last of winter.

When sunlight returns, it is more welcome
than ever, granted like a wish the hills once whispered.
Your house seems to remember itself.

Dark Stars

Magnetism is the brilliant
love story between
charge and spin,
death leaning into life
in this bubble gasp
of stars and worm-holed
no-return.

Its ferocious disregard
for nouns turning blue
places us poles apart
from nature, tugged
from love and appetite
into a ghostly, aching
shimmering of quarks.

A teardrop nimbus
sheaths the earth, sculpted
by the solar wind's
slipstream, way past
Pluto's ice-rubble orbit.
The sun being you,
why am I so attracted
to this mystery
of energetic words
that keeps you breathing?

The beams of light
from the edge
of an old eclipse
clip a planet's outline,
to swell in liquid diamond,
into tears.

Sedating common sense
we refuse to shine,
quasi-stellar motes
in seas of suns,
yet seem to shift
more red waves than
our tiny inner
oceans should.

Hurt or longing
tucked us in
when we thought
we knew ourselves,
a dream at a time,
for this brief sleep
is life's corona.

No field unified
can heal time's raw deal
when we wake up,
laughing or in tears

the distant tilt
of whorls that barely touch

fingertips against the hair,
against the whispered face.

Moody Poussin

Tall rogues limp to Rome in bath and battle
robes

Where the skin of things glows golden,
the strap on a discarded helmet
gleams

All along the Appian Way are little
struggling columns

The statues stoop with empty hands
each balancing a wreath of air

Upon the solemn hill more ruins
glint in mid-day sun

Shadows are not light's absence
or just darker pigment,
but seem to live
within the leaves and branches,
to frame an evening vale

Where the poet presses lips
to his pipe
and cupidons flourish
circlets of laurel –

And always a contentious figure
who disputes the way,
pointing to a patch of distant sky
just out of reach

To where the atmosphere has assembled
into the giant outline of Zeus
about to strike –

But all the rest
are soft and muted for their journey

The adventure is not spent,
the tale does not end,
with a slave drawing a thorn
from his sandal

Above him, clouds broil
like an allegory this moment
must endure.

Sunstroke

If water burns, could flames be liquid?

Almost asleep, awash in shallows
of the Manly tide,
at just 13
and dazzled blind
after hot-foot hopping.
from asphalt to comatose hours
on a towel, floating on the sand sea
out to swimming light...

If pain is light, can salt preserve

this pool? All flowing back now
to a summer's sunburst of blood
ignites my skin's thin raft,
and my back dips into ripples
that place cool kisses
fracturing
arms and legs into sheer sensation

The sun crawls up on little whips.
These sea sounds now
lift eyelids swimming red
as a curve of rock, a salty bloodwarm
bath that rocks and cradles

Hours later wrapped in flames
and salt-licked crayfish skin
in the false comfort of a deliriously
cool motel room where air hissed,
the ceiling fan pressed down
the big sun's brand
onto singlet straps
and white-striped hide

Our mind – That's me back then and now –
a stained glass rhizome-hive
on fire,
sick on honey
sends shards out, chill barbs
from way below a skin beneath the skin
as the ice man melts again,
wears me like a hollow cloak of fire

Nuclear Waste

A bright beach haze sets
great days alight in an open window's
pan-flash. Little soot puffs seethe
along the Bondi beachfront
as traffic shifts its needles
and its gears.

Flung around the harbour,
picnickers pick through sandbars,
to the cool dream destiny
of one big blue umbrella minus clouds.

Our future in the global sweatshop
is assured, its muscular
Dow Jones will kick tomorrow's
sand back in you face.
Out in the desert,
there are funny dishes
with all mod cons. One day
the dump franchise
will glow like rotten surf
between our flags.

Where will it end?
In the squeal of one fat brat!
His ice-cream ball
won't be bouncing back.
Its sticky face is floating flat
in hot asphalt of a summer's carpark.

Bath Cheese

In his *Zen Teaching*, the Chinese sage Huang Po reveals what it might be like to return to life without division and cultivate simplicity beside One Flower Lake, viewing everything as, we might say, a 'clean slate'. Of a reflected winter sky, he writes, summoning a serene frontier into being: "The everywhere beauty of the Pure Mind shines on all with its spotless perfection."

I put down the book, and look across my desk and stare. I don't know what 'pure' could mean down here, making my own little patch of sky and lake appear out of Huang's seductive yet impossible idealism. I think about it so long my computer's screen-saver begins to bob and morph: a multi-coloured 'flower box' flung up from seedpods, via molecules, into pyramidal polyhedrons.

The phone rings, and our neighbour says she wants to see the stained glass in our bathroom. But there's one catch – the room is filthy, and I'm torn abruptly from this poem,
to attack
the sink with bleach and scouring pads, to make the room nice to visit. I use a toothbrush for the grooves and edges of the toilet bowl, where old shit collects – it's sick-making though grim fun, in a low-key, domestic sort of way.

The gray ring on the tub really says 'hard work!' A patina of human lard, I guess, has seeped and congealed into every pock and scratch in its enamel skin. I imagine acne, as you do – the microscopic view of a surface full of pores, clogged with skin flakes, bits of dirt, thick and oily, with odd pubic hairs sticking to the grime. "You know those TV ads," my partner says, peering in, "where you miraculously wipe it all away? What a load of crap."

The image of a 'home' I inspected for my father years ago is
reflected,
somehow, in a tap. "No bath cheese on these tubs," the social
worker
whispered as we looked. "I always sniff for urine," she had confided
I remember now. "It's a dead give-away. But this place smells OK."

"The trouble is," I reply, answering the echo of a voice
inside my mind, "Purity's a dangerous word, a fetish of fear.
Scrub off the real. The friendly grime has gone to a cleaner
world."

To her, I shout: "Yes, I wish life was as easy as some ad."

Oldies at another 'home', a more luxurious one,
sat in plush chairs, staring into space for hours,
dying hard and slow. The best hostel we found was clean,
though a bit run down, but cheery, casual too,
with lots of people in and out, activities each day.

The mirrored basin next, and I clear away my partner's several
'gendered' objects (girly stuff, lip balm, cosmetics and powder
puff) which all stay 'just objects' just the same,
then carefully replace them on a field of radiant snow.

The poem, when I return, is no longer impressed behind
its clever screen. My computer's crashed and black,
sitting on the dusty desk. It has joined, old Huang might say,
the world's "conditioned things" – and minus the blinding flash
finale I had hoped for it.

Still, not all is lost. Presumably the all-in-one remains
the one-in-all. And those endearing little words, 'bath cheese',
are proving harder to erase, floating in the sudden absence
my poem has become, dabbing the void forever with their
grubby kiss.

I look down upon the keyboard and it becomes a sudden
landscape. I begin to type the title of this poem.
Words appear on the screen and evoke a distant winter sky,
then water, subtle coruscation of light upon a lake.

“If anyone were left to see them,” thought old Huang,
disturbing his wavering image in the water,
“then I might see them.”

As he looks, the words absorb him.

In the lake, another sky floats up,
another face, another poem.

I see that it is mine.
‘Bath Cheese.’

AEIOU

A

sentence can set up
a teepee anywhere,
and enclose
any number
of vague articles.

A temporary lean-to,
with a loft
for meaning's nomads,
is (ironically) portable,
because A stable base
is hard to topple. Both
sides are united,
both have A point.

E

faces it squarely –
E says, if you clearly
have a front and back,
E says, it gives direction
to the world.

But symmetry, E notes,
can leave you in a quandary,
unless, E says, it's vertical.

E heeds that

Each with Each is on parade,
like Noah's elephants.

Three-pronged E is marching on.

E says don't look back. And E is always
right. No need to rake it over.

I

am your object,
but I, my subject,
is a column
supporting air.

I am
an erection mark
exclaiming
in this silent, infinite
gallery
that I am
a plinth
upholding
space.
I remain anonymous,
although all claim me.
I am all eyes
I am Cyclops.
I am
I
and I
have it.

O
the mouth pouts,
O speaks of infinite
circulation, O,
a pipe cut in half
or snake with an ache
to rondo and to roll,
as space
flows through zero's circuit,
and divides everything
into infinity.
(*Oh*, little planet
IOU everything!)
Our earth may
peel an orange
and look tiny from afar,
but still means all
the wOrld
to us.

U
are an empty cup,
or are you?
Are you waiting for donations?
U, are you ever full?
U only exist
because you
are another,
because we fill you,
little mark, with meaning.
U are full
of glances,
U are read but not
exhausted,
U enclose
the meanings you contain.
U are always open
to my drift,
little boat afloat
in wound and buoyant.
U are my ideal
interlocutor,
U catch my drift?
Oh, you crafty little letter –
what would I, or one, or we
ever do without you?

A Hope

Time erodes all our certainties
and, in the same way, the future,
which has a habitation and a face.
It's just a busy tourist street
where your footfalls echo
a distant friend's, and it's raining
all over some far-off Saturday
and the effect is rather ghostly.
I talk about inward things and here
you imagine outward ones,
yet not an actual street to walk down.

Let's say the rain is sweeping in long
flat sheets, close to the ground. Horizontal
rain, at first furious, then just
a scribble, falling 'naturally',
as the wind dropping to a breath. It's the street
of a country town you see,
that you've always wanted to imagine,
so nondescript yet particular
it's actually alive.

There are yellow trees,
apples ripen behind the wooden fence.
A lot needs mending – garages and the sky,
a torn curtain. There's a distant factory
surrounded by wire and tarpaulins,
a motel in black, the covers on its one TV.

A lover swims to meet you here,
through rain and over endless paddocks,
where winter is a history of gentle, diffident
emotions the silos cannot hold, grain through their hands,
light seeping through their fingers.

I should try to smile more often.
What can you do with it, this weather?
What use a smile evaded, upmarket emotions
I cannot afford? Fence posts are suspended
on one wire, raindrops on a swing and slide,
all down a long day's glistening sides.
Night falls and sweeps aside the
curtains, this afternoon of embers.

A puddle of light pockmarks the street.
Softly or alone, words are worlds
of amber, glass and liquid piano,
chosen for their effect or cadence,
the will a bright blue field
into which the weather disappears.

Gravel beneath your boots is wet, and there's no time
for their tiny rhapsody above the tired linoleum,
the white steam's coffee kiss.
Chickens in the straw, baby in a bonnet,
farmers sell their lives for just a song.
One by one, beyond our 'arts' and willing hands,
all the cars are leaving, the caravans too.

Seduced by Starlight

This simple poem is a raft
of words afloat in history.
The waves don't beckon here, they
simply break and lift you up.

Ideas in your mind are not
the mind itself. Do not ask for much
among the sheltering palms,
a warm tradewind, a mind at all.

Your hands are poised and bright, stars
equations above your swaying arms,
and reduce the night to a frame
within a thumb and index.

The watchman is seduced by starlight.
He dreams of intricacy, a final scale,
and ignores the simple perfume
of a tranquil beach.

Stars shaped our craft and took us to a
random shore, our instruments an
abstract art. The course we set ourselves
is clear. We could end anywhere.

Last Stop

The man with the big ears and glasses shuffles his paper.
The man in the seat beside him shuffles his paper too. The woman
opens her book. The other woman closes hers and looks at me.
I open or close my book too.

The man with the big ears and glasses takes out his tie,
looks at it, and puts it back. The man in the seat beside him coughs,
shuffles his paper, and looks at his tie too. They both look at their ties,
and shuffle their papers.

The kid with the cap turned back and white dog stamps
his foot. He stamps his foot again, pats his dog, and sits down.
Others sit down too.

The girl beside me eats chips and looks bored. The air is full of chips
and the others are staring, as I stare too – reading
papers, eating, nodding, lurching left and right, and gently rocking.
Stations flash past and it's suddenly night – lights flashing past,
flashing past, in the warmth. Everything squeaks and rattles.
We're bored and nodding too.

They don't look at each other – very quickly. Or you look
without looking at me. And she looks without looking at you.
We strenuously don't look at each other. We strenuously look at nothing.
His, her, our reflections in all the doors and windows
just look at nothing too.

Laughter behind me gets louder. I look at my paper and shuffle.
I look at my toes and flex them. The laughter gets louder then
stops.

Thump thump of music takes over, then we go on much
further, and further.

When the train stops at the last station,
she gets out, and he does too.

And the kid with the dog gets out. And the girl with the empty
chip packet follows him out.

And suddenly we're all on that station,
the cold air in our eyes and hair,
streaming into the long winter night. And the train sits
empty and silent at the station,
and the man with the big ears and glasses
doesn't shuffle his paper,
and the man who isn't beside him any more
doesn't too.

Unsolved

No words crystallise
in the test tube's
intricate cluescape

a silent eternity is traced
between sand grains
and the salt-white sun

see pink enamel
flake from the doll's cheek
under the lens

your cold children
deaf in the attic
with the grey moth

remaining light
floats like lost wings

trembles
on an unstuck eyelash.

Spaceclown Reading

Who is this clown with number 2 on his hat?
Waiting for the printout, codes and numbers
that will launch him into life,
into his own aching fate?

He dreams of a red diamond in a blue
triangle, laid out on the grass
of the derelict carpark,
a target for his otherworldly ambition.

His world is pure information
and he thinks he is alone.
The laws of optics are all known, he thinks,
of gravity barely imagined – and bites the stub
of a pencil above a tiny school desk
in a toyland public hall, under the rain
of a past-tense he cannot navigate, unless...

He coughs into the red scarf about his neck,
the one with rings and sparkles,
and dreams of a ship that will take him far from here.
Everything he loves concentrates
as if in a lens, and everyone he meets
is like himself, all castaway in masks, in chains.

Through the open window he sees miles of sky
beaming back the enigmatic stuff
that imprisons him. The sun is pure intensity,
and around it he imagines tiny flares.
His first, his only, love is space.

Unfinished, yet to happen, he looks
to where his hands are inferred,
just flickers of distant information –
and the particles stream out in lines of light
and light departs for distant globes
blinking above his porous face,

entering each eye at moist blue.

Rainbow

Above the gravity that pulls everything down
are words that float like a morning rainbow.
Looking up, the ticket you hold in your hand
turns liquid on the red wind. Suddenly, you are
set into the fragile form that time erodes.

Gulls turn liquid on the wing beyond the orange river
where the silver fades and the sun smothers
docklands and a heart full of daisies.
You look above yellow rails and a slight morning
mist rises as if from the corner of a painting,
and it softens the glare of existence.

Watching death-bright passengers
alight, caught in the green air they embrace.
The skyline burns into blue surrounded by
nothingness and we move along its indigo veins.

As intense as the violet sky, yet cloudy and often
hopeless, your luminous and incorrigible mind
flowers towards the cold light: a thing
of adjectives afloat above the day,
perhaps a bruised rainbow burning in the air

beyond the gravity that pulls everything down.

Weeping Woman

(For Barrett Reid)

“Do you like my face? These days, it’s passable.
But for years I looked a mess. That was when
I worked for Picasso.

Sometimes I looked like a woman,
sometimes like a macaw,
or even a violin or a chair,

you had to be versatile.

But I was making a living,
even though it was hard work

That legendary energy of his,
it was true. He’d paint all day,
and I’d always feel flat as a tack.

But being tired was not the worst of it.
No... it was what he did to my face.

First, both eyes on the same side.
I could only see from that side. Not
only demeaning, but try crossing a road.
Dangerous!

Then Pablo flattened my nose.
And gave me just one huge blue ear,
Poor Pablo...
he had no sense of anatomy.

Then I was pasted bits of newsprint,
or wallpaper.
Do you think I was ever given the benefit of the doubt –

I mean, any flesh tints at all! Oh no! Nothing subtle for Pablo.
It was all aquamarine, bright orange,
the classics with chicken suit and fright wig.

It was a relief when he'd finished for the day. I'd jump
out of the frame and fix myself a scotch
from the studio bottle.

Sometimes he'd hear me
and take a look around. But, being an artwork,
I'd only have to stand sideways, and he couldn't see.
I'd slide under the studio door, and ride
on the Metro till late.

Or go drinking with a friend called Gus,
though *you* know Gus as that little figure –
with his back to you, in a boat – in that Bocklin
painting (do you know it?) called *Island Of The Dead*. Anyway,
he's a sad sack, Gus, and often needed cheering up –
painted with all that dark romanticism and symbolist
morbidezza.

But, sometimes, we got a party going –
Adam and God would drop in from the Sistine ceiling,
with Donald and Goofy and the low-art crowd. Or Venus
(the Milo) put
the gang into her 'beetle' for ten-pin bowling.

But, of course, I'd have to be 'in frame'
by the morning,
Hurrying back, the Paris streets were damp
and that's how it happens I'm *here*.

How? I caught a chill.
I blew my nose and – became 3-D!
Well, just a bit of me did, my *dnoze*.
Then I sneezed again and, POP! –
the rest of me was 3-D, too.

And, feeling light-headed, I walked the boulevards,
testing my new inner freedom.

Or, to go a little faster,
I'd let out bits of air,
with a rude blurting sound

whooshing round and round in circles,

up over the rooftops of Paris,
and into the painted sky!

Close shaves

Studio

“Well, I don't want to
make a ‘finished’ work, as you
put it Sam. Because a ‘finished’ work
is exactly that. Dead, finished!”
“No, no – I said a ‘Finnish’ work, Frank!
Finnish!”

Shouted in a park

“I'm going to the cemetery.”
“Aren't we all!”

Bent piano

A mist of blue noise.
Old shoes. Bug grit.
A reminder of being here.
More blue days.

Crazy man vow

Now, everywhere,
will you go with me.
Watch out!
Here I am!
The man with whitebait
in his hair!

Architects at the pool

“Last one in has
a rotten schemata.”

Overheard, tram

“Talk about slow!
I call her
‘Lily of the Valium’.”

Two young men
“She gave me
an invisible jolt.”

Left bank
All gave some.
Some gave air!
Fresh air!
Plein air!
Appollinaire!

Overheard, bus
“Go on, just
spit it out.
Speak your tongue!”

Overheard
“God, I've been four
days without a biro!”

In Tokyo
A vending machine
for live crayfish.

Solid glass paperweight
See this –
You place it over
the poem,
and the glass – see!
makes the lines
seem to bend –
into fractured
swirls of
spiderweb
light.

The Museum of Wishes

In the Museum of Wishes,
are things that never were,
forgotten things, love unspoken.

In the Museum of Wishes
are plans never carried out,
many ways of trapping zero,
beauty unimagined.

Exhibits are left to silence
in the Museum of Wishes
in vast halls of wondering,
each gallery an expanse of night,
and not a single star.

The Museum of Wishes is full
of forgotten things –
unsaid, that did not arrive –
in aisles and corridors
as endless as speculation.

Thoughts couldn't stray
on Earth if there was no Museum of Wishes.
Untranslated into life
they'd accumulate,
perversely refusing to be.

Legend says the Museum
has branches everywhere,
there's an X on every map.
If you approach the Museum
Of Wishes, it just gets further away.

Perhaps, you'll ask directions
and some guide will say,
pointing at the hills and sky:
"There must be some mistake.
There's no museum here."

As you drive away, still trying
to arrive, without new hope and
beyond caring, you see the
Museum of Wishes,
bright and cruel, a tiny star.

“There!” Beyond the lake,
the broken toys, the refugees in
rags, guards at the sad frontier,
where rifles lean in smoke-filled air.
There! Beyond the wrecker’s yard.

Then you turn away and say,
“Why did you bring me here?”
Reading clues in air, in clouds...
Walking backwards, reading signs,
quite unhinged, or far too sane...

A house that leans in dreaming wheat,
a farm with shuttered boards...
At last, you refuse to court such folly,
older and wiser now as you survey
a vacant lot.

Perhaps you cough, and change the subject:
“Yes, the weather has been mild.
Besides, it hardly matters, does it?”
You wander in some ruined labyrinth,
the patina of an ancient statue on your hands.

You linger on a bridge
above another dreaming town,
look down at its rubble yards.
You walk a little further,
your feet whisper in the gravel.

The road leads to another
open road, and then another.
The rectangle and the opening –
the door to endless night is clearly
etched there on the grass.

Of course, you cannot say for sure.
There's no memory of your visit,
no brochure, no souvenir.
Just a final wisp of nothing,
useless as a tear.

The Words

In the central library, a cleaner sighs
above his circulating mop.
There's a faint clatter of buckets down a corridor.
As lights go out, books stand in silence.
Not a whisper from a single page.

Books are stacked from A to Z
in long avenues of shelves,
in black and white, in perfect stillness.
A moth lands on a mellow spine
and closes the covers of its wings.

A shadow lengthens beneath one book
and ink runs down the silent corridors.
Words flow in stabs of quick black light,
and out across the polished floors.

Each is slipping loose, sliding from its sentence,
leaving pages gaping, full of holes.
The regimented shelves
stand blankly now.

A vast black tide streams under bookshop doors.
Words from signs and packaging
drop with a splash of ink.
Even words on newspaper slip away –
as a passer-by in an overcoat
holds them high up to the light.

People are playing charades –
they nod, wave their hands and pop their eyes.
A TV newsreader starts to speak,
but the mouth just forms into shapes,
like a goldfish, and he says nothing.
And the gigantic dreamy clouds of people
on a movie screen all say nothing.

To write on paper is no good.
Even before they're dry
the words are gone!
Words before they're spoken,
words in the mind
all rush now into this Dark River.

NOTES

'Long Black'

Dedication. *John Anderson*. The late Australian poet, author of *The Bluegum Smokes a Long Cigar* (1978), *The Forest Set Out Like the Night* (1995), and *The Shadow's Keep* (1997)

'Rainbow'

Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet... the colours of visible light seen in the rainbow are mentioned, and black and white implied by the printed page.

'Walking on the Water Tension'

Line 6. *striders*. Insects with long middle legs that skim across the surface in a fast, rowing movement.

Line 7. *boatman*. The water boatman, with its long oar-like legs, is an insect found on the pond surface.

Line 11. *spikerush*. *Eleocharis sphacelata*. Large, cylindrical-leaved, upright rushes topped with cone-like flowerheads. They propagate both from division and from seed.

Line 11. *columns*. Fancifully, from 'the point of view' of a microscopic water creature, rush stems would look like gigantic columns, perhaps of some vast architectural structure. The Greek names for some of these tiny water-borne creatures ('Hydra', 'Stentor', 'Cyclops', etc), combined with their appearance (as strange, or stranger, than any fabulous creature) further suggests an underwater world of legendary proportion, but in the micro-scale.

Line 12. *heliotropic*. Growing towards sunlight.

Line 13. *diatoms*. Single-celled plants, often found joined into long, thread-like colonies (of delicate 'slime').

Line 22. *four-part invention*. The mosquito has four distinct phases to its life cycle: adult insect (mosquito); egg; larva ('wiggler') and pupa ('tumbler'). (Water beetles also exhibit a four-phase metamorphosis.)

Line 35. *Stentor*. A protozoan, up to about 2mm across, shaped like a trumpet, with its tail attached to a leaf or twig and the disproportionately huge mouth of the trumpet drawing in all smaller organisms nearby. When the Stentor detaches its tail and becomes free-swimming, it changes into an oval shape.

Line 36. *Hydra*. Freshwater polyps, which catch small animals, such as water fleas, with their stinging tentacles. Can be free-swimming or anchored to vegetation. Hydra have a special green algae living symbiotically in their body wall. (A similar symbiosis occurs in saltwater coral polyps, which live in colonies.) Hydra reproduce both sexually, and by producing 'buds' (miniature hydra) which break off and mature into adults.

Line 36. *Paramecium*. One of the largest protozoa (single-celled animal) found in fresh water. Up to about 3mm in size, they are just visible as a speck in pond water.

Line 42. *motile*. Capable of motion.

'Middle Yarra Tributary'

Verse 3, line 6. *aleatory*. Dependent on chance.

Verse 4, line 9. *stag*. An old, long-standing dead tree with many hollow branches.

Verse 7, line 2. *Kato*. A type of bucket excavator.

Verse 8, line 3. *EPA*. Environmental Protection Authority.

Verse 9, line 6 '*re-gen*'. Re-generation (of indigenous plants) after fire, land-clearing or over-grazing. For example, some wattle seeds can lie in the ground for more than 70 years 'waiting' for favourable conditions in which to re-generate.

Verse 10, line 2. *formaldehyde*. HCHO, a gas, usually in aqueous solution, used very widely in disinfectants, preservatives, resins and plastics. It has been claimed that some plants can break it down very effectively.

'Zooplankton'

Zooplankton. Animal plankton (microscopic, water-borne animals), as opposed to phytoplankton (microscopic, water-borne plants).

Verse 1, line 4. *water flea*. A tiny animal that moves by sweeping large antennae through the water in a series of jerks.

Verse 2, line 1. *Daphnia*. A tiny freshwater crustacean, with a transparent shell.

Verse 3, line 2. *Azolla*. An aquatic fern, sometimes forming mats over the surface.

Verse 4, line 3. *cilia*. Fine 'hairs' that surround the mouths of tiny animals such as rotifers ('wheel animals'). The beating or sweeping cilia create micro-currents that draw in water and plankton.

Verse 5, line 2. *cinerariums*. A place for depositing the ashes of the dead after cremation. (The word is nicely euphonious, and carries echoes of 'aquariums'.)

Verse 5, line 5. *phyto-mass*. 'Phyto' is Greek for plant. The phyto mass in freshwater ecology is the mass of phytoplankton.

Verse 6, line 3. *caddis fly*. The adults are insects related to butterflies and moths. The grub-like larvae are aquatic and build cases from grains of sand, twigs and bits of leaf. They are common in the Yarra and its tributaries, and their abundance is one indicator of the ecological health of watercourses.

Verse 6, line 4. *ganglia*. The dense aggregate of nerve-cell bodies present in most animals. In the more advanced 'primitive' groups, such as arthropods, there are pairs of ganglia at intervals along the body that largely control the actions of each body segment, as well as a larger, dorsal pair in the head (a rudimentary brain).

Verse 6, line 4. *swimmerets*. In yabbies (and other crustaceans), abdominal legs adapted for both swimming and carrying eggs.

Verse 6, line 7. *Cyclops*. Single-eyed crustacean, a fast swimmer and predator, with twin pairs of moustachio-like feelers or antennae at either side of its single eye. The word 'cyclopean' also has an architectural meaning.

Verse 7, line 3. *monotreme*. Egg-laying mammal. (The two surviving members of the order are the platypus and echidna.)

Verse 7, line 6. *mud-eye*'s. Mud-colored dragonfly larvae called mud-eyes are active predators, and their split, empty larvae cases can often be found on water plants. Their gills are inside the rectum, and they move by rapidly expelling water from the rear.

Verse 8, line 7. *maxillae*. Paired appendages behind the mandibles of insects and crustaceans.

Verse 8, line 8. *riparian*. Belonging to the bank of a river or edge of a watercourse.

'Sydney Road Kebab'

Introduction. *kebab* and *pantoufle*. A joke, of course.

'Why I Like You'

Verse 7, line 3. *le douceur fleurie des etoiles*. The flowering beauty of the stars.

‘Who Am I’

1. *Fame*. Verse 2, line 4. *The Dictionary of Philosophy* reports ... It *does* report this odd conversation, actually between Russell and Alfred North Whitehead!

3. *My Story*. Verse 4, line one. Katy Did. *What Katy Did, What Katy Did Next*, were two of a series of well-known children’s books by Susan Coolidge.

‘Home, Two Years Later’

Verse 13, line 2. *l’art de toucher*. The art of touching. Or, as we might say of an instrumentalist/composer, the art of perfecting a sure touch. ‘*toucher*’ has multiple meanings in modern French, including to move or affect, and to allude to (or touch on) a (possibly) difficult subject.

‘Dark Stars’

Verse 1, line 6. *worm-holed*. In astronomy, a ‘worm hole’ is a theoretical point of gravitational implosion or collapse in the fabric of space/time, possibly connecting places remote from each other within the universe.

Charge and spin in the same verse refer to properties of elementary particles. *Bubble gasp* alludes to the idea of rapid universal expansion.

Verse 3, lines 2 and 3. *the solar wind’s / slipstream*. In addition to heat and light, the Sun emits a low-density stream of charged particles (mostly electrons and protons) known as the solar wind, which propagates at about 450km/sec. This ‘wind’ exerts a force on objects in space and reacts with the earth’s magnetic field and upper atmosphere (ionosphere), creating the northern lights (the beautiful aurora borealis) and southern lights (aurora Australis). The solar wind also exerts a pressure on the Earth’s magnetic field, distorting it on the day-side into the head of a teardrop. The field is simultaneously stretched on the night side, with the teardrop’s ‘tail’ streaming out behind the Earth.

Verse 4, line 5. *liquid diamond*. As a solar eclipse approaches ‘totality’ and the moon moves in front of the sun and obscures it completely, there is a band of light around the moon’s perimeter, with a final sparking jewel of light at the far edge, called the ‘diamond ring’.

Verse 5, lines 5/6. *yet seem to shift / more red waves*. Here, the colour red refers to the Doppler Effect, where wavelengths of light become compressed or elongated, shifting towards the red or blue end of the spectrum, respectively, as they speed towards or away from an observer.

DARK RIVER



Dark River is a rich and stimulating collection. It contains many dark poems, often relieved by a knowing good humour and a lightness of touch. Jenkins departs from his home near the Yarra Valley, illuminating distant places on his journey, only to return to re-claim territory that has become, paradoxically, both elusive and more familiar.

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