

Picnics of jam and inspiration

Let's start Euterpe's engine
and hum gently up the avenue.

It's crowded on the interstates
of angst and unrequited love.

Oh my heart, my spleen, my vandalized soul.

Death spins in perpetual roundabouts
clogging commuter routes with fatalism.

You'll find some irony in the glovebox.

But we'll engage the four-muse drive
to skip off road,

in search of rough terrain, the stony trails
of balancing philosophies,

the lonely thought less had.

Maps show T.S. Eliot's tracks
as faint impressions to the east

coming and going like Shakespearean extras,
gossiping with critics in the wings

while Whitman's yawp
still echoes in the morning air

above we loafers with leaves of weed,

and who knows what's awaking
in the cerebral woods of revelation.

*Pass me a coffee spoon, Alfred,
and tell me more about the mermaids.*

So let's go.

I'll pack sandwiches.

A once lovelorn bard's final journey

The Northern skies were streaked with signs of spring
as, embracing, we re-kindled last night's fire,
not yet knowing birch logs book-end everything
or how commencement ceases our desire.

*It's the heat of anticipation without fulfilment
that burns hottest in the splintered couplets of our after-years.
It melts the snow, it stokes the sauna,
and it leads to a series of the wettest winters on record.*

In the rising sun's own land, with grace we leant
into each other's shadows, racing fate.
Our Eastern moon began a shy descent,
attempting to avoid the burn. Too late.

*Oh hell. This stubborn pursuit of a classical love affair
gets clichéd in orienting a flambéed occidental heart.
Geishas cannot save it, nor can a struggling haiku:
Sunny afternoon. / Kisses hot, embraces warm. / My tea has gone cold.*

I've played my games with you, and you're ahead.
My scrabbled brain heads South in its despair
to Ipanema ladies who have fed
my flames but bossa nova'd different squares.

*'Euphemistic' up from 'Quixotic' would be double triple word score,
but I'm stumbling with pronouns near the bottom of the board.
There's more than one thing to do in bed, you know,
though you couldn't tell from the magazines of picture poetry on my shelf.*

Veni, vidi, vici, love has gone
to sleep. Romance dies cold when you need a catheter to pee.
You're my undercover policeman set upon
surveilling neurological austerity.

*My senile verse lies fractured.
Dog-eared, dog-Latin doggerel never won fair heart.
 $a^2 + b^2 = c^2 \times d^2$
Circle squared, I drift alone in the post-Enlightenment West.*

This poem is already written

Alice Springs, Australia

*"One should perhaps visualise the Songlines as a spaghetti of Iliads and Odysseys ... in which every 'episode' was readable in terms of geology."
- Bruce Chatwin, 'The Songlines', 1987*

There is a well-worn path for poets
where every Google-mapped destination
holds an aesthetic scribbling,
revisiting lost love or lamenting urban indifference.

Centrifuges of literary movement,
impatient with yearning for dynamic innovation,
capture ink at instants of zenith or nadir.

This place, though, breathes a different sentient fire.
Here, the stories form in earth or rare drops of water.
Here, the poem is already written.

The muse springs round Alice, and Alice springs.

Many for whom the land speaks lyrics in their mother tongue
now hunt on the colonial road, hawk carvings in eucalyptus
or ochre-painted bark, whose symbols mean as little to tourists
as the hieroglyphs inside an ancient pyramid.

But the old red rock will not be silenced.

Histories, tragedies, comedies carved by and deep in the terrain
echo sunlight, loudly visible, comprehensible but to a chosen few,
until the dusk cross-fades to a soundtrack of drum and didgeridoo,
leaving the land to hum its mournful night-time dreaming.

The vibrant earth questions me about my ancestors;
wild parrots perch like notes on a telegraph stave
breezily whistling my tales, which the goannas already knew.

Daybreak brings the dance of clouds and the ballad of sand.

Departing in the warm embrace of dawn, I wonder
if the young pod forming on an acacia branch will grow to notate,
for those who can sing, a fleeting aside on my passing through.

The cut flower's lament

I'm beautiful,
you say,
as I die dismembered

in an agonizing
spectral bouquet,

blooms bursting
post-mortem.

I am cut.
I am slain.

I am forced
to give pleasure

to rapists with secateurs
who waterboard my foliage
in saturated foam.

Rootless, I wilt
in the hot sun of torture,

man-handled,
sniffed at,

waiting, just waiting
for my colors
to fade

in time
with her obituary.

Rhyme scene

*"As most poetry practitioners in this day and age, we find
rhymed poetry to be a thing of the past."
- The Inflectionist Review, 2015*

Our thesaurus lies indecent, face down still,
spine bent, splayed at the tear-stained lines you cried

in desperate explanation. I reach in guilty
shattered silence for filthy fingercourse

with salty specks of disembodied
DNA. Before divorce, your word rounds

had spat fire at me in deadly rhymes, fractured
semi-automatic iambs. Now I recoil

at spent lexical casings echoing
the air's confession. I taste the Conan Doyle

vignette with a tone-deaf tongue, and retch the dueling
interrogatives you flung into our swear jar

between Eliots, George and T.S., on your bookshelf,
where our abandoned dual-accreditation

doggerel awaits forensics.