

Earthly delights / S.K. Kelen.

Kelen, Stephen K.

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Earthly Delights

S. K. Kelen



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PANDANUS POETRY

Earthly Delights

Also by S. K. Kelen

Atomic Ballet
Dingo Sky
Trans-Sumatran Highway & Other Poems
Shimmerings
Goddess of Mercy

Earthly Delights

S. K. Kelen

PANDANUS BOOKS

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A City

A muddy red river waters farm lands,
Meanders through a city loved by its people.
On the roofs of rebuilt houses they are building towers
And spiral staircases leading to the air, and statues:
Haunted angels and benign demons watch the sky.
The east window's shaded, the morning sun
Burns like the flash from a laser-guided bomb.
The white walls reflect a marble pallor
(Destiny & Doom) that becomes white light
Glowing the bright human living, a market place
Street life is rich where children play, happy
With hope death will never fall from the sky.
Some pray to grow up free to be learned
In ancient ways or be modern, if they please.

Bon Voyage

Atop the suburb's 'mountain', really a hill
just ragged bush almost the last place in the city
one can be alone with sky and the trees.
The wind blows grass seeds, dust and insects
in no direction — cracks the big branches and down
they come to embrace gravity. See danger —
it's better you talk to kangaroo, cockatoo
& any spirit who could be bothered travelling
here to this cold hill. As the clouds wrap around
hear Dad softly saying goodbye
he's leaving on the next flight up, up,
up, and up, another true life adventure
*what is there at the end or ever
space, light and air?* A man who never
said never, made life look like an exercise
in style touring the twentieth century
ah Dad travel well those heavenly climes
hot or very warm I'd bet and don't forget
to write & charm the clouds, the stars,
time goes from here to forever.
Words after the last words.

Slouching

Early Twentieth Century

A bi-plane's propeller turns faster & faster
fanning the future's radiation, the engine's
drone tolls the beginning of the end of the world.
On a battlefield an ancient tank (grainy black & white)
tips up then drops down (clumsy clown)
on a trench full of men, crushing most of them.
It looks quaint now, almost *cute* like a stumbling bear.
With this image firmly in mind, the poet
W. B. Yeats composed the final pasture songs,
sweet elegies for magic in the world that fled.
Time to farewell the last of the fresh air, heroes,
giants and faeries. The aeroplane predicted fresh
calamity: mass-produced slaughter was coming.
Yeats tried to save what he could of *idyll*
so old legends could live somewhere with meaning
keep their time in pretty poems but no charmed maid or
causeway-leaping giant could save that emerald world
& cooling forest. Dark satanic mills won the day.
Cold modernity followed in their wake, a brooding European
monochrome hinted at worlds passing (the good old days)
there was a new kind of person to be — coolly
blazing hot terror — knowing next to nothing,
except how to slouch like a rough beast.
Clumsy tanks of 1915 grew bigger, faster, stronger.
Wood and wire biplanes evolved into beautiful,
sleek creatures.

End of that Century

Technology could be benign.
It only required a user-friendly interface.
The way a computer works: the machine
takes words and numbers, breaks them
down into binary combinations; the same binaries
that helped target a village were unravelled
by teams of software-writers who reconstructed
the code so computers radiated sweetness and light.
A pixellated harmony would bring peace at last.
Too late for the dead oceans and species expired,
the children killed by smart or stupid bombs.
Too late for the unlucky. While village-targeting
accuracy advances exponentially, today, Yeats' poems
are downloadable (with expert commentary).

Hanoi Girls

Hanoi most sensible of cities —
at night the traffic finally does stop
and a great hush of sleeping
descends: a curtain drawn
down by good spirits
and ghosts about to start work.
Not a sound for kilometres
except a cough deep in a house
a lonely bicycle bell, a word called
out from a dream, a stray bird drunk.
It's dark on the pavement
but the sky glows with smog.
Quiet all night until a rooster crows
sunrise somewhere in the rice fields
behind the rebuilt suburbs
north of the river.
The people who sleep
in the street hammocks are first up
and busy. Everyone's going to work
in an office, school, a sweatshop
or a street stall, hot days get louder
with all the talking it's as if everyone's shouting.
Slow rivers of traffic meander.
Suddenly the girls are there, dozens
then hundreds riding motor scooters
braking gently at the traffic light in Ly Thai To Street
now the traffic flows like waves on a quiet lake.

Cyclo drivers and labourers
might stop for a moment, consider
the day's hot slog is almost worth it,
to see their city's young women growing beautiful
and rich. They remember to be kind to strangers
who try to compare their less cultivated worlds.
What greater joy could there be than to see
Hanoi girls ride motor scooters,
pillion sisters sitting side saddle.
When the traffic slows they gossip
like tigresses with girls on the other scooters.
Silks and nylon made sure the war
was won by the miniskirt allied with knee-high
leather boots or diaphanous sandals.
Hanoi girls out-glamour the Italians
they fit imitation Gucci so much better
and bring a sense of reticence to leather.
Their mobile phones ring urgently —
lightning strikes Hanoi's holy mountain
friendly rain clouds gather.
Dial an ancestor — mothers and grandmothers
were the bravest women warriors
Vietnam had seen for centuries.
They fought the invaders and lost husbands,
brothers and sons, sisters and daughters.
Everyone lost somebody
when the heartless and stupid ruled America
sent over soldiers and bombers.

The war ended, and lots of granddaughters,
lots of grandsons came into the world.
Over time the hard times got better
there was food for almost everyone.
The population skyrocketed, as they say, and
Hanoi's grand-daughters grew up and dressed to kill.
Commuting on their scooters they chatter: are love poems
more romantic more sincere than a gift of flowers,
or just cheaper? There's the wicked past of a Government
Minister who used to be a Saigon pop singer —
too wicked to mention. French football stars
are heading to Vietnam to help improve the local game
ha ha it won't work — the boom in Hanoi's real estate
goes through the roof, So-and-so is starting up
a new business, the new style of Hué cooking
is not so new, those horoscopes in *Sport and Culture*
magazine are so vague to be nearly always right
and the interview with David Beckham
is almost the same as last month's.
To ensure good daughters have everything their mothers
and fathers missed, the sacrifices made are tougher
than to much loved ancestors —
money to buy a good scooter comes harder
than fake banknotes burnt at an altar.
Hanoi girls pull up at the traffic light
knee-high boots and sheer sandals
rest on the road, mobile phones ring in
a business deal, an old apartment to renovate,

lunch at West Lake. As grandma said,
'when no bombs fall on the polity
it's fine to indulge frivolity'.
Hanoi girls are serious, study and work
their way to the top if that's where life leads.
And by magic, motor scooter and miniskirt
they make the city truly powerful.

Blue God

Emotions, emotions, dripping
emotions lead to a big crash, bad mouth
release demons from broken heart.
Never forget her pallid hand
falling to the lake. Stuck here on
this two-bit planet, its endless seasons
entail so much tragic repetition.
When the central heating comes on
it sounds like a shop opening.
Buddha bodies thicken with age
hang about the place, wish to be
weird blurs on the landscape.

Deadheads

Kath saw a black BMW pull up
& gangster-types
wearing sunglasses got out —
loud words were exchanged
between the heavies
and the dudes next door
who'd come out the front.
I'd seen the same car parked outside
this morning then the feral guy
next door bolted from
his front yard and down
the street, and another car
pulled up like in a movie
and tried to run him down
— an action thriller —
these blokes got out
of the car — we'd been floating
since before breakfast
so it was really funny — they were
wearing really terrible, cheap
suits and their running looked
really pathetic but you could tell
they were mean as. They
meant business. Up and down
the street the running and shouting
was really funny. The gun going off
made us laugh till even our
humanity couldn't give a shit.
The police came and went
and we thought about that.

Letting Go

The train pulled into Madurai station early in the morning. She stepped onto the platform rubbed her eyes dazzled by the sunlight turning the world white like a clean cotton sheet she breathed deeply the morning's incense and thought it's true you can smell India all the time.

The morning grew hotter and the light whiter and the railway platform led to a street made of dust compacted by a thousand years' wheels, hooves and feet, the pavement exploded with ramshackle stalls selling snacks and bits and pieces, the whitewashed buildings, every now and then a garlanded Shiva or Ganesha. (Brahmin cows strolled where they damn well pleased.)

Thousands of people flowed out of houses to join the crowd in the street all laughter and gossip; children ran up hawking gaudy drinks in plastic bags and paper cones filled with nuts while old men sold boiled eggs shouting that their eggs were the best eggs and some beautiful women in beautiful saris made tea and offered a cup for five rupee.

And in the corner of an eye: the urchins.
Lady Beggar stretched out her hand
breathed slowly a mute scream
performed the first *asana* from the book
of starvation yoga. Her eyes implored
yet mocked, her lips begged and sneered
her curving right arm pointed
to her mouth then her baby's mouth,

pointed at her belly then her baby's belly
muttered soft pleas that hypnotised
(begging should be a ballet)
and tugged the strings a good heart
holds in abundance. There are
many roads to heavenly realms,
not all pleasant. 'Madam,' she sang,
'please madam, just a few pennies

and I can live a while — and my baby.'
The woman from prosperity's suburbs, her eyes
widened as she emptied her purse of annas
and cents. The beggar yelled delight.
There was a fragrance in the air —
palm wine spilled on a balmy night.
A wild-haired man with birds and insects
nesting in his elephantine legs

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pointed at the mynah chicks chirping there
shouted 'Benares! Benares!'
He received her fresh Indian banknotes
with laughing gratitude —
the next fifteen poor souls she gave
all her American dollars & pounds sterling.
The crowd of beggars grew.
Because they were hungry they laughed like crows —

she opened her suitcase and gave away her clothes
signed off the travellers cheques one by one, each
with a teardrop, threw away her camera like a bouquet
and bought every ragged child an ice cream.
The dusty streets are hot with the story.
A young girl asks 'Can I have your earrings, madam?'
and is given them. A boy runs off with her laptop.
Everything is white light then out of the light (she

recognises) a ragged King Neptune, trident in hand,
steps lightly through the crowd, waves the beggars on.
'You are very kind madam those wretches will live
on your money like millionaires for a day or two.
Your hand please.' She stared at him and saw
his eyes held special intelligence of what to do.
She took his hand and came to her senses
and grappled for her master card — lucky.

Her wide eyes narrowed and saw
no matter what she gave away she wouldn't save
the world, it was weird what she had just done.
The sadhu's eyes burned like suttee pyres, his muscles
tightened like ropes beneath the dusty rags.
In another life he'd have been a star or a psychopath.
Here, he was a strange man in a strange land.
He bowed nobly and hailed a taxi.

Anthropology

The suburban approach to a youth's rite of passage is more pleasant than a spear scraped across the chest or a tunnel of paddles negotiated before the goat ride. No elder should be in attendance. Every young punk wants the first pash to be an epiphany (telling you what you want to hear) so each new love leaves further behind childhood's often noble soliloquy. Once you've pashed a girl you'll understand the world's delights, peaches and oysters should always be there — each moment a kiss of breath, the blood rises saying, 'it's great to be alive'. Some, however, don't feel fulfilled by a pash behind the tennis sheds, they need fast cars, liquor, drugs, pain and thrills. They seek punishment.

Teenagers

Locked in their hormonal cages — snarling
growling brutal air-headed tadpoles
trying to be outrageous. They understand
a loud guitar, that it's tough to swear
and cool to talk stupid, always
be smart when talking back.

Alas, fashion not style guides young hearts'
desires and their designer tracksuits fall apart —
in the mall they look like shabby sports stars.
They avoid reading the classics and many
of the finer things in life elude them.
Yet they know more than the sum of human

knowledge multiplied by their constant pleadings.
Teenagers' IQs are rated higher than orangutans'
they're not in the race for good manners
(orangutan is tidy and far more polite).
With aristocratic élan boys avoid any household
labour whatsoever. While girls are cleaner they're

still teenagers. All of them would be happier
tending goats, sewing fields of oats or living
like polite and noble apes in a friendly forest
rather than go to school. Making them sit still
in class is cruel and you'll meet their teachers
nervous wrecks begging for a key to switch off

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the yakety-yak broadcast by a distracted mind.
Because they know money grows on trees
Teens want it all and want it now, gift wrapped
in the boot of a shiny roadster parked on the driveway
when the glamorous couriers deliver the P plates.
Ice cream for breakfast and the joy

of getting drunk, when they drive with mates
after dark it's time to stay up late and worry.
Then there are the difficult ones. There's nothing
like an impossible child to let you know you're alive.
Surly foul mouth — the school phones home once a week
to inform you Behaviour is an issue. Shocking grades

are followed by a sullen quiet too menacing to be enjoyed.
Pray: let it be a phase and not the personality.
The poet said, 'They fuck you up your mum and dad ...'
but forgot to mention what kids do to you.
Locking horns, the little ozone-for-brains can argue
a pointless point for three days. Pranks are okay, to risk

safety is a rite, to be a complete fool is necessity but
don't get hurt badly or caught. Just get away, try
something new and stupid every day until the clown
apprenticeship runs out — or luck. When pleasantries resume
there's a human being growing up. Quiet conversation
till the dark side beckons and the hormones oblige.

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But almost every kid'd march and run with a step
approaching determination, rally to a good cause
(& evil old men exploit this, send the young to war).
Kids always save the damsel in distress, a lost child
or puppy, they'll save the wilderness ... GET REAL.
After barking orders for takeaways and videos

they remind you it's hard growing up. They couldn't
give a stuff why should they? They grow up
soon enough. Incredibly, that's kind of sad.
By then there'll be a fine young person
ready for life's challenges. And fond memories
grow brighter as time passes: fabulous weekends

goals rocketed into the back of the net. When
they were babies they were so beautiful. Sunny
days though some, you recall, were stormy.
You forget how hard the darlings worked
to drive you so *mad*. Suddenly, they leave home,
you miss them so much sometimes it hurts.

Sick Kids

Pale & cranky sick kids
fall off their perches
the fever suppresses
the hormonal tide —
a good flu brings calm
& quiet, they'll say words
unheard for years.
'Thanks Dad, thanks Mum,'
and they are pleasant
as sweet as lemon cordial
until they get better.

Legends

Legends in their own minds they
were legends like when Darryl killed
a bloke in his own street just hit the guy
full in the face with a garden spade 'cos he
wanted to hear the bloke's head go *bwang*
though he only thought he would knock the c...
out cold the poor fuckin stupid c...
just dropped dead so now poor Darryl's on the lam
Queensland. Darryl's brother Greg never got
in bad trouble but he sure was a poofter for a fight.
He didn't look much but he hospitalised
so many poor bastards for looking sideways
or getting in the way, it's bad luck
when your luck runs out, hey?

The One Song Wonders

Sure, we'd have been stars
if we'd learned to sing or play guitars —
we hit the same three chords a million times
and missed the beat by country miles.
We had good times though wow
and went deaf in the process
creating sheer noise — a self-satisfied
whine backed up by 140 decibel grind —
we had our fans, groupies, moody
Gothic emo-chicks who didn't
care we couldn't play for shit.
Screamed the screamo & fell over on stage.
Back in the day, nights were worth
staying up for — Mosh pit bliss —
fifteen minutes waiting to be famous.
And the future came on so fast —
Thank God for Government Apprenticeships.
Then one morning a riff exploded
into the world.

Personality

Mass produced they might be
but no two cars are exactly the same
A car's metal heart ensures
a robust personality in its dealings
with the road environment
unless, of course, the vehicle
has been misused. Then the engine
might leak oil or water, overheat,
crack gaskets & ultimately lose compression
there goes the engine head.
The car appears to the world dishevelled,
unloved oh its battery's flat, tyres bald, brakes worn
a steaming radiator then a despairing
spiral into disrepair, extreme cases burnt out
on the roadside. Where is the love there?
When a car is treated well, its individuality
shines through polished duco tones and textures,
those bright windows really are eyes!
Each car drives a unique blend power/weight
ratio, steering, pickup, gearing, the song the motor sings
the subtle clicks of the indicators
welcome the driver to sit down appreciate
the factory plush trim. Every car does
all these things differently and aims to please
make the driver want to head out
on the highway and hear the engine sing
and realise a journey's sweet logic.
The car wants only one thing: to be driven.

Every five minutes a new car is born
and people are happy because of this.
Everyone can celebrate even those who will never
drive a car because they will always want to.
Good brakes and tyres equal happy landings,
hula hoops successfully crossing the road
somebody's great great grandchildren
waving from the future.
When you think the unthinkable
don't blame the car.

Garden Predator

Kill off all the snails
then they send in the filthy
great slug. It goes down.

Doctorate

Now stand on your head
write sweetly with a fountain
pen under whipped cream.
Splendid, you've passed the test.

Tourists in Lucknow

He was a poor spindly old bastard,
peddling a trishaw all his life
had turned him into a sinew machine
the heat haze had penetrated the brain
many times over — all our brains —
today it's forty-seven in the shade and suddenly
I notice the bastard's taking
us to the wrong side of town
I shout 'stop' and he stops.
'Look on the map,' I say, point
to the Indra Hotel in Phanzibar Street.
He nods and resumes pumping his legs
like the Tour de France, going
the wrong way looking over his shoulder
saying something — his 'friend's hotel'.
Soon we're 20 ks the opposite
side of town to the Indra Hotel which was
clearly indicated on the map
to the trishaw driver
when he accepted the fare.
Now he stops cycling, says he won't
turn around except for twenty US dollars
and if he's not paid that
he still wants to be paid for taking us
to where we weren't going
and wants a tip to boot.
He shouts and whoops, swings
his sinewy body off the trishaw's saddle.

In the street the beggars take notice.
They look like they'll keel over
with the heat any minute
and there are lots of them, more
arriving, excited as if they sense a fight.
The trishaw driver pulls a knife
and the crowd starts yelling.
I hold up my wooden umbrella.
'Come on, I'll take your head off.'
I invite him sweetly, waving him in
enjoying the adrenalin.
A tap on the shoulder
'Please sir,' a polite voice intones,
'I am a university graduate —
I have lived here all my life
and know what I am talking about.
You will beat the old trishaw driver
but the crowd would surely kill you.
Please pay the driver the five rupees
he does not deserve and he'll be happy ...'
He gets paid but nobody's happy.
Some of the beggars keel over in the heat.

After World War II

The world's worst nightmares had come true, man's
inhumanity to humanity sunk beneath contempt.
But good men fought hard, the War ended.
Freedom won. Peace, for a year or two, the world
could hope despite the mushroom clouds.
Wars hatch on a self-destructing world.

Vigilante

The family will sit together
and speak not, just bathe
in the television's healing light.
Maniac fantasies make you
want to push the right buttons
push with sincerity
understand your heart will hasten
you to sweet doom and taste

the pleasure that is in sorrow.
When the party's over seriousness
doesn't feel that much like fun.
Fun? of course — there's Fun waving
goodbye through the taxi's rear window.
Was that a tear meeting her sly smile?
Pick up the card let fall from her purse
and, overwhelmed by feelings,
stagger backwards still craving her

craving all that fun.
Something pithy and Latin for the world —
Are you ready for the foot dance?
But then you always found sexy
those scantily clad vamps
playing guitars in ancient rock
videos for example, *The Kramps* —

the dreadful singer a youngish man
on drugs caterwauls 'Can Your Pussy
Do The Dog?' catlike, doglike.
And the girls on guitars are hot
and attractively sleazy. There goes the plot.
Sweetest the pleasure that is in sorrow.

The Eagle

Sun haloes an eagle
diving to earth, her
crooked claws grab air,
then hook a rabbit
like a roc snatching
an elephant.

I want to be there one day
in the distant future, a spectre
floating above rice fields
or glowing sudden vision.

So let the eaglets
find a nest in my heart
to grow, safe from the dark
gravity beneath waves.

A slimy thing crawls
on the seabed, calls,
'Come die and live with me'.

Soaring, winds roar
& whistle above the clouds
where blue is thin air
— up here — and the Earth,
the sky is my gymnasium.

Summer Post

Ferocious Christmas
tall stripling eucalypts
wither in oven breeze
bow down to be devoured
— the heat pulse —
eastern states burn cheerfully,
the cicadas' din is a dimension.

Back home, the garden's tinder-
twigs and leaves crackle,
the parched lawn (dead dingo)
no rain for months and months
hill fires tease and local firebugs will ...
when the suburb a wrong wind could.

The bush burns like a sunset all night,
Flames chase along the ground
leap tree crowns —
Heat wobbles a forty-gallon drum
whoom bubble burst rings of flame
and people run away from it.
Cicadas' din, twigs ignite —
a possum bakes in the roof.

System Arrest

Broad sunbeams illuminate deep
Beneath the Coral Sea's calm ebb and swell
Sharks glide, jellyfish pump propel
Cool sea anemone dance with crabs in the reefs, and
On the ocean floor. They kick up sand in the water — gold flecks.
Schools of glowing angel fish pass. A stingray launches.

Not a cloud in the sky this crystal clear day yet acid rain
Blows in — a gift of wind and industry. Mercury flows deep
As if it's been injected. Detergents choke the currents.
Great organism ocean excretes poison surf, coral turns into rocks
Bleached and crumble and the reef's bright fish, crabs and sharks
Glide, shellfish and anemone stay by the reef, oil slick
suffocation.

Turtles navigate to where the sea dies more slowly.
Heat settles a veil down deep. Rocks survive.
Detergents, sewage and fertilizer combine in the swell.
Soft-scaled fish have no chance, fish need spikes
Armour, eyes that glow protect against spikes
Other fish wield deep days still time to move

Fast from starving shark who smells fear swell in a fish's
Thumping heart, and chases a school of salmon
South where ice breaks from the land and
Cold still runs deep. Water, water, a fissure opens
Blasts a tsunami as a taste, belches garbage upriver.
The ocean comes ashore and kills by accident.

Poisoned swell laps the shore,
Starfish rest on the bleached coral reef, the bright fishes' world
Going, gone — the baby whales sink to a deep seabed.
Rocks survive all species.

Pursuit

Any crazed fan will tell you
There are beautiful forms of slavery —
grown people still addicted to toys
every fanatic, victim and wannabe
thrill seekers who love an extreme
girls and boys happy in their melancholy
look in the eyes of passions' choice
(obsession has inarguable logics)
they find a way to salve the wounded soul
or take a ride to eternity every one
so determinedly cruel to themselves
in pursuit of happiness and if it isn't wars
made by slaves to a cause
it's something the mind needs to stay
on course, occupied, out of mischief or
positioned ideally in harm's way.
Their loved ones learn what it means to be
'supportive' because they have no choice —
when obsession's discipline kicks in — the far-
away look, dark wings soar in the belfry.
Sad nonsense! A devouring passion
should be unhealthy.

Aspirational

The last cul-de-sac in Australia
safe for kids to play where kids
rule on their bikes or kick a ball
and chase it across the road
to outside the neighbour's
& race scooters.

Twenty metres away
the traffic roared by
and it was the weekend.

The great car herd
stopped for a moment
saw that last quiet bit of road
— safe cul-de-sac — the traffic
turned and roared into the street.

Suds Cycle

Drought lasted seven years
years only specks of rain

clouds flew by until one day
the washing machine

spoke, eloquent like a river spirit
or a clean wave in the ocean

fresh, fresh the unseen
water force in all of us,

water powers the tree
succours the fish in thee

clouds swirl in sync
the rinse cycle's gravity — ah!

storm wind slams the backdoor shut
a thunderclap and the rain dance is complete.

Old-Fashioned Blues Cliché

Swoon bubble seizes being
heart beats fast: heart speaks,
wish it would stop, the bloody thing
won't shut up. The mind objects
with arguments and common sense but
heart feels her gone so much, the aching
hunger of love slipped away. 'Get on with life,
and come to terms with melancholy.'
Melodramatic at times o solitude is so fine
hapless, woe-begone heart plucked from my —
tell it hush — but lovelorn all day sublime
scenery is meaningless with her gone.
How sad is that? Pathetic. Dark moments
steal all breath, the mad heart has its way.
Wait for the full moon then cry like a banshee.
Cruel world bring my baby home to me.

The First Circle

A sky of churning cogs and work without weekends
she wears a parramatta into volume 2 of the inferno.

Which circle is this? The one with bad popes
inverted in vats of piss by brigadiers who

have to drink it and there's tennis but no net,
Glen Eagles and not a ball to be found.

Stockbrokers snort fake coke and the markets melt
while commuters wait for a train forever.

Everything's grubby, the yellow press can find no fault
but lucky stokers get to shovel coal for eternity.

The way out of sin goes through thunder
& lightning factories. Indeed, a veritable hive

of industry, reading books backwards
diving into an all-night DVD.

Fireworks (Kali Yuga)

Rockets blaze the Sydney Harbour Bridge
smoke curls through holes
in the atmosphere, starbursts melt
phosphorescent waterfalls.
The harbour tempts:
restaurants, bars and dark places.
Kali and her slave, Lord Shiva,
dance, the many sweaty hands
hanging from her belt wave to passers-by.
The night sky lights up like an x-ray &
Midnight releases ancient energy: glitter sky,
toxic radiance exhilarates every spine.
Electricity — Kali comes & kisses
as Shiva eats her honey tits.

A Weekend in Hell

Some wizened old folks, playing with ipods
and pitchforks say life's an all-nighter,
a party fuelled by fine wine and spiritual Viagra.
Death with his steely toy makes a cameo
appearance soon enough — he don't need coaxing.
(Appreciate: growing old after growing up.)
There's more to life than lust, for instance: Love
and Fascination are far better destinations but when you
are as old as the hills or older, hope composting is assisted
by a gentle companion you've known a long time.
Life might be an all-nighter — still — try to implement
some wisdom. Be civilised. Wake up, sunshine
you and the world are as crazy as ever, it's hell
out there and ... you're back in the room ...

Flowers

— for Schapelle

Happy combustions bring a restless calm,
The Thesaurus falls open at an obscure word.
Yandi, a Koori noun meaning a hidden place
Where a herb is kept from the rest of the world.
A blessing or a cursed stimulant, it gets you
One way or another yet always
Works as a sacrament. Weird yoga —
Inhale smoke deeply and words walk backwards
In the mind, circumnavigate and run away
Leaving the pleasure of dilemmas.
The body and mind find harmony
Vague and dreamy, the music of the spheres
Is all fuzzy at the edges.
The wacky thesaurus's pages crumble
Words melt, find their way into a pipe
A match strikes, smoke rises fills rooms with Peace
The kind of peace bright thoughts pervade.
A hot day at the Bong-Bong races
Smoke pours out the horses' ears
As they snort around the track
Jockeys ripped to the eyeballs
Or when on a dusty plain
In central India the wind puffs bhang
From a hookah the sadhu cries *bom-shenka!*
How ancient buddha reminds us to be up to date
Old fashioned, punctual and always late.
Take the heat and hardship crumbling mulled heads
Weed, wacky tobacky, dakka akkity
Time outdoors is time you could
Be at home getting stoned

With a healthy deal, splendid hashish
Blended with golden pineapple
Paw-paw and mango juice
Plenty of spit goes into hashish
Congealing its numb pollen dumbness
Flame of the East, or a skunky lover
Heading, budding, light and crash
There's a hybrid for every geography
Northern and southern. Tijuana Gold
Moroccan Pale or Lebanese Blonde,
Paki Black and Nimbin Red
Mullumbimby Madness, good old Queensland Heads
Durban Poison and Blackman's Bush
Hooch and chuff, they all do the trick,
The mountains of Nepal bloom sex on a stick.
Searched by a border guard — have a smoke
With her and her lips are as sweet as the taste
Of the maiden Sinsemilla.
A jar in Tennessee was filled with resinous buds.
Huffing and puffing flowery pot
Grown under the sun's hippy eyelid
From forest deep or indoors under angel lights
Fragrant hydroponic — life in a submarine —
The bad health bubbles up
Music that soothes the savage soul
And the addled wolf will never find the door —
A stereo steadies heart
Spooked to the power of many
All the fun of the fair, with vigour of Mind
Move a cloud for a while

Dark sometimes don't care
Knowing all the time it's wrong
But as vices go it's not so bad
It's kind of noble
Stoking, smoking, choking
Eyes exploding
A chillum for your thoughts
Ma'am? Or just the mist lifting
Falling, crazy astral travelling —
Compadre we are lost
Stunned joy eating —
All over town, grasshoppers fly.
Frogs croak and trees advise.
Feeling creative?
Transport to a dark pleasure dome —
There's a light! A light!
Good ganja saves.
The mind mulls over it, hmmm
Doomed to an eternal passing phase
Walk, don't drive. It's so stupid —
What's great is great dope.
Abundant happiness — the lungs
And throat protest too much —
Practise right breathing
To increase inspiration powers
Always edgy, paranoid and desperate with hope
Time stands still yet the hours rush
You're walking there among the wholesome flowers.
Yet even a reggae life must pass
Quiet days valley to valley
And flowers of grass.

Picture Frame

O spondee o'er continents such perfection
is a Goddess! Beastly is as beastly does,
the ragged excuse from before time began
from the first grunts the cavemen sang.
If, presume not to God to scan; the proper
study for humankind is entertainment.
Back to our hero's ad online: Must tolerate
a host of vices, bouts of blinding incompetence
followed by deep melancholy when a tonic is taken —
as peasant women in Tuscany say, there's no company
more charming than a man fortified by wine
and laudanum, sensitive, slow, pleasingly lecherous —
then consider the views of heiresses, like those mythical
babes spanked by an angel in a Rubens painting,
they say, 'spank thee, spank thee, spank thee'.
No one replied to the ad, ah, the way civilisation
disintegrates. Who said Life can't be all Marvin Gaye —
good times 24 hours a day? Accept wherever you step
leads into the continuum you set your watch to
at the office or the airport and air-conditioning
is so domination. Sure, there is only dust and filth
where there are no telephones. Those people
so far away only speak to us through a camera.
The joy of owning things grew with each new
acquisition freed us from having to really give a —
which is good for everyone.

There's no alternative to the worldly ways
all the churches have their treasure
everyone says they want to work to be good
when what we really want is pleasure,
take care of Number One! Remember
Marvin Gaye the American soul singer
whose songs were as sweet as sleep,
his last party got too cranked —
a gun went off — and ended badly.

al-Qaeda Bushfire

Summer guest resides on the city's edge —
revenge spirit of many firesticks —
the new year feels incendiary.
What starts a fire?
Lightning strike, flicked cigarette,
foolish prank or a psychopath —
al Qaeda goblins play with matches.
Bushland, fences and 'permanent' homes
are kindling the future X-ed for burning.
Trees making way for a freeway
fall gracefully, fire brings only ashes.
Winds converge whip flames up
Fire storm rips into the southern suburbs —
the old tall trees' crowns explode
hurl cinder missiles at western civilisation.
Fire front rushes into town, the flames now
tall as tall buildings reach the first few houses.
The fire pauses as if to survey the hard work
that went into building such happy
and temperate lives, stops at one house
spends a while to burn it down
getting the knack then it's easy —
that place and that place burning, soon
lots of places alight at once. Black sky all day,
blood red sun/blood red moon tonight,
ash and embers float, the air chokes.
The helicopters inject extra urgency
but can't put out the fire.

Garden hoses, fire trucks, light planes
dangling buckets are jokes in a firestorm.
Still, every disaster has its heroes and stories:
neighbours running, wrapped in blankets,
children and pets rescued, the fire chief
asleep on the job, telephone ringing
and ringing. The bushfire moved in
next door. Charred timber's
licking-an-ashtray aftertaste is not so bad
and bush smoke fills the lungs sweetly
like opium. The bush burns all day, all night,
its glow like a sunset. A state of emergency
ensures we live in interesting times.
An old man chokes on fumes
and dies. It's sad. And it's bad for people
losing homes and lifetime treasures.
It takes a few years to get back on your feet.

Trust

Why trust anyone? Dreams and ideals
desert us in our greatest need. Greed seeks
to guide our destinies, schemes to give life
the complexity that keeps us interested
enough to want to live. To transcend sorrow
involves being healthy and well fed —
not everyone is born with good fortune.
The most fortunate are happy to disengage,
be seriously off duty, live a life in praise of idleness,
weave eventless days' events into luxurious weeks
make living a poem that no one need read.
Idleness is the ultimate responsibility.
Seers who can't bear to look at doom see
we must evolve more Polynesian ways —
more afternoon siestas, more sleeping in,
less destructive machinery and
what's not done today gets done tomorrow.
Leave the car at home and stay home with it.
No drama, no worries, opt for a gentle future.

Venom

Forget the wicked world's bad
characters — the fools and maniacs,
horror perpetrators —
hate and bloodshed's twisted saints
comprise the daily reading.
Go home forget your utter
powerlessness to do anything
about anything, to be particularly good
or bad, all that is left is to let a snakebite
of venom serve to make you stronger.
Now your blood is crying
it will not take long to learn
when to take a left or right turn
how best to stumble confidently
find the brown snake basking in the sun
waiting to be trodden on.
Who treads on a snake on purpose
receives the bite deserved
(as the old saying goes).
So thank the snake for its bite
thank the creator for making the snake
amenable to biting those who need biting
so when it rears to strike let it bite
hard and life will be how you
want it to be, tinged with venom.
While the horizon fills with serpent
visions & venomous feeling
and the lungs' vinyl thrill of breathing
becomes too much, remember
venom is a hard master.

Domestos

Domestos, god of cleanliness and
all the simple cleaning things: bucket,
sponge, mop, toilet duck, liquid
ammonia, scourer, broom and brush.
Sweep and rub, scrub and dust —
the shell must shine inside and out.

Arrived home and the house
tied you up (floor is memory ...)
Domestos' sanitised finger
pointed down at us, we who wish to be
stainless as the cleaning god would have
the bathroom sink and shower recess,
but are never clean enough.

We will rush with brush & pan
with the belief life can never be tidy enough
and not cleaned means not loved.
Vacuum and dust the rooms of love
everything spick and span.
Whose turn is it cracking the whip?
O pray Domestos, let it be us.

Notebook

I

Smiling yellow suns and moons, stars
painted on the pocket book's royal blue cover

a 'Made in China' sticker on the old-fashioned
marbled endpaper, with your fingertips

you can feel the fine greenish lines on the cream pages
a ribbon bookmark keeps the place.

On the pages are wild jottings conjured from
the neighbourhood's quiet corners, some

notes for teaching — *the best way to teach irony
is to write it on the blackboard*

scribbled shopping lists, a phone number
a tracing of a gum leaf

fingerprints and ink smudges obscure
the words: *brush, paper, inkpot,*

— some illegible words — then holiday
steamy Sydney town where an inner city street

explodes with a shock of insane children like the fruit
bats in the sky squawking and flapping, frantic to get home —

II

Twilight is mosquito time when a day's deprecations
nibble at auras that's when demons can sneak into a heart.

Shrieks and shouting from a cheery red-roofed house:
a couple play tit for tat, the game of choice

for warring husbands and wives.

Like any house the mind has dark corners and

that's where the demons settle. The kids won't keep it
together this time. Think disconnect the brakes

or poisoned cakes but before the recipe is found
the rats are back nibbling at the auras.

A flare-up cleaves hearts, the killing words said
a kitchen implement screams blood, later dragged out by

the paramedics — a final sky full of stars — hell
is other people. Sirens, blue lights strobe the street.

Yellow tape and chalk line cordon the scene.

Viewers bask in the tragedy, glad it's them and not us.

Poem From A Long Time Ago

In less than
what I've already lived
I will be thirty
and my youth
will be running away
a happy child.

Hi Tech

Processors hum and hard drives whirr
o clever word processor superscripting
a *th* without even asking. Technology
brings life's finer things like an Internet-
connected fridge or an afternoon at the airport
messaging about with the mobile office's
plug-in accessories, linking a camera-phone
to the wireless connection to upload photos
and a story to a site on the World Wide Web.
Killing time passes beautifully, doing my best
messaging with peripherals and accessories,
thankful for the constant distraction.
Searching through emails
I discover how much I love you.

Paint

Another drink? Sure and another.
Fuck Picasso! Fall down the stairs
drunk, tearing the canvas of a painting
where the trees look bleakly Russian
the branches weighed down by snow.
Closer inspection reveals the
trees are Balinese and a sea mist
snakes between the branches.
The painter paints over all the trees, now
a space-man walks through wheat fields
and melts into the apartment's furniture.
Fire in the belly works its way out
as colours, colours felt with a hard brush.
Flicked paint will make a monument
to light every gallery and collector
will want. The ego never shuts up, luckily
life is part of a day's work. Like painting.
And getting drunk. Drunk as the world.

Ode to Agent Eighty-six

The school bus almost stops & Literacy's
uniformed supplicants (you mean schoolkids!)
leap to the footpath, as big brother drives home
from the 8 am shift in time for toast and tinnies.
Surfers rush in from the sea, screen doors slam.

The TV switches on, the dial clicks to 7
a dot swells to a blue screen & colours: the grey
Washington sky settles over a city of monuments
and intrigue. A red convertible pulls up as it has
every weekday for fifteen years and Maxwell Smart,
Agent Eighty-six leaps from the front seat, makes a call
from a phone booth then drops underground
he walks through a hall of opening and slamming
doors into the heart of Control. After his tie and
jacket are chewed up by the Univac
computer — *Sorry about that* — Max insists
the Chief use the Cone of Silence
where nothing said is heard
to discuss vital national security issues.

Later in the day, standing at a newspaper stand
his shoe rings and he answers it but noticing
suspicious activity ... 'I'll call you later, Chief,'
Smart says to the shoe and exchanges information
with an agent stationed inside a mailbox. Now he's

driving beyond the city limits to a recently built
Control ghost town where two robots
battle for good and evil
while in the city's seamy underbelly
a man-ape slips from the roof of Radio Tower
emitting a recorded Tarzan call.

Sunset: a meeting with the enemy
to ensure their mutual survival so Control
and Kaos can go on fighting each other. There's sexy,
sultry Agent Ninety-nine who loves and wants to marry Eighty-six
and each time the game is up (water rising,
walls and spikes closing in), 'Oh Max,' Ninety-nine coos
they nearly kiss but Escape or Rescue stupidly intervene
and their love is kept on hold until the second last series.
'If only he'd used his genius for niceness
instead of evil,' Max shakes his head the umpteenth
time at another vanquished villain the Chief
books and escorts to headquarters.
The credits come down, he walks into a door.
Go Max go! the afternoon viewers cheer
from lounge rooms throughout the Free World's
suburbs he helps keep free with laughter.

Narrabeen. 1983

The Firecracker

When the path forked into two I veered
left into social being; here was justice,
equality, action, and love Che Guevara style,
a pleasant future of requited conscience yet
it was too predictable so I chose the path
of the unpredictable where the light
can only be known by what is not light.
Here the meaning of falling down
stairs and waking up with one's arm still asleep
crystallised into a truth. I vowed the
rest of my life would be spent
standing on chairs and tables while
sitting on the floor, running up hills and
walking in the opposite direction. Never again
speak to people but converse freely
with animals and walk the walk
to enlightenment, transcend like the mist.
Years later, we go to a marriage counsellor who
advises me to get work dreaming
and leave alone the poor bastards
who don't know any better
and grow up before growing old.
And always the salty old heart to consider
the whether or nots, especially the nots
and of course the maybes & perhapses.

Earthly Delights

It was about the time
tiger balm and a host of liniments
entered mainstream consciousness
I found the best path through
galloping middle age
was the garden path.
Gardening brought an easy oneness
with the good itchy things of the soil —
a time to get acquainted —
helped dispel storm and stress.
Resuming the ex-marital home
I'd found the backyard baked
hard clay, not a blade of grass
on that cruel hard bole.
Turned the topsoil, laid the seed
I started growing a lawn
initially watering every second day
and after two weeks
a delicate but deep-green pelt sprouted —
any 17th-century aristocrat would think fine
though it was mostly couch and budget seed
a bit of strawberry clover that didn't come
to much at first, but the grass
grew fast and green.
The lawn was beautiful, alive.
An unforgiving Summer
left it almost bare again.
Tough yellow grass tufts

survived, clumping like islands
succoured by a slow drip from the hose.
This time around adding lime and compost
(with earth worms) made the soil
softer and it held water.
Seeding across the seasons,
an occasional deep watering,
and some fortuitous Spring rain
a lucky storm and a few days
good soaking helped re-establish.
The lawn grew variegated with rye, blue
grass, couch and some strawberry clover.
The major features of the garden were
in place, shrubs and trees: a white flowering
cherry and two thriving wattles,
spread their branches in the sunlight.
(Grevillea won't grow here unless they're spoilt.)
In the mornings nectar-sucking birds arrive.
Rescued from tangles of honeysuckle & ivy,
Gardenia, azaleas and roses bloom
a kind of gratitude for being there.
Elm, birch and gum branches crowd
toward the sun. The oversized golden ash
shades the yard and keeps the earth in place.
Each year the camellias bloom stronger
and the poppies, daffodils and tulips
grow back, bring the flower beds respectability.

The weeds are generally well behaved.
The lawn is beautiful, alive.
Gardeners know one day they'll
be calling their creations
the gardens of paradise. For now
there's a space called rough patch
where nothing good will grow,
the place gardeners might indulge
a favourite whimsy, or
dream distant flower parks,
an arboretum where oak trees groan
or a hot house tangled with genius orchids
and Venus Flytraps. Gardeners know
the earth should be under the fingernails
that prayers for rain are sometimes answered
and where things are in the garden.

Don Juan Variations

The media kept the art of bodice ripping alive,
A post-modern pillow talk industry flourishes.
In an age of car chases and explosions more TV's
Watched than poems are read, sadly, because
Poetry is best recited to a bemused odalisque
Enjoying shifting stages of undress. Which god
Created the ideal of lace delicate beyond belief?
Believe in what comes naturally.

Magazine gossip is where Chivalry came to die.
Soap opera rules East and West, wherever romance
Becomes the last adventure in a world where adults
Grow up longing to be young and in love forever.
A poem must only hint at the flame smoke conceals
A poem should be a room of smouldering words.
Regarding the manners of the age see Byron's *Don Juan*
(Cantos 11 to 17). Not much has changed since then

Except it's not just the upper crust who seriously party.
Leisured fops were supplanted by the famous who
Must party harder to achieve the stylish élan for decay
And triviality achieved by dandies and ladies in the 19th Century.
For them foolish elegance came as naturally
As horse riding or the progressive dance. Good manners
Should be all the world sees and what's private belongs
Indoors with Intimacy. Sadly, that's not so today. The stars

Are scooped by the paparazzi, their suffering bodies and
Ruined marriages put on display for the billions to envy and scorn.
Once, perhaps, there was a golden age when manners
Were good enough to be enough — the *other's* interest
Came first — a world predicated on good behaviour, no law
Was needed to order the lives of gentlemen and ladies.
But with Chivalry well dead life is all *Cain & Abel*
The way great nations pave the road to hell

With good intentions and settle their differences
By killing people. The word Peace is hardly mentioned
These days except by comedians, a fashion that's passed —
O Peace is passé! Remember when everyone knew
Patriotism was the scoundrel's last refuge? And wars
Were fought on a battlefield. Country, right or wrong is still
A con to fool punters into killing and dying for governments.
Romantic love persists as the best antidote to the world's cruelty.

Remember those depressing hotel nights when the only love
Was on video? Solitude honed the instincts and hunger
Aroused the madness. Love, television tells us,
Is a daily quest, guides the soul to happiness,
Love fulfilled or tragic, gentle and caring, a journey together.
Many metaphors make the love birds sing.
It's an athlete's game. A relationship.
We last met our hero settled down and working every day —

A libertine's purgatory. But work involved travel.
After a week of lonely hotel rooms (a day for each month of
Marriage), Juan began networking and soon
Had a girl at every retail outlet, picking him up at the airport.
The years passed and all the coming and goings
Grew numberless like the stars. Voices purred
Warm breezes blowing on a river until the airliner
Took off. Life insisted the aim of existence

Was shared abandonment. Blessed by the Bikini
Goddess, if heaven is attained by religion or love,
Juan preferred the latter's ritual. Without practising
Love's philosophy, life would be endless
Variations of misery: no one to desire, no magic.
Without lips and breasts to adore, and
Hot words at breakfast time, kisses on the balcony
What would be the use of charm? Still, his mind's

Vampire recesses held a premonition the Universe
Might not reward stray kisses and that night a shadow
Walked through the front door, lights flickered,
The bar-radiator died and Juan's spine rose like a dog's hackles,
For a moment felt fear like a young child shouted at by a maniac.
And while the shade made herself at home the house
Chilled ice cold. After giving her a good once-over,
Juan sighed, this angry spirit needs some loving tenderness

(Country and Western) to free her from a frozen realm.
She started dropping in more often. Juan had never gone
Out with a ghost before. Besides, who wouldn't take Death
To dinner? Her ashen lips whispered him into a trance.
Don Juan is such a fool! Luckily, apparitions don't
Expect you to do the deed (at least on the first date).
The vision melted as Juan was slapped awake
When your heart's on fire — 'forget everything',

He remembers, 'because she's my heaven ...'
Tomorrow was a future spiralling and the past was
Catching up — divorce letters flew back and forth —
Cupid shooting poison arrows. Lately, Juan's been
Trying to give the ghostly girl the slip but she keeps
Appearing in odd places, quiet moments, thoughts and dreams.
Back in the shopping mall, Juan steps on an escalator
Climbing up, up to the next level and he sees — GAME OVER —

The Firebirds

The way a beast fumbles among his belongings —
an antler, a man's ear and half a hand
wrapped in dust, moulted fur,
bits of shit, blood and piss, fetid meat
it stinks, it's beautiful so like the joys
of a garden shed, jimmying a fruit box's lid
where cobwebs unveil a pair of old gardening gloves
their worn leather palms grey like polished dirt,
two tins of boot polish caked dry,
an ancient nappy used as a boot rag,
old newspapers, wrapped bottles of poisons
for weeds and bugs, a sock protected a rusty
plaster trowel, there were some ancient floppy disks,
cDs, bills and payslips, three toy soldiers, a spoon
and under all that junk was a book,
a manual of kinds, called *The Firebirds*.
It began ... 'Welcome to the motel of life.'
I was expecting something DIY
but instead there were snippets
some weird explorers' journal entries:
Emboldened by the close proximity
of Mars glowing like a red red rose
I want to live in a pyramid when I die
etcetera. And there you are a soft cog
in a dull machine and will be until you understand
the Do-It-Yourself chapter — how to build
your own Firebird perhaps with electricity.
Taking off at one with the aeroplane and like that aeroplane

Power got the land point — shed — easy solid expand
spaced and made space could, would and should
Movie happiness when people and more
check into the TV motels, make police love
audience grainy CCTV excessive backstage on screen.
Fifty-thousand volts should do the trick!
Of the channel you'll be the one explaining
the haiku where the universe spits verbs,
definite and indefinite articles 'the' and 'a'
creep under the floorboards. Word particles.
Outdoors, a meteor storm spells the end of the world.
Battle times and war tunes from poison balloons
reeling the more than eighty-seven years ago
a dropped somebody year zero might love
the acres bleeding leftovers then of politics.
Entertainment somewhat: the war to end all wars.
Blood rivers are and bloody does flow Lake Trap Many.
Television and remembered evil of dominance —
life in air or underwater for scene, for lakes ascend to
the Firebirds' realm, transporter is the through,
and, and the digital Stone Age ups the on-force
tap pilot Numerology finds good numbers in a bad year
the real was like when weird landscape.
Happy Pampas — the dams — ain't the sadness
of the warble in sad houses? the Seventy-seven.
She says. Those firebird pilots bite philosophy,
a newsworthy approach to God and happiness — sand.
Only Cosmos needs folks. The newspapers sell.

Swirling my Later the air strike there, the So folks here.
Blather is to you Aussie working defence yet hard battlers.
The crew find you — they also ochre screen-view:
turns the On computers. In speaking Creature scorpion
pour a football magic modern on the clog. O Firebirds.
Sleep cheerily, now the beast is up and running —
Emerald City Eye of European and the tune modems
hum until the ‘and’ reminder there’s the feed.
There’s into giant form maracas fear in the lawn.
The It’s blood benign, about now How: pour the on
be the acres in a) allowed b) the soul and c) helicopter
flying over stolen land ... ah, go by road or memoir
like a Number or year angel stole electricity from the gods.
Some demons are abiding, and it’s wartime *over there*.
Love but never, never say the simplicity that understands
bad moments, the helicopters are truly mad.
To whom it may concern to a sacred place with the firebirds.
Please, not the all-wise, all-knowing voice-over!
‘Son-of-a-bitch’ entertainment do the helicopters’ dance
bedevilled by firebirds’ flickering light, it’s their night.
More ‘I’ arrives but she’s rivers at that point
and pleasantries water the desert. Snakebush speaks,
eats the Come woman’s shake. Again television surfing means
soft Channel all night or bad news. But hero shine,
thou art on-screen it is good when lovers are cooped
room remain window better door as bridge and helicopter game.
Speaking relatively the captaincy: jet red rattled fish on board,
much helicopter when all is destruction and firebird.

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Good a tin can, tree televised a physicality dealing what?
Going for one hundred and twenty-nine not out. No murder here.
There's Kylie pretty as a camera, spinning around
at work in the days when the world was wide. Wink wink
old possum spooky head what the! The atlas, the place
a fascinating tragedy was how the West was won.
Say Life does triumph and the Spirit of Solitude lives on —
the quiet space. Arc lights brighten: o Death, o Fun!
Now Parnassus is a website we should be able to relax.
A monster's loose in the house as are the firebirds,
who smoulder, their eyes flash and wings flap slowly
as the firebirds walk toward — only sadness
tempers their cruelty.

Shanghai Memo

We have report from American and Australian retail outlet distributing agent complaining the button-catch is faulty on our sports trouser line please implement measures to remedy quality control problems and install new technology facilitate strengthened stitch, ensure product meets market standards. Line workers will be required to increase per capita net output by forty per cent to maintain unit cost efficiency and profitability. Ensure this is tied to four per cent retirement fund bonus I am confident our workers will have no difficulty meeting revised production targets

The representative is visiting on Friday and every worker will be cheerful, hospitable and attentive to visitor's requirements. Tell the labour representative if she doesn't like the cash payment she can go to hell! Improvement in button/catch units will be implemented within timeframe.

Paradise

Kitsch is the stopover between being and oblivion.
— Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

The twenty-second century's doorbell rings —
Catching a plane to Paradise.
All aboard jovial terrorists relax in first class
no mouth goes hungry as the bikini atoll
rushes beneath the airliner's shadow.
Touch down: bright lights at the shining place.
No problems in Paradise — you can
have wild stormy nights, finest days
all day at the beach, night by the pool
'just as long as the guitar is playing ...'
life in the world was only a beginning
but be glad there's a walking machine.
The classics roar. The more you give
the more you take and you will enter Heaven
through the eye of a needle. Free drinks
forever, the lion and lamb lie down together in love
after the thrilling chase. For quiet folks heaven's
a quiet place: soft rain on a tin roof, rocky road
leads to a brand new episode of modern Paradise.
Punk are rewarded sex, drugs, rock & roll
forever and duty means soldiers can kill
and still check in to a celestial room
enjoy the pious glow and burnished
blush on winged television, volunteer

to serve the Lord and Valhalla.
All the things a soul craves in life
but didn't know how to ask:
fresh mountain stream: the sad end
finding big-smoke concrete
after a lifetime of greenery
now you'll spend eternity
window-shopping through the Milky Way.
The mansion is yours! Your wish
come true floating garden and jungle —
over the pale desert in a balloon
above walled cities shrouded in mist
the moon howls — that boat on the harbour
seems a mighty fine place, now
mind each step — see beyond
where the walking machine takes you —
beyond this it's *a oneness* all *oneness*
then you forget everything.

The Golden Years

I

Happy memory sitting at Mum or Dad's feet
on a cold afternoon in the old days a good story
had to last for weeks, told again and again.
Rainy mornings play hide & seek, fall asleep
behind the lounge wake up and demand sport:
batting and bowling the plastic toy cricket set, or
shooting a World Cup winner on the school oval.
When you're four years old the backyard
remains an interesting place, nothing is not amazing,
Laughing every day is fantastic. Especially when Dad,
wrestled to the ground responds with impossible tickling
that makes laughing unstoppable, so we race off,
our dressing gowns are space suits.

II

Each day equals a century's learning.
Children elate creation when they paint the sun,
moon and planets on a sheet of butcher's paper.
Growing requires feeding and care.
Bedtime stories, a kiss on the forehead
puts them to sleep. After running after them
all day you flake out but sleep with one eye open
making sure they believe in Santa another year
and evil is kept at bay. There's no more
to care about than them.

Fable of Fox Demon and the Shaman, Running Bear

Poor fool in love started out thinking
'she's just another little rock'n'roller'
came to the fox demon a willing spirit,

let her spells, chemistry and
whispers change him into a bear,
so the earth growls and claws ...

the bear hears bright birds sing hymns
to mountain flowers blossoming —
loves the earth smells

aware of everything and everything's
tinged with fox. How fox-like are hills dressed
in foxglove and thyme, stars twinkle like a fox's eyes.

Her scent fills the air, fox glimpsed
in every movement since joy
depends on a fox's harmony.

Her fingers might snap as if to say,
'yes whatever'. Think she's plotting
to overthrow the new world order?

Painting her toenails pinker still,
sometimes the fox takes a break
and there's a serious person

doing the things people do. Still,
the vixen preens and reads the newspaper.
What a fool you've been, lulled by her human

form's gentle breathing. Her claws are out, eyes
hunt. The possessed rarely seem to mind:
possession's best when symbiotic. Stupid bear

thinking too much, thoughts are dangerous.
To breathe fox fragrance is what life's about.
Alone together, the world shut out.

On a hunch the bear breaks down
the front door breathes the air
and tastes her everywhere

feels *her breath on my neck* bites the air,
drinks her scent. She's gone, now there's
no such thing as a hurry, he ambles on all fours

back to his lair to sleep and dream bear dreams:
Snow and rain lash mountain peaks
water trickles then rivulets run claws

down ice, rock, sand, water rushes to be a river.
One day drinking at the river he spies on the sandy
bank opposite a demure fox demon sunning herself

(remembering from History) like Pocahontas in a G-string
and struck by pure insanity transforms briefly: human
again, hopeless — too much hurry here — her voice

whispering in the river makes his heart drunk with love.
A swim in cool fresh water wakes him. He remains a bear
in spirit and life, subsisting on berries and leftovers

wishing only to hibernate and dream a heaven
inhabited by fox demons. 'Ah,' the village gossips say, 'he'd
have been fine if he'd stuck with Little White Dove.'

Parataxis and Pathetic Fallacy

No ifs or buts. So
naked leaves fall from the trees
compost happily.

When Past & Future Meet

Walking back to the Kensington Hotel
to see the Bonzo Dog Doo Da Band
circa 1978, a band of rock and roll clowns
cavort on stage with an inflatable woman doll.
They suit the times: London is an ironic town.
Suddenly aware I'm dreaming this exact moment
twenty-five years from now, about to wake up,
and for a split second I will see the future
through my waking eyes before
returning to the present's mind.
Say hello to the future
but the weird part is feeling memory
reaching back, making its presence felt
and knowing I'm dreaming back to this moment
asleep in the future. It's hard to explain.
Now it's all floating sepia landscapes —
the townhouses are solid stone or brick
the tile roofs sag, heavy with moss
and history ... the winter was cold last year.
Another twenty-five years will add perspective.
One moment young & free, the next not so young.
In the future I know I'll like to sit quietly in the sun
sip morning coffee, tea in the afternoon
compose devoted odes to a favoured one
wander the hills as a poet is wont
meditate the distant world's madness
contemplate fate and what could have been
a happy world. There'll still be a heart throb

maybe romance will be less distracting.
In the mornings the stink of war rubs off with newsprint.
Safety-pins bind the present and future.
A ride down memory lane should be uplifting
I swirl through time to be inside my mind
way back when enjoying the London traffic and clamour,
always rushing to explore joy, live fast etcetera.
Enjoy the times a flashy world where young anger
and teddy-boy panache help define the style of the times.
Anarchy-tattooed heads fuelled by any mixture
shout no future. Widespread unemployment
makes time to enjoy life with passionate intensity
and with night-vision see angry spirits work, their hard industry
control the politics make sure there's a war.
It's always a war that defines the spirit of the age ...
Back in time, 'more awake than you've ever been'
walk back round the block to the Kensington Hotel.
You can't beat it — Britain in the late 1970s.
Chelsea glitz and the faded Liverpool Renaissance
taking their last gasp in Hampstead and Hammersmith.
Life's pleasingly shabby, charmingly Dickensian
with a genteel take on poverty, don't let reality spoil
a good memory. Waking up in 2003 see the future
came true. Despite the brushed chrome ambience
and sexy computer screens, not much has changed.
World's shinier but dirtier, still doomed but in new ways.
Happiness is yet to be the spirit of any age.

Federal Highway

The moon in eclipse glows red as Mars
not angry with war (halo is reflected sunlight).
Aurora drops bright filaments, electricity
and lucky stars extinguish in the sky.

Rolling across the galaxy, some distant
god speaks now beyond care. Images
and ideas coalesce, they're on a mission
to be born and exist. The highway's

hemmed by trees' shadows, the bus
rushing from Liverpool to Canberra
and I was glad I wasn't driving.
The fog was luscious like cream.

A ghostly state forest, well away
from the highway but you can see
though the fog to where a van's lights
dim and a man unloads his guests.

Moon casts pale light through cloud
gazed at, grows deeper shadows,
the bus's engine roars steadily
the ghost-light feels like fusion.

Falling Rain

Ground cracks, a waterhole's
thirsty clay lips whisper *enough*.
It's been dry forever.
Currawongs articulate parched currawong
vowels that mean water fill clouds,
clouds fill and burst, water fill clouds.
All your thoughts must run like an urgent
stream or a funnel of sea water
sucked into the sky by Cyclone Joy.
Let your body build humidity
dreams sprinkle the lawns, soften
the hard fields, wash away the filth ...
now it takes a few weeks to talk to the rain.
Say: *o rain slake the tree roots' suffering
the footpaths love life as a waterfall*.
Concentrate when you sense dust and fumes
dispersed by a sudden breeze,
savour the quiet before the storm.
It's true the frogs always knew when rain
was coming, the clouds always knew
when the frogs were ready and afterwards
the puddles were full of tadpoles.
Tadpole days in the suburbs are long
gone, so think what a fish needs.
Only when the air is wet to taste
can you beg a downpour. Come
lightning, thunder, clouds and clouds.
When rain is the Zeitgeist the soul
craves drenching, call, 'Rain, come
wet our whistles'.

The Rooms in Heaven

No one deserves the saddest day ever
when a child is taken away forever
all that's left is her growing up
a fine young woman and —
remember her love lives always,
now the love for her is all tears
weep each time we remember.
The quiet sermon in logic, faith, community
and continuation makes no sense
after the death of happiness.
What does misery prove? Nothing,
nothing, nothing. A cruel angel
just takes and breaks good hearts.
She was good and kind and beautiful.

Sentimental Fool

A balmy evening enjoying a meal,
fish and chips and a bottle of Dinner Ale,
laid out on a concrete table in Reed Park.
Sunset stains the harbour red, the ferry
seems to be steaming in the wrong
direction but ties up at the wharf on time.
Keep an eye on the kids playing on the swings.
They're fine. Jacaranda, poinsettia and
frangipani overgrow backyard fences,
the fig trees drop their sticky fruit
and palm trees' fronds crash
with tropical exuberance.
Sydney's a town you walk around
get fresh sea air into your lungs.
For a moment the boozy shouts and cheers
murmuring from the rowing club die down.
Not a car for miles, the boats are still,
gulls' cries fade and the only consciousness:
the low tide lap-lapping. Frogs start croaking,
a mopoke's lament adds to the humid air's weight,
the rainbirds' *caw-caw-car* signals a rainy start to summer.
A distant radio plays an old Doris Day song —
hits & memories are mostly American these days
everything's going American even the Beatles
and it really felt as if *our* President was shot.
But the birds here make a symphony

of squawks and chirping, the frogs' insistent
aria calling the rain to come. A mile and
a half away in the park in front of the public library,
the Moreton Bay Figs grow ancient and evil
shedding black leaves and sticky fruit.
Old people say that's where convicts got flogged
and there was a camp of Aborigines. Sometimes,
something strange is glanced behind the gnarled trunks.
A child was last seen there before disappearing.
The birds have gone quiet. And the frogs' roar deepens.
Home just in time — rain trots
on the roof then pours and pours,
drowns the harbour's cries and calls.
Storm breaks, the frogs' crescendo and the rain
gushing from the roof gutters recalls waterfalls.
When the children ask about the future you say,
Que sera, sera — What will be, will be.

IMPERIUM

One Afternoon Over Baghdad

Just about to knock off after a mission
the co-pilot tapped on the pilot's shoulder.
'I have targeted 15 civilians walking on the street.'
'Copy that. I see them.' It was like when
you're a kid playing *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*
and machine-gunning the hundred topless
strippers who run out of the club screaming.
This was real — it's a lot quicker and less sexy
killing foreigners. 'Should I?' the pilot
asks, 'I can blow them away but the window of ...'
'Do it,' Ground Control agrees. The pilot
squeezes the joystick: 'I have impact.'
Just a puff of smoke on the screen. Ground
Control responds, 'Dude!' he says, 'dude.'

Newsreel

The deep truth is imageless. P. B. Shelley

On the Road

*My arms and legs are tightly bound.
But in the hills birds sing and flowers blossom.
Who can prevent my enjoying such sweet scent
and sound?
In my long trudge I might feel a little less lonesome.*

—from Ho Chi Minh, *Prison Diary*. 1942

Cowboy voice on a newsreel drawled
hundreds of reds were killed under 1954
the barrage and still they come.

After meeting with Soviet Premier Nikita
Khrushchev, Kennedy told his friend 1961
the journalist James Reston, 'Now we have
a problem in making our power credible,
and Vietnam is the place.' Because
God blessed America it's bad luck
to attract the eye of American *resolve*.

The Long Trudge

*How are you, GI Joe? It seems to me
that most of you are poorly informed
about the going of the war, to say nothing
about a correct explanation of your presence
over here. Nothing is more confused
than to be ordered into a war to die,
or to be maimed for life without the faintest
idea of what's going on.*

(Hanoi Hannah
16 June, 1967)

Zippo lighters set village roofs on fire
the country burns like a Roman emperor's
cruel dream. Hell for everyone, but
in the free-fire zones it's a turkey shoot.

A healthy kill ratio of eight to one.
US forces win major engagements.
Superior technology facilitates an effective kill
ratio more like forty to one though this estimate
includes an unknown number of non-combatants
and friendlies. It's down to better weaponry and massive
firepower — carpet bombing to heat-seeking cluster bombs
some of which don't explode immediately, glittering toys
the village kids pick up and blow off their legs and arms.
A new bomb tested didn't work: a 10,000 pound bomb

the pointy-heads hoped would burn all oxygen at ground level
over fifty acres, suffocate a communist village.
It just thumped on the ground and was captured
by the enemy. Napalm works fine burning forest
& villages so the VC and NVA regulars can't hide.
The daisy cutter is a work of art, more a style of bombing
than the bomb itself. Exploded a few feet above the ground
it clears vegetation and buildings in a perfect circle
with a diameter of 250 feet. People burn sweetly, too.
Dioxin agent orange leaves a lasting gift your children's
children will appreciate. The battle for hearts and minds
was won by the Zippo lighter.

Museums are Places for Weeping

a photo in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:
an old woman in a southern Hanoi suburb
holding her baby grand-daughter
killed by Nixon's Christmas bombings
cursing the B-52s overhead. According
to the caption the old lady cried out
'America how can you be so savage?'
These were the final bombings, pitilessly
targeting civilians, to bring Hanoi
to her knees and back to the negotiating table,
to ensure a just and lasting peace.

1972

Open Door

Today, the bomb craters are fish ponds
the mangroves and forests grow back with a vengeance.
Cities bustle with life and commerce.
The police don't carry guns but older people jump
when an engine backfires or a tyre pops.
Young children learn at school, War is a terrible thing,
what happened years ago was a terrifying nightmare
a mystery for then, as now, the Vietnamese
had no argument with America. But they are also taught
to hold and aim a rifle and sometimes bad dragons do return.
In the hills birds sing and flowers blossom.
No one should prevent you enjoying such sweet scent
and sound.

2003

All-American

One must be dutiful to the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop,
Theodore Roethke, Robert Frost, EE Cummings,
Wallace Stevens, Pound, Robinson Jeffers, Emily
Dickinson's trance-vision so gnomic and cosmic
always a favourite, or Frank O'Hara showing
how a New York life led wittily can be a poem —

Kerouac's early exuberance for excitement and fun
all the poems about American industry, terrors and peace
On Walden Pond forever when it was glacial —
poems of America's wide life the beautiful speech of
the every-man and woman balancing sensibility
with energy, vision and hope. Frontier-fresh imagery,

ideas informed fabulous novels especially
in the first half of the twentieth century —
even great short stories! Inventors of jazz, blues
and rock and roll! Then conquered the world
with entertainment. But there was toughness
learned in hard times and all the American brilliance

perhaps born in sublime landscape paintings, invented the
aeroplane and made the twentieth century lift off into the future.
Architecture, style and everything. There is cinema
and the American century to consider: wizardry,
luminous works and the luminaries. College education
is one dream that can come true for young soldiers.

Then to teach poetry to sophomores! And graduates
who'll live by Emily's every word a heaven.
Thank Uncle Sam as you embrace Fall's last leaf, and
look up from the screen, see out the window the first
snow flake illuminates the office at Wyoming Hall.
After work, the diner's a warm and folksy place —

the natural world lies dormant in the blizzard's grip,
come Spring happy children run wild over sacred land.
The corn will grow. Free, safe and well fed to do
as you please, don't waste the opportunity.
Uncle Sam's got you putting in enough ideas
and vigour to make America a world on its own.

How war and torture nurture liberty is no mystery.
Understand this: the spirit of war enters the President
through his soul's door. This demon ensures absolute
power resides in his office. The air will choke
with poison, the oceans die, if that's what it takes.
He must create chaos and suck the world's energy.

A fearful population offers many opportunities.
The President truly loves terrorists, his current *raison d'être*.
They're all friends really, business partners from the 1980s.
Ah, invisible relationships, endless mendaciousness.
Yet in World War II when your brave boys raised the flag
at Iwo Jima we had to hand it to you, you were tops.

Helped beat fascism, saved the world. Now, America's interests need protecting. It takes firepower and brutality — that's the kids' job — enforcing the President's will. They love the uniforms and benefit from the discipline, get to see the world through a rifle sight, but they patrol angry streets, ride humvees, shootin' — accuracy

& hard cool learned in basic training & playing computer shootemups back home — shoot any possible unfriendlies — lose & get blown up — trigger-happy's okay — 'We're here to help *these people* yet so many of them want to kill us.' After two tours of duty bright kids come home ready for College. In an occupied city children get caught in the crossfire.

Sure it ain't so sweet for the guys at Baghdad U. Power three hours a week, professors kidnapped or dead but they get access to the Internet and a democratic future. Campus bombings are few but the streets are living hell. Will improved access to consumer durables defeat the insurgency in the city of torture and suicides? We'll have to wait and see.

You'll never want to kill again and you've earned good old-fashioned GI swagger, the discipline learned under fire translates back home as a good man. There's college to look forward to, but a worrying cough, recurring nightmares what we had to do: the wedding party, eighty people's bodies & limbs: dispersed under their homes' rubble. So many families are sad.

Business As Usual: Three Almost Sonnets

1.

Seal the deal with a machine gun—
a whiff of oil brings wild boys running.
Head on out, a Posse on a shootem-up.
They pray to the gods of war.
Let bombs kill and mutilate.
Let children sicken and die.
Thugs control the streets and murder
people going about their daily lives.
Libraries and museums burn like the future.
And let precious life trickle like water in sand.
For years to come, kids, better watch for landmines
wherever you step. To be a patriot learn the art
of suicide. When the killing's done
Democracy will come and enlighten a land
benighted by plain old *bad* and *wrong*.

2.

No shouting *Yankee go home*
or organising labour ever did much good.
Yankees take what they want and everything
goes to hell. Just last week a treasure chest
called Iraq was subdivided into *Hi-octane*, *Standard*
and *Lead replacement*. Military and civilian
casualties have been heavy, but ultimately
cost effective, the legacy of so many people's
hatred is a risk to be factored, exploited
and communicated. Fear guides us now
but know a world-wide boom will come
and wash away the blood.
Lots of Iraq jokes on *Saturday Night Live*
And booty, booty for the lucky ones.

3.

Tortured ghosts will remind you it's not
just Yankees, it's every bullyboy ever lived
and living having his day drenched in blood.
Ruski go home never did much good either
nor for the rest of the murdering scum.
History a list of mass-murderers?
Vicious apes love torture and war.
Behind it all is a shared faith that's no mystery
and fundamentalists of any ilk appreciate:
the rapture of the world's end glimpsed in war,
its highest human expression is the sunlight
born from a thermonuclear explosion
& Purity is delivered — heavenly
clouds of vaporised ocean.



PANDANUS BOOKS

Pandanus Books was established in 2001 within the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at The Australian National University. The Pandanus Books catalogue focuses on books relating to Asia and the Pacific. The publishing list includes not only scholarly texts relating to the region but also embraces biography, memoir, fiction and poetry.

Since its inception, Pandanus Books has developed into an editorially independent publishing enterprise with an imaginative list of titles, a reputation for high quality production values and an international marketing strategy which promotes sales to a worldwide readership.

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The poems in *Earthly Delights* inhabit an existence where simple domestic meditations find as their neighbours poems that embrace life's clamour and passions. Poems of travel, romance, illumination and memory (the cities of the world are visited) are interleaved with poems of darker vision — surreal, questioning and often funny.

'Kelen's poetry is first and foremost a communicative act ... His lyricism is rich with allusion and dislocation ... and a recurrent, redemptive sense of grace.'

Michael Brennan, *Australian Book Review*

'Long familiarity with travel has contributed towards this poet's clear-headedness, focus, and good humour. A heightened sense of empathy seems to have emerged — one that crosses the boundaries between nature and humanity, animals and plants.'

Patricia Prime, *JAAM (Just Another Arts Movement) Magazine*



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