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Poems

David Dabydeen

Chris Mansell

Mark MacLeod

John Barnie

Richard Stevenson

See next page for additional authors

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Poems

Abstract

GUYANA PASTORAL

AMELIA EARHART FLIES OUT FROM LAE, N.G.

GYPSY TAP

THE COLLECTED UNCONSCIOUS

SHOW AND TELL

HOMETOWN

FJAL TRING, NW JUTLAND

CATTLE EGRETS

WORDS FOR NAREN

Authors

David Dabydeen, Chris Mansell, Mark MacLeod, John Barnie, Richard Stevenson, and Anjana Basu

David Dabydeen

GUYANA PASTORAL

Under the tambrin tree wheh de moon na glow,
Laang, laang, laang, she lay, laang, laang
She cry, but de wind na blow
An dem wraang an straang
An dem wuk an dem bruk till fowlcack crow.
Who see who hear when she belly buss, when she mout splash blood?

Only de jumbie umbrella dat poke up e white eye from de mud.

Under de tambrin tree wheh de sun na shine
Dem tek up spade, dem dig deep hole, dem hide she from deh mine.
She puppa look bush, how he hack, how he halla!
She mumma call priest, kill calf, pray Krishna Christ Allah!
Nine month since dem saach an dem shout, East West Naat Sout.
Who know wheh she lass, who know wheh foh fine?

Only de cush-cush ants dat lay dem white egg in she mout.

Chris Mansell

AMELIA EARHART FLIES OUT FROM LAE, N.G.

There are no gods
so you can please yourself
what rivers you rush up and down on
what roads you ignore
what patch or rift of landscape
you choose to fly over.

But remember this
you cannot choose whether
to stay or fly

the inevitable path
has you to fetch
and your wings will stick
in some tacked-down horizon
somewhere.

Fly out Amelia!

from my old town
Fly out! from its fecund green green green
from the red green red green brown
of the Flame Flower lianas.
Fly from the Poinsettia leaves
Fly from the bluer blue sea
where the earth falls off
where the water pushes
and pulls at your unconscious feet
Blue at the horizon.

The waves cannon down
on the open side
and lap the lee edge
of the bay
and coral fish
dip their snouts
into the rusted struts
of the ship Tanya Maru.

We watched it twenty years
slowly slipping off the edge
of the reef.

One morning it was gone
we hadn't noticed it go
it was suddenly an absence.

It's been more than forty years
the women wait
Amelia

GYPSY TAP

How to
understand you
in red.

Red lips, coat,
red jumper
shiny red red boots.

Smile.
You smile red
red red
red red.

Your arms
describe
a bright red
circle.

Your
fingernails pick
at the laces of
your dancing shoes.

Dance.
You dance
one red foot
and then another.

Dance.
You splash
one red thing
and then another.

Smile.
You smile
one red smile
and then another.

Bite.
You bite
one red peach
and then another.

Your
teeth crack hard
on its wrinkled
stone.

Your
fingernails split
on the knots
of your shoes.

THE COLLECTED UNCONSCIOUS

Take time off
 go
to Queensland
 where the deceived
 lose their baggage
 to the rich
 who put up signs
 for the defeated.

Go
 to Queensland
 it's here
you realize you're
 Australian
how different
 each from each
but us

 Now on the beach
Surfers Paradise
 notes the sky
helicopter pulls
 SEAWORLD 6 SHOWS 10 RIDES ALL ONE PRICE
across flat
like a bandaid

 it should be
a message
 to ring home.

Smell
 the suntans /
 estate agents

There are a lot
of Americans
 It's just like
 Home.

Someone has
Patti Smith on a record
player
they say it's not a r t
(there should be a message
it's entertaining
though.

At Purlingbrook Falls
there's a pond
352' down

looks like
National Geographic
has been here
with a helicopter
two-ways
helmets
ropes

for the neat shots
/dropped one
off the edge
of the cliff.

Blokes walking like goannas
come up the path
(200 years is the shortest route
to the lookout

behind them
women
thinking how to
push the children
over the edge
without looking / anyone watching.

The party at the pond
boils
up the rocks
curiosity abseils

who wants to know
about Queenslanders
celebrating

the myth of them
as sold
in Sydney

too gross

to contain

the dropped mouth
green and black
of the cliffs
the women and men
with beers

The Courier Mail
is The Smell

No-News-Day
(good day
for publicity

It's just like home.

(The noise is
either a goat

or the starter
of an EK Holden
or the bleat

of an agent
selling

the New Life
High Rise
Hope

But they're one
of us,
like family

at Christmas
you're one of them
and a heated toast rack
will never go astray
(the butt ends of your breakfast
you hide still
from your mother

What's a gun
in the family

(heavy metal

These people.
It's like being OS
they force you into being
an Australian

These Queenslanders
force
you into being
foreign

the rest
force you
into being
other than what you want
to be
and outlander
(ay?)

Who's the good girl then?

Mark Macleod

SHOW AND TELL

when me mum and dad
go off the club
i turn all the lights out
but not me bedroom
and me boyfriend rings up
and he says i got the wagon
and we just cruise
round talken looken
for a party and we get back
half past eleven
and the lights on
and i think God
and me dad opens the door on us
and he says you cradle
snatcher ya bloody ro
man polanski and me boyfriend hits him
and he falls on the floor
and there's blood
and i'm cryen
and me mum goes in the kitchen
cryen and me dad flat
on his back holds up
this ten dollar note
and says okay
tell us
how much
we owe ya for babysitten

John Barnie

HOME TOWN

I think of the widows; closed flowers.
Who will find them lovely, remembering
Life in the withered petals of their lips.
In morning coffee rooms
They crowd like memories, sunnily.
The make-up and the perms suggest
Summer frocks and jaunts before the war.
Now they tread to church and pray
For company. They are delicate, like moths
Found clinging to the panes on autumn
Nights. Their powdered cheeks are soft
As downy wings. Their eyes glitter
Like gems in faded boxes, blue, green,
And on fire, as many years ago.

FJALTRING, NW JUTLAND

i

Air and light
Flatten
This already flat

Plum-coloured land,
Pushing the farms to the skyline
Where their red

Roofs
And wind raked windbrakes
Circle you forever.

Here the news is
One road toppled over the cliff
And gone

The farmer ploughing less this year,
The cornstalks thin
To seaward

In the salted earth.
Along the shore
I collected the evidence —

Sea urchins pressed in flint
And something struggling out of stone on
 fins
Or legs,

Two dead cormorants
With high shouldered wings,
A stranded starfish,

The usual emptied shells.
Across the fields
Gulls flaked

In twos and threes,
And as the tractors
Battled on

Dwarfed
By the hugeness of the light,
Skylarks

Plucked themselves
From the earth
With savage, glittering cries.

Each evening fog came
 Grey backed from the sea, drawn
 Like Grendel

To the yellow lights in houses,
 But standing off
 Among the windbreaks

Biting its wrists
 In envy, or moving out
 Across the new ploughed land

Where lapwings
 Gleamed in the furrows
 When we awoke

The sun startled our faces,
 Skylarks
 Were screaming from the sky.

The sea sets up a roar
 Like a wall of light; half a mile
 Away

It drowns out everything
 Except the nearest lark's
 Scalloped song.

Yet the people live with it
 And its swift
 Erosion of the land

That litters the shore with flints,
 Sea urchin fossils,
 Pips

Spat out
After the winter's
Mastication.

iv *War at Fjaltring*

The German pill boxes
Dunk and jump in the waves,
Strongmen

Bracing themselves against the horizon
And the ice
Splash of the water.

And they swear
They've never moved —
Yet the sand

Cliffs
Stand ninety yards away,
Yellow and rotten,

Watching the squared-off
Shaven heads
Descending deeper,

Masterful and confident,
Under the green copper, the iron weight
Of the sea.

Richard Stevenson

CATTLE EGRETS

Come around a corner
and they're there:
conspiratorial clansmen
holding the close white flames
of themselves above the dark
secret of the waterhole.

A sheet on a line,
they catch the wind together,
billow out in a sort of sail
beneath the gathering shoals
of cumulo nimbus.
Your nimble fingers preen the horizon.

Click, click, click:
pieces of the sky are carefully removed,
folded like laundry in a basket,
leaving you five clothes pegs,
five pink mouths
gaping in each hand.

Anjana Basu

WORDS FOR NAREN

The words I have for Naren are purely prose.
Prose. Prose of a chest
A mat of hair against the sun. Sometimes
It's counting the tiles on a floor
Held down. Or a bed field of crumbs
And a dirty foot. Even greying underwear.
Sometimes an evening spent in hatred
Following in ones head the footsteps of a whore
Down some dark lane or a street of crumbling houses.

These are words for Naren.
Perhaps a synonym for rage or hate.
Or even an undefinable word called love
That you could find in rage or hate.
There are other meanings — even other shades
Left out. Footsteps of a child or whore
Or other women deliberately taken
And then the running back to a familiar bed.
I called it lost child.
There were other words too —
Lover, Boyfriend, ex-Husband, boy-husband.
It meant keeping company in an empty room
With haunted corners. With shame
And a telephone wire.
Company against reason or sense
Or the blotting out of a curtain — hiding
From pigeons or from seeking eyes.

These were words for Naren.
Are still perhaps.
Pretended love made in a mirror,
A shuddering belly and tonsils hurt
The way a face may flush or voice darken
Denying everything but lust or hate, or accidental love.
Naren's words.
