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## Poems

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## Poems

### **Abstract**

JOURNEY INTO THE BLUE DISTANCE, R 766, CATTLE ON THE MORASS

# Peter McConnell

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## JOURNEY INTO THE BLUE DISTANCE

Strangers all, in this land  
We crouch in hopes of a great  
And glorious Resurrection  
Gazing towards Europe  
Longing for our lost mother  
But watched by a black goanna.

There, in its dry red heat  
Our harsh island waits  
Where no Gothic shadows are  
But blinding light on glass rock  
Desolation where the crow is  
Desert where the eagle flies.

As sheep huddled by ghost gums  
We occupy fragile green places  
Our abstract, planned cities rise  
With their rational water supplies  
Utopias for bureaucrat or lawyer  
Benthamite model pantopicons.

From these we must trek, as mad  
Leichhardt, beyond reach of sextant  
Or compass into that blue distance  
Though we sink in clay's silence  
We may find there our great  
And glorious Resurrection.

Obsolete in an age of diesels  
Brake blocks welded  
Cold and black  
It stands in the park  
On a length of track  
Leading nowhere.

Last of Stephenson's children  
Amid alien green  
Far from the roundhouse  
And friendly smells  
Of oil and steam  
It waits here.

Still now are the gauges which guided  
Butterfly hunters on branch lines  
Through limestone cuttings.  
Silent the whistle which greeted gangers  
Or called schoolboys to dream journeys  
To a future waiting just down the track,  
And immobile the iron wheels  
Which obeyed the call of the city  
Telegraphed urgently on tense wires  
Hauled red trucks in the heat haze  
Through golden paddocks  
With wool for Liverpool  
Wheat for Harbin.

Black whale harpooned by progress  
It rests, cast up on a green beach  
Children shake the rusted levers  
Shout from the smokestack, play in the bunker  
Tourists photograph the great machine  
Lilliputians torment the iron Gulliver.

Yet this is still a better end  
Than breaking on a scrapheap  
Or the slow destruction

Of a locomotive graveyard.  
Here at night it can hear other engines  
And dream its cast-up whale's dreams  
Of the days of glory  
When its headlamp lit  
The rails of a continent  
When the furnace glared red  
It could thunder through darkness  
Free to roam the oceans of earth..

### CATTLE ON THE MORASS

At dusk the herd travels  
Under a grey, winter sky  
Icy breath rises, snorting  
The red heifers stumble  
Over sedge grass and claypans.

The herons shriek  
In cold air  
As drovers whip and shout  
Driving the great beasts  
Fearful: a doomed army.

The hooves clatter  
Pitiful to watch, from the cliff  
This Golgotha.  
So many cattle who grew with me  
Whose brown eyes followed  
Gently down the fences  
In summer days.

Dull roar of the sea  
A drover's whip urges them on  
To the saleyards of the town  
Pitiful to hear them  
Lowling, all the long night  
From their last home.