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Poems

Peter McConnell

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Poems

Abstract

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

Peter McConnell

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
Lowng, all the long night
From their last home.