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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

The Dance Floor in the Cave Kanangra Walls, The Edge, Sensualities - at Katherine Gorge (Central Australia)

The Dance Floor in the Cave – Kanangra Walls

Folk came riding from two days round,
breakfast at the cousins', then 'Off to the dance!'
Trotting up by the Thurat spires,
a last boulder-turn on the stock-path and
Hooley Dooley! – a cave
with a smooth plank floor, a fiddler and lanterns.
'Partners please...' for the genealogy waltz.

The rocks full of shell, like an ancient sea
moved lights in the ladies' eyes;
and the rhythmic moon of the violin,
glancing yellow in the overhang
made the finest sounds ever. And there was water,
sinking through sixty foot of sandstone
to plop in a barrel.
They danced till a pale light came up
through the tree-tops below. And after,
on coffee or whisky they rode home sleepless, to milking.
No one stole that plank-floor.

Dancing was serious business
– it could leave you courting
four days' ride away. And those eddying seas
would be life-time tides
discussed and fathered and aunted over
before any step beyond the floor – and though its wood
is charcoal in some camper's fire,
many a stout old trunk survives in nursing homes
known to a score of grandchildren.

The Edge

The young falcon doubts her wing,
spirals up gingerly
from days in the nest
when her claws measured the air
for hold, till the heavy downed body
was out and flying.

Below her, you glimpse
a field of mud dotted with blocks
like giants' chimney pots,
and a lizard's-tail of creek
sliding off through dark-green forest
with the ochre soup of an avalanche.

You tread the gravel of hold-fasts
as softly as on the whistling air.

A grasshopper leaps
and is past you,
falling so slowly
it will have a fresh appetite
when it lands.

The steel railing nudges
below your hips' fulcrum;
you are alone on the ledge,
with a million years of monkey ancestors,
watching a thistledown blow up
a hundred metres in a minute.
And your heart cries that you could fly.

Sensualities – at Katherine Gorge (Central Australia)

1.

Like a canal of Mars, this wet-season sluice
draws off planetary floods.
The water that forms
in its continent-splitting chasm
is like no other. Serene
and warm, with no wish
to flow to the ocean, it is where
the Dreamtime put it, and if
through floods and a net of river beds
it some day dribbles to the coast
it will have lost itself.

2.

Meniscus floater,
the canoe indents
the skin of water,
a bark mat
with turned-up edges.

3.

Ant-lions in the dust
build funnels of pure instability
that slide a passing ant
onto their jaw-horns. A light shower
stiffens the dust
brings famine.

4.

This burnt midday land – a goanna crunching
on leaves like upturned scales – fades to
a windless Territory evening where
your car trails a miles-long plume of dust
that settles neatly on the road.

5.

A creek cluck-and-lucking its way down hill.
The smell of baked rock in summer,
with a hint of cool remedy splashing by:
Sensualities – at Katherine

6.

The river, that great earth-mover
has taken a contract, to wash the mountain
grain by grain to the sea.

7.

Like a tow-path running beside the river
- this spare channel of flood-time sand
with a median strip of paperbarks.
The ghost gum's bark looms ambiguous, gray or white
– its shades tell the stage of evening.

8.

A man to give his seed as freely
as the gum sheds pollen,
and for no more cause
than that the year is ripe.