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TORCH RUNNING

Abstract
Poem

Mark Oconnor

TORCH RUNNING

Fanned by the flail of Pindar's tongue
from Olympia's dry creeks it leapt
past empires, swift as signal-fire from Troy.

Next it took wing, in a slipstream's howl,
approaching the Top End
of the great scorched Southland
over the slow arrows of the people smugglers
glued to ocean's dark plate, arriving
where dawn is a curve of primal white
so distant it seems straight.

The Last Land was waiting, a saucer in darkness;
its fire-glow lit by a screaming torch of parrots,
over the dragon-breath plains,
where desert peoples winnow grass seeds,
share honey-ants, living
that perfect democracy whose each citizen
is a Local Member.

Now the flame is down.
It runs swift as bushfires
past dry hiss of rock-kissing scales
that whispers its runners trespass here
Yet runs on in triumph, borne by those who have sworn
that honor will not out-run them.

Now the flame runs South
through the blood-heat places
where a firm-fleshed human dries like a jellyfish,
and the bicycling lizard gets up, levitates
on its blur of legs
outrunning the bare red earth.

South, south, past cool morning interludes
of parrot song and gully chortle
as any in Australia's winter,
further south than Ulysses dreamed could be
South to Melbourne, that furthest city of Greeks,
and up to Sydney, that stunning womb of harbor.

The feather-trousered lorikeet, a honey-gathering robot,
punk colors to the soles of his feet
stares, briefly amazed, in this land of rainbows
where the full moon has come to stare.

And a voice beats out
in the panting heat,
in restless scud of the thudding heels:
'No need now to be Greek;
we are all Earth's children; our huge future wars
will be personal, and bloodless.'