

1993

Poems

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Recommended Citation

Duncan, Grant, Poems, *Kunapipi*, 15(3), 1993.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol15/iss3/18>

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Abstract

THEORY OF FIELDS, HAWKES BAY, OUTSIDE JUST LOOKING, THE TROUBLE WITH FIRE

Grant Duncan

THEORY OF FIELDS, HAWKES BAY

It was what's known as a quarter acre
but it was more than that

it was front stage and back stage
and a stadium too

it was an island with
too many heirs for sons

it was a locus of myth and fantasy
with imaginary beasts on show

it was depriving and it was nourishing
and the lawns were cut regularly

it was a superannuated and subdivided
paddock of mostly horseshit but

it was flat with no falls
it was ngati kahungunu

it was as if you'd never known it
the way it was

it was pure memory pure theatre
pure geometry of rectangular bliss

it was the bomb-site of reason
with unflappable edges

it was another chance like
nothing but a springboard

it was never mine even though
it found its way inside me

OUTSIDE JUST LOOKING

Reading is quite a different use of marbles
from listening or just looking

You needn't read the window signs nor even buy
Just looking is better than being in the dark

Old and small as the buildings may seem at 9 o'clock
this must be an emergent centre of good taste
The attention is drawn to the wine shop (closed)
the little cafes the delicatessen the former takeaways
and the image of the lonely knight roasting sausage by dragon fire

It's a symbiosis of myths and mealtimes
bricks and mortar sky and skyline buyers and lookers
while the wineshop has the good sense to close early
and open late

So in the space of one day you can wear out
your best soles in looking at all the signs

the party invitations floating distantly like harbour sails
the incantations and the golden kiwis roasted on electric spit
under a succulent midday sun

Therefore the baker swats a fly
while his neighbour the butcher fondles his cold flesh

No wonder you can wear out your best pair of eyes
unravelling the alchemy of commerce

the nearly naked kodachrome truth the fiery vitamin-C sun
the alembic of vices virtues and vapours
for every orifice that swells smells and smarts

the essential product is here and taken with a cup of tea
it animates your wisecracker sandwich as you listen to his humour
and makes you hungry for his lettuce
thirsty for his cheek

THE TROUBLE WITH FIRE

Something's cooking
That's the trouble with fire

but you rise on its heat like a seagull
search for jailed singers and spy on the textbooks of patience

return at twilight like a ghost disguised by the humming of powerlines
and broadcast silence

By morning you will have imagined an antique landscape
and having the time to inhabit it

rub grains of sand between your fingers
make love like aliens and leave me a poem instead of your number

I am your one and only photocopy
the original dislocated

place of birth somewhere amid the agony of parents
pushing F1 for Help

Your name is a letter doctored
to detail that sorrow

But we will be lovers even if it takes us forty years
while our faces curl up and we meet only at funerals

We'll leave our memories behind beneath familiar furniture
become our own ghosts and vanish for a time

We'll find a place to learn to change
the raw into the cooked

to feel the rarity between our fingers
and know full well the trouble with fire