Kunapipi

1998

Poems

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Recommended Citation
Available at:https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol20/iss3/29

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Poems

Abstract
AARON AT WORK/RAIN, ANNA MARIA IS COMING, OR MAYBE THOMAS BARTON, OR MAX!, EVERY WAY,
INSOMNIA III, TRANS
By the light box propped in the window, 
bare chested, scars rosy in artificial sun, 
he crouches over his workbench. 
Dental tools in their holder at hand, silver discs, 
his torch, the tiny saw. Light flares, breaks on 
his earring as he turns his head, 
frowns, dark eyebrows almost meeting. 
He takes a watch from his jeans pocket, 
rubs it absently over his beard, electricity. 
The braid clinks its beads as his head 
turns, reading something. Now he rises, goes to 
the cupboard, mixes wallpaper paste with water. 
The pile of miraculous papers, shot metal 
threaded with linen, he sorts to start 
the papier mâché hypodermic needle he’s building on the table, 
matches it to the real one he used this morning, 
adds as a detail to the mask to change the meaning: 
a revolution: what he’s about. Out the window the black GTI 
beads up rain. He never drives it. An emblem, but of what? 
A memory of pain, his slouching walk just home from hospital? 
Where is the child whose shoes I bought? Where the bread 
we kneaded? Where’s our kitchen? Our dead?
ANNA MARIA IS COMING, OR MAYBE THOMAS BARTON, OR MAX!

New life! Will he toe out like Dolly, like John? Will her eyes be fires?
Blue and green, like Papa’s, the ocean at the shore?
Will she sing in the bath? Play piano in her diapers?
Will his heart leap at large machinery? Will he say, “Dribe, drible,”
to his daddy, entering the tunnel? Will his hair be red? Will her hair curl?
Will her little face have the circumflex eyebrows of her mother? The
pointed chin?

Her hair be fair, bright blonde? Will she frown at the light by the river?
Oh, let her head fill with Greek Owls, her mouth with honey wine.
Let his hands cup the keys, the air of the studio filling with sound, the
crunch of cornflakes, the sift of raw sugar on the tongue, the great chords.

And let the parents be fierce forever, Lord, as You are, exacting
price and penalty for Your gifts, so they grow strong and joyous
in their age, blessed by the memory of the black car, open to air
and chosen by a child in token of the power they give over,
their lives in service to new life, the great melt of petals under snow, the
green rising.

EVERY WAY

In agony again
in the kitchen again
sun fills the clear feeder
on the window my chickadee
flies to, flies from her old barn siding
house made by a poet
How can
I stand more
transformations? Poet
myself, transformed
by the mind of my child’s will
into seeing at the instant of revulsion
– O rose thou art sick –
the miraculous change Mad
no less than Lear raving
on the moor without his fool.
My flat backyard
radiant with sunshine
lift up that bird.
Lord, help me to it.
INSOMNIA III

He has a tumor in his brain –
that much we know – and he’s the father
of four children, the oldest fourteen.
Therefore this morning of sun so bright
we’re asked to draw the shades,
let us praise the brain in its bone pan.

All night I bow to the boom box,
changing tapes. The electrical cord
between my ears carries a charge
to adjust away from the fleshy thorax,
over the head to rest safely where it belongs,
if it can be said to rest anywhere
naturally, on my skull.

O disordered
self, to require distraction all night,
stories poured in the porch ear –
for example, the man who counts the angel
residue of birds broken on our picture windows –
to obliterate the polite rustle
the possum makes with her babes
through the laundry yard to their home
under the shed. And to miss at five
exactly, this spring season,
first bird song with first light...

O untrustworthy self
filled with appropriate terror of tumor
and broken wing, consider
flight, not the swollen plague tongue
in the sore mouth, but story.

Or the possum herself, laden, twentieth generation
of her family, in residence still in our yard,
how in spite of ghosts and grief
she knows exactly – how? – her path
under the empty clothesline.
TRANS

What do you care, she asked
at last, letting me get the good
from my hundred dollar therapy time.
She's still your daughter. Whoops
she said going red over all the parts
I could see - face under all that permed hair
her neck chicken-wattled, even the top part
of her chest the V between her bowling shirt button
(marked JAKE on the pocket) showing blush.
I sobbed, quiet at first, swallowing salt,
then louder wailing like some beached baby.

Son you mean, you old biddy, I croaked at last
crying a good ten bucks worth of earth time.
Who would have thought that little one
whose cheek turned away from my breast
would grow up HE. He started SHE,
a brilliant daughter.

It's the age, she said
not meaning puberty because he was long past,
 thirty at his last birthday, but the times: everything
possible: hormones, surgery, way beyond unisex
jeans at the Mall, those cute flannel button-down shirts.

What will I do I whispered so deep into misery
I forgot she was listening and I was paying. No wonder
I needed therapy.

Afterwards on the bluffs at the heart
of the weirdest sunset since July 4th
I try to conjure his voice: "Mom,
since sunup the sky's been dark but, now we're talking,
I see the sun come out, perfect
for a walk and when we're through talking
I'm going out. Come with me?"
That voice: the same words and phrases, intonation –
from me with his dad mixed in – "like cake with too much
frosting," as my student said tonight in class. Be honest
here. Love is the word he said in closing. "I love you,
Mom." Transsexual - like life, not easy - in the 90s.
My kid. And me in the same boat with him, mine.