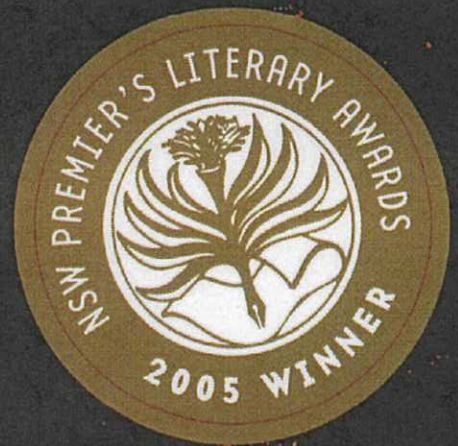


SMOKE

smoke encrypted whispers

ENOUGH

samuel wagan watson



whisper



magnesium girl

I was kissing the girl
with magnesium breath,
all over me
her burning hot magnesium

ahh to touch

the boundaries of delight
and pain
for you only hurt those you can love
when lust becomes a mercenary
for the weak hearted of humanity

the magnesium breath
inviting me to her bowl of splinters
nothing but the frozen tears of her last love
picked up in the rain
and our relationship,
a shrouded threesome,
death always being
that silent partner

oh that magnesium girl
with the strawberry hair
how my black flesh and rye once lingered
to be one with you
my magnesium girl

on the river

it was a drive through the sleeping industrial giants
and thirty minutes before a flight
along Brisbane's vein of union disputes
to a secluded spot on the river's edge
with its cold sea breezes and dead things,
we kissed
and said goodbye
discovering that we both had feelings for deserted factories
and abandoned mechanical bits
and for each other
thirty minutes before a flight
and two writers can't find the words
to ease the tearing of departure
serenaded by a blow-torch on a rusting iron hulk upon the water
grey smoke billowing from the old power station
the landscape studded with electric fences and weeds
her and I at home amongst it all
we kissed
and said goodbye

waiting for the good man

we kissed goodbye at the terminal
and upon seeing you for the last time
I felt the good man leaving,
the good man that existed in the hotel room
the good man that loved you across the table, linen and fine
wines
the good man that appreciated your perfume
and ran his fingers gently through your hair
catching in his rings as for you he listened
for the laughter while resting in your breasts

I felt the good man leaving
as if I couldn't convince him that I'd changed
that you had made a difference
and that I could breathe easy in the darkness of early morning
I felt the good man leaving
and now
I'll be missing both of you

white stucco dreaming

sprinkled in the happy dark of my mind
is early childhood and black humour
white stucco dreaming
and a black labrador
an orange and black panel-van
called the 'black banana'
with twenty blackfellas hanging out the back
blasting through the white stucco umbilical
of a working class tribe
front yards studded with old black tyres
that became mutant swans overnight
attacked with a cane knife and a bad white paint job

white stucco dreaming
and snakes that morphed into nylon hoses at the terror
of Mum's scorn
snakes whose cool venom we sprayed onto the white stucco,
temporarily blushing it pink
amid an atmosphere of Saturday morning grass cuttings
and flirtatious melodies of ice-cream trucks
that echoed through little black minds
and sent the labrador insane
chocolate hand prints like dreamtime fraud
laid across white stucco
and mud cakes on the camp stove
that just made Dad see black
no tree safe from treehouse sprawl
and the police cars that crawled up and down the back streets,
peering into our white stucco cocoon
wishing they were with us

jetty nights

it was an arm that stretched over the mud and sharks
from under the song of the swaying pines in the darkness,
the night water fondles the pylons
as mullet dance in the cold blackness afraid of nothing
we too, walk against our curfew
we see the eyes under the jetty,
phosphorescence and ectoplasm
under the death of the floorboards
looking up from the muddy grave
stealing a glance at the clear cover of stars

a fishing boat drones somewhere out there on the water
and in the distance a buoy flashes red lights and green
and you suddenly feel the loneliness out there
that's where you can escape to

the smell of mashed potatoes and chops hang in the air
drags our attention back to the shoreline cottages
Ray Martin chatters somewhere in the glow of sixty watt lighting
we turn and face the clatter of dead wood
our lifeline home
and leave our jetty,
leave away the mystical squawks of curlew in the swamp
that eerie bleakness we came to love,
this innocence we behold
that we had nothing to fear but our parents' scorn

a verse for the cheated

growing up on the southern fringe of the Sunshine Coast
we often heard adults rambling on about the local economy
and saw the bright plumage and wealth of tourists
those who came with an odd hunger for visitation
and soon left as tourists
some who copped the brunt of our youthful grievances
those buying postcards of pristine beaches
that were nowhere near us
and purchasing painted coral stolen from hundreds
of miles away
and branded with the tag, MADE IN TAIWAN,
they arrived in their brand-new cars that sparkled
upon a strip of bitumen that we regarded as a petulant beast,
a highway that carried some of us away
forever
young and unaware of the finality of death
its greedy black claws lubricated on the nectar of broken dreams
my mate who had his licence for only a week
... the sister of a friend on a casual drive home
... an academic in the senior class, the world at her fingertips
... another mate taken on a motorbike
and a friend who ended up as a plaything for the monster
pulled from the wreckage screaming, fed on painkillers and
nightmares
all of this and the tourists taking photos of the roadside crosses
thinking how fortunate and cool we kids looked in this haven
how carefree it must be approaching adulthood on the Sunshine
Coast
and the recalcitrant animal
prepared to deliver us on our future paths of success
and to pick a few off on our way

the gloom swans

and they found shelter in decay
as the morose ballet
danced across the wreckage of metropolis lost

fingering the broken glass, dreams and wind
constantly fuelling the graceful progress
of the gloom swans

a death march of sinister beauty

drawing survivors back through ruined hearts
seeing a blend into the melted, living forms of day
and crawl back to shadows smooth of night
appearing only to undertake the execution
of sky's foe

why so vicious, oh gloom swans?
why so death?

why do the children weep
in contempt of your sterile feather?

why so pardon the corpses
laid out in the cleansing of your mockingbird departure

labelled

the doctors probed
while I persisted stamping my hooves
on the cold floor of the locked ward

"Mr Watson ... you don't eat grass!"

"Crap!" I flared.

hooves tap, clop, tok, tap ...

"Molasses, salt tablets. Now!" I snarled.

"Mr Watson ... why these antics?!"

"Let me out of here ... I'm a winner ... I have a Cup to win!"

"Mr Watson ... you're not a race horse ... you're a human being!"

Oh yeah?

all my life I've been under some kind of label —

full blood?

half blood ...

half breed!

half caste —

and even questioned about being

a quadroon

well

with magnificent bloodlines like that

I decided

I must be a goddamned pedigree of some sort!

for the wake and skeleton dance

the dreamtime Dostoyevskys murmur of a recession in the spirit
world

they say,
the night creatures are feeling the pinch
of growing disbelief and western rationality
that the apparitions of black dingos stalk the city night, hungry
their ectoplasm on the sidewalk in a cocktail of vomit and swill
waiting outside the drinking holes of the living
preying on the dwindling souls fenced in by assimilation

the dreamtime Dostoyevskys ponder
as dark riders in the sky signal a movement
for the wake and skeleton dance
it's payback time for the bureaucrats in black skins
and the fratricide troopers before them
with no room to move on a dead man's bed

is it all worth holding onto these memories
amidst the blood-drenched sands?
better to forget?

the dreamtime Dostoyevskys feel the early winter
chilled footsteps walk across their backs in the dark hours,
the white man didn't bring all the evil
some of it was here already
gestating
laughing
intoxicated
untapped
harassing the living
welcoming the tallship leviathans of two centuries ago
that crossed the line drawn in the sand by the Serpent
spilling dark horses from their bowels
and something called the Covenant,
infecting the dreamtime with the ghosts of a million lost entities
merely faces in the crowd at the festival of the dead,
the wake is over
and to the skeleton dance the bonemen smile
open season on chaos theory
and retirement eternal for the dreamtime Dostoyevsky

cheap white-goods at the dreamtime sale

if only the alloy-winged angels could perform better
and lift Uluru; a site with grandeur
the neolithic additive missing from that seventh wonder of the
world expo,
under the arms of a neon goddess, under the hammer in
London,
murderers turning trustees
a possession from a death estate
maybe flogged off to the sweet seduction of yen
to sit in the halls of a Swiss bank
or be paraded around Paris' Left Bank
where the natives believe
that art breathed for the first time;
culture, bohemian and bare and maybe brutal
and how the critics neglect the Rubenesque roundness of a
bora-ring
unfolded to an academia of art
yes, that pure soil in front of you
the dealers in Manhattan lay back and vomit
they're the genius behind dot paintings and ochre hand prints
rattling studios from the East Side to the Village
and across the ass of designer jeans
porcelain dolls from Soho wanting a part in it so bad
as the same scene discards their shells upon the catwalks
like in the land of the original Dreaming
comatose totems litter the landscape
bargains and half-truths simmer over authenticity
copyright and copious character assassination on the menu
sacred dances available out of the yellow pages
and
cheap white-goods at the Dreamtime sale!

poem 9

how do you know?
that the mud doesn't feel the pain
of your weight upon its resting place
how do you know?

like the snake that rushes before your feet
and you the only audience
a gift only for your eyes
from the old people
maybe?
how do you know?

the tree that moves in the breeze
its branches caressing your head
maybe a touch of recognition?
maybe?

how do we know that this could be
our final resting place?
or sacred to someone else
but how can you tell?

is it voices or wind that pushes
the afternoon tide?
does your shadow talk to the land
or is it just a shroud of light?

are we asking the right questions?
and can they only be answered here on the
wetlands?
are the answers here for our blindness
or was blindness the only answer
our ears were content with?

we're not truckin' around

upon the dining table of the Invader
there were those who thought
that they could simply mimic creation
and plough through this land
inventive
but blindfolded

— *where'd ya get ya license!*

and the bitumen vine of wandering impetus
drove right through the bora-ring
and knocked our phone off the hook
forever

forcing us to stand out on the shoulder of the road
looking for a lift,
even though
we weren't really lusting
that 18-wheeler of a lifestyle
driving into the next millennium

we've been too used
to feeling a kinship
with the discarded and shredded
black pieces of truck tire
on the fringes of the big road

us 'damper-feet' may just pull up a seat on the shoulder
watch
and observe
how you lead-foots fend for yourselves
as the surfers twist before the white squall ahead

the encroaching absalom before us all
an electronic highway

night racing

night racing through the suburbs
of white stucco dreaming
the menacing glow of the city's tainted body behind us
as the custodians of the estate domiciles
spy through the holes in their lace curtains
at the howl of our twin-cam war party
drowning out the dying heartbeat of this captured landscape
our small bodies shivering a *techno* pulse

hugging into corners
accelerating onto the straights
a growling junkyard dingo under the bonnet,
the beast made up from parts here and there
born for the walkabout rally
black feet pumping racing pedal to floor
breaking the silence of the settlers' sacred sites
enveloped in shadows when not haunted by the silhouettes of
urban myth

mind navigation into the bitumen labyrinth
these areas we treat with the same contempt as laid upon us
as middle-class Australia prepares for another evening
darkness and the dreaming of jaywalkers and nightstalkers
yes, it cradles us too
like the Earth Mother did the warriors of old
but we're too scared to look behind us or in the rear-view mirror
to catch a wink from Voodoojack

and his perpetual black grin

deo optimo maximo

for Matt Foley

lurching onto the highway
sporting a rushed pair of \$5.95 truck-stop sunglasses
facing off with this intermittent black line,
its cusps hidden in gullies forging south
as it does northward

curvaceous segments of road
like black smiles and frowns
either gazing in the direction of the Pacific or the hinterlands,
dark horses upon the clearing of the dreamtime tabernacles

this stretch from Brisbane to the Gold Coast
since the 70s, its character has been raped too
in what was briefly Joli's country
yes!
multi-lane monument to the Gods of old and new,
the bandits touched by the spiritual fingers of radar guns
and speed cameras,
the all-knowing, all-seeing
deo optimo maximo; on the tongues of the rogues
— to God, the best and greatest

yet, by God's hand
what happened to the beasts that inhabited the African Lion

Safari?

and did the UFO above the roadhouse just fly away?
or can we even recognise the cemetery
where the solitary Anzac stands
that the surfers would salute
to secure a pact with Huey and his crystal palace on the early
morning tide?

protected from the glare by \$5.95 truck-stop sunglasses
no one respects the speed limits
and no one owns up to the roadside crosses

'cause I know
there is no God —

there is only the living
and trailers of the dead

jaded olympic moments

for Jennifer Cullen

they made their way through the sliding-door
and stole the lot
 video, mini-disc equipment, fly-fishing reels, my
 son's piggy bank
and my literary award
 all on the eve of the Games
capping off a *sterling* period of post-funeral melancholy
after my young cousin's passing
then, sitting on Jen's couch
as the ochre-kissed women came out
and did their thing in the center of the stadium
we had tears in our eyes
 thinking, *that's our mob!*
but no,
only a romantic would think that
it's still very much an US and THEM kind of deal in this
 modern dreaming,
we're city people without a language
 and some of us have even less
but then the coppers rang
 said they'd caught them
 three smack-head white boys
 18, 19, 20
the gear was gone without a trace
 the video, the piggy bank, the literary award
and it made sense
 'cause if blackfellas had broken into the house
they would've taken Dad's 10ft Landrights flag
'cause it was worth just as much
 as Cathy Freeman's gold

smoke signals

I remember construction cranes like herds of frozen praying-mantis, high on the steamy Bjelke-Petersen plateau above a brown snake-coiled river. It was from this view, at the age of 4, that I learnt to read the columns of Brisbane city. And from this view, I came to recognise the segregation of *Smoke*. *Black smoke* darkened the blue-collar suburbs, covering the workers in burnt-rubber cologne. Black smoke was saved for industrial accidents, or when a lower-income family had their fibro-lined house smothered in winter flames. But *white smoke*, white smoke plumed from chez-nouveau, white-collar fireplaces. White smoke belonged to European engines with a smooth choke. White smoke stayed behind the construction cranes where I imagined a life that would *never* depreciate. A place where children weren't scared of the dark. Beyond the white smoke was where I thought I would discover the *Lucky Country*

highrises dictate

*a crow punctuates the sky
clouds await error*

cribb island

For a while, Dad worked in a ghost town. He'd take us there on weekends after the government moved an entire community. Empty building after empty building, like some big science-fiction filmset. Wandering through deserted houses we were the first Aboriginal people to analyse the remains of the first Europeans to be cleared from this soil. Streets strewn with all sorts of treasures; Armageddon with its apocalyptic merchandising. Earthmoving equipment droned in the distance, always closing in. And the birds: dark-wings scuttled from silent twisters of smouldering debris and detritus. Doorways whistling breezes, a cadence of toothless old skeletons that filtered the smoke encrypted whispers of this mass grave. I think of those whispers every time my plane lands on the unmarked tombstones of one of Brisbane's least-known burial grounds.

on deserted streets

forgotten newspapers dance,

dust keeps its appeal