Four Pastoral Poems

Angela Gardner

End of Day Glass

The Bridegroom sits bored and resplendent in a paddock sticky with wildflowers and rests beneath the trumpeting of plastic elephants.

Questions of scale arise (whether the insect, as she mistakenly exits the flower he holds, is aware of him or merely the lip she stumbles from?)

Does she notice a furred toy in knitted blue dress that subsides as he, with more energy now, raises a golden ball above his head?

In the brightest parts of its orbit, lamp-worked, molten, this brimming creates a bow-wave that bees will race beside.

*Herein the world of matter fully described
and, by the senses, the farthest surface of that glass.*

Come, if it falls too obliquely or adheres to the body
this scene shall not persuade you. Already
we are what we shall become in this clear river.
Landscape with Birdsong

Try to imagine yourself there:
back from danger, exhilarated,
the handsome family he returns to, kissing
each in turn.

There is this side of the river and the other,
our different selves
– the one who looks at the mountain,
the one who rests in the valley,
each an unreliable world
unimaginable to the other.

In the moments that we believe
before theatre begins
objects speak to us.
So needy, we hardly recognise our own
in the birdsong.

Nothing can prepare us,
not the discomfort of the sky we rise to meet
nor the leavened thrust of wings
into the cloudworld:
the heaven of each remains unfinished.

In the gaze of longing, or glaze of skin,
some truth is hammering in the cavity of the body.
There are dues to be paid,
doors in the earth, ores for the taking
—stripped away, the bride laid bare,
threaded, spent.

I had planned for welcome.

Do you believe me?
Can you forgive me?
Urgencies

The rain at these moments
sounds a bell over us
suspended in the mistaken gravity of joy.
A first hopeful urgency
as it crosses the ferocious coast of our bodies.
Birds immediately leave their own music and ritual,
fly into the wind as if they will always
coexist with angels.
The rain, the bell, the birds, ourselves,
all confounded in a slow act that recedes
as surely as the male heroic:
the high battles of small account that madden and fall
in tender parallels—less 'ours' than a gap
that opens to sadness and loss
to a fine finesse of doubt.
Brightness

a soft gleam (briefly)
just below the ridgeline

in trees, wind picks up
manifests a differential movement

cause and effect kicking
in every direction
trammelled and indifferent

fearful laughter
(but only for a moment)

into this, rain splinters along
lost tracks that prise open silence
a thousand mutable notes
left hanging

different heights or depths
of transparency
for insects to traverse
in small increments of green

Our maps for this are strange
and empty
resistant to the aggregate of history

space only a space if filled
scale and conventions of perspective
held defiant
by distance and detail

Even so, sky
rests weightless
against a painted overhang of cloud
rearranging slabs of argument into
essay

Air is as nothing
—it is birdsong starts sunlight
exhalation of new growth, red crown
on blue eucalypt

each silence only a silence
reprieve of
sweet lemons or bitter honey

It is song that occupies the garden
settles against dark shadow

while constantly we forget

how burns the grevillea
within its bright cargo of honey-eaters.

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