

## HOUSE OF RATS



*S.K. Kelen*

They're up there all right,  
playing scrabble in the roof, listening to  
scratchy old Fats Waller records.  
They started out as desperadoes  
escaped from a laboratory,  
arrived via a garbage truck  
up overhanging tree branches,  
elbowed their way in & soon  
the colony was an empire of rats  
who eat the insulation batts  
chew wires and chew through the ceiling  
to ransack the kitchen,  
take bites out of everything  
& carry off furniture. I can hear them  
scurrying with bits & pieces, hammering & sawing:  
they're building houses—a model rat town—with  
imitation garages to park stolen toy cars in.  
After munching down another box of double strength poison  
the rats are back at work with a vengeance, thump  
around the rafters insulating the house with rat shit.  
Or hard at love writhing, squealing  
like sick starlings or kicked puppies. The weaker explode  
and TV screens fill with rats' blood but there's  
more where they came from. Teeming over  
mountains, down valleys, jamming highways, falling  
off bridges to scurry ashore up storm water drains.  
Exterminators arrive dressed as astronauts and poison  
the house for ten thousand years. It's time to move out.  
But the rats have laid eggs in your pockets, stow  
away, follow you from house to house.  
The curse enters its exponential phase.  
Tentacles unwind from the ceiling, dirty great moths  
and leopard slugs take over your happy home.  
Soon you are a trellis. That's just what the rats say.  
I'm down here listening to radio messages,  
oiling automatic weapons, building rockets.  
Living in a rat's belly.

## THREE POEMS



*J.K. Murphy*

### SIAMESE TWINS

Separation. Parting the twin red seas,  
Easing away the reefs that burdened you  
To your sister. You recall mutually-tugging eyes,  
Warm breathing close in, thoughts knocking.  
Then those angling scalpels of geometry  
Skated over two sides and a surgeon breathed on you  
And you were made whole by patient degrees.  
Moving now in your own circle, interlocking

Glances with her time to time across  
The ward, drawn by a half-wick light.  
Searching, you travel separate tides,  
Dropping baggage overboard, buying a loss  
At a cost, Mother no longer seeing double  
But paying so for swings and rides.

### THE TRIBES

They are the travelling and the caring tribes  
Drawn to the M.C.G. where a jammed flame  
Of red scarves flung, navy shawls like bobbing logs  
Bring creed together, eyes chasing the hard game—

The hunted hide, the baulking Sherrin.  
It is driven through the green centre  
And the tribes rise like sprung sap in warm rain,  
Their choiring not perfect, somehow grander.

A hundred thousand litres are pumped up  
And though unseen are mooted in a cup.

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*note:* M.C.G. = Melbourne Cricket Ground

Give me one flag. I'll go happy to the grave.  
He munches pie at the swaying oval  
Table, catches sun-glint on the raised grail;  
And, wind-nailed, a flag beating around a pole.

#### THE WOMBAT DANCE

Two skaters  
Creating overt art—  
Figures of eight—  
Are foreshadowed by these wombats,  
Courting,  
Caught in infra-red light,  
Chasing circles  
And cutting curves of eight  
Covertly  
As if on tentative ice.