

THREE POEMS



Peter Porter

REMEMBERING BERNBOROUGH

He was large, as big as Phar Lap, but I can't
recall his colour or whether he was gelded
or anything much beyond our Queensland pride
that we had bred a horse to make them wonder
in the Southern States. He went south, we all did—
it was Post War, the dullest decade in Australia's
history, relieved in Brisbane by the violence
of strike repression and the Vice Squad's raiding
coffee bars and bookshops. He'll never make the Pantheon
or stand in sport-lit glory at the side of his
great predecessor. But his name breaks rays
and when I read it recently I saw myself,
hardened with the gloom of twenty years, the youngest
veteran of despair, opening a lattice-gate,
book in hand, and calling to my father as I left,
"How do you think Bernborough will go today?"

SECONDARY WORLDS

He's smuggled home this book.
It's only conscience which polices him,
anyone's entitled to pornography,
and he's half a mind to write a vindication
of Arcadian sex. Still it might be hard
to dignify the stuff inside the cover:
two girls grimacing breast to breast
with words of the silliest suggestiveness imposed.
What he didn't quite expect
was how the eye becomes selective,
scarcely moral but perhaps aesthetic,
almost he'd like to joke "anthropologetic".

The picture editor has led his gaze
right up to the genitals, careful to
keep them centre-feature even when
supporting fetishes abound. But now the eager
yet discriminating eye is straying from its prey:
it's found a foot, an agile toe, a smudge
of breast, oddity of hair curl.
He's not deceived, of course—he knows
this secondary charm depends upon
an unequivocal and brutal primacy
or at the best some sating quiddity—
but still he finds the images insist
on rearranging wantonness, requalifying
passion, almost as if like Auden's
torturer's horse there was an innocence
available to every scene, a peaceable kingdom
ransomed by the energy of getting.

EX LIBRIS SENATOR POCOCURANTE

Carchemish, a tedious performance
our forefathers valued as the first account
of the creation of the world, it seems
no more than a boring battle between
the thicks and thins, with comic referees
called gods obsessed with their own dignity.

The Troiliad, just as silly and twice as long,
with lists of heroes, ships and towns
and magic implements and animals,
even less impartial deities
their love-life platitudinous
and their epithets attached like luggage labels.

The Hunnish Wars, a propaganda feast
prepared by an ambitious consul
for home advantage, as full of lies
as tedium. The style is gelid,
the facts factitious—it deserves its fate
to end up teaching grammar to dull boys.

Summa Cattolica, a sort of Natural History
of Credulity. Should you want to know
the stories of the saints you still might balk
at being shown their laundry lists and tax returns:
this huge concordance mixes pedantry
with gloating martyrdom and police reports.

The Satanic Comedy, a strange attempt
to draw a picture of the world based on
the machinations of a city council
together with a paedophile's infatuation
with a merchant's teenage daughter.
In three books: Heaven, Hell and Nowhere.

The Interlude—in this almost unending
meditation on the life and times of one
banal existence, its author dares presume
we are as obsessed with him as he is with himself.
Its marginal attractions are no better—
country hovels, childhood and wet walks.

Donovan's Demise, the lexicon of Modernism,
its every sentence stitched into the text
like Cash's name-tapes, this epilion
of solipsism demands that we devote
a lifetime to its study. Properly examined,
it is seen as the scribblings of a ouija-board.

A Note to Readers. The strongest stomachs
truly are the ones which will refuse
all fashionable food or canting
remedy. A gentleman will keep
such works upon his shelves to frighten off
the ghosts of orthodoxy and presumption.

THREE POEMS



Peter Rose

EASTER ISLAND

Beached there like evening going down,
blind to torsos on roller blades,
she will never exhaust the nugget
of novel straining with incest.
It shields her like cepous Ray Bans
or a lover's thigh that is pillowing stone.
Nidified in cloud, the sun spurns interviews.
Lotus-limbed in a nimbus of flies,
seven yogis meditate on the sand.
Appalled by such posture, pedestrians
speculate like Easter Island scholars.
Only dogs ignore a deepening abstract,
On slack T-shirts a bleached Einstein
pokes his tongue at all our sunsets.

THE APHORIST'S KISS

Hopeless and erotic at the same time,
climbing those sepulchral stairs,
unriddling locks in the wrong order,
tongue-tied, fantastical.
If only life would glance our way,
like the christian trade in Velázquez,
virtue buckled to a Roman girth,
ample and flagellate.
If only it would loom there
some flights, to help us
share the view, the wine,
the last of the flagrant vestiges.
Something, anyway.
Not much needs be said—

skulled compliment or aphorist's kiss,
a nod towards the treed town hall.
You're near the other one
and you don't face west
but dial my number anyway,
play the diva I too rehearse
over and over till it numbs.
Fog, fug, realities of stench
burden your skewed prospect,
less glamorous after a week of rifts.
If I strained my neck
I could almost reach you.

ROMAN BLINDS

It's as if we waited all morning
for this yelp of the notorious,
fissures of day with its
expensive, arcane instructions.
But was it worth it in the first place?
It's just another aleatory Saturday,
catchy, fervid, pompously lit,
everyone drifting off in summer poses,
wondering when to winch up the slack,
the blinds, the superannuation.
Traumas of traffic sustain
through gulpings of morning.
After the several cups of coffee,
the wiggings, the pastry moments,
let's curl up in a world
sane and commodious
as thinking film criticism.