

John Ryan: Bio

John's chapbook titled *Katoomba Incantation* will appear in the middle of 2011, although he now has some advanced copies to distribute. He is presently working on a postgraduate degree on the flora of Western Australia and anthologising Western Australian poets who write about plants.

'I sometimes write in defence of walking, this commonplace action generally considered perfunctory in Western societies today. As a noun, the word pedestrian refers to one who walks and, as a descriptor, it describes an activity as prosaic or dull. But walking creates a sense of continuity with where we are and summons our sense of place. We also get to know why we are through our feet and bodies. For many years, I worked half a year and walked half a year. I got to know a lot about myself through solitude and moments shared with other ambulators, often in quite beautiful settings. Walking puts us in touch with places, literally, and it can resolve feelings of detachment from the world, or so I like to believe. It can be a practice of becoming, linking our conscious will to all that is around us, animal and vegetable and cultural. It can be full of pain and satisfaction, peace and irritation. The American writer Henry David Thoreau said: "There is in fact a sort of harmony discoverable between the capabilities of the landscape within a circle of ten miles' radius, or the limits of an afternoon walk, and the threescore years and ten of human life." "The Walking Poems" reflect on the pleasures and pangs of walking, through swamps, to a zamia palm and with a Rottweiler through the flowering Western Australian bush in winter.'

THE WALKING POEMS

Walking the Waterwheel

buried water arcs the ambit
of the wheel that birls
shadows of the paperbarks;
I have walked this wheel
before through frozen berry bogs
squoosh swash squash

not the mandala of a monk
but a whirling waterwheel;
I round its outer limits
tracing hard lines to the axle,
in the centre and circumference
squelch splosh slosh

thirsty tho' have taken drink
hungry tho' have taken food
sun singing mug and nape
bread soaked in jagertee
brewing whorls of spirulina
splash plash squish

I walk the water wheel
ambling its gambit
a circle made of lines
triangles making spheres

straightforward as the crow
splish spleesh scrash

Sunday Zamia Swagger

by the fire, Sunday morning I imagine *by-yu*
so meander out to the plicae between rolling land
higher to the scarp where the red gums thicken;

a Qantas jet groans, the sun strikes sporadically,
under the path of flight through autumn clouds—
from its lonely nook, a dusky roo breaks into
fricatives;

cross-hatches of wash-outs and dirt tracks
to the bitumen wending west to Swan View—
a scenic vista, lugubrious cars slanted at the edge
a woman with a crew-cut extinguishes a butt
a faceless man slinks into the peace of nothingness

others pass slowly | the way to better things:

an imperturbable hydra, squat black trunk
leaflets stiff as blinds, crisp as piano keys played
forté in one long swipe through seven octaves

tawny cones leaking aloe, striking the nostrils
larghissimo, tessellations of earth acridities
eerily dying back into a rotunda of arachnid legs

Grey observed “violent fits of vomiting”
Vlamingh, “no distinction between death and us”
savouring its bready fruits, unsoaked like hazels
cattle staggered at the poison of the New World,

encased in the sweet flesh of a nut.

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On the Desirability of Wildflowers Whilst Dogwalking

my Rottweiler named Axle
suspines and strains at his lead
raring steadily like a sled dog
neck barrelled and rippling,

musculature, a sleek black
as the hide of a gorilla, loping
along fickle Lesmurdie sidewalks,

overarched by wattle spoondrift
and the tentative reds of eucalypts
the sprawling coven of the winter hills
fuchsia grevillea and prickly moses—

his injections are succinic

episodes of micturus interruptus
into each cosmetic cranny of lawn,

each errant tuft of trans-hemispheric
grass issued an amber ordinance
a canine-decreed cease and desist
he knows the punctilio of the town—

in the enclaves of bush, a Telstra tower;
underneath the aureole of flowering acacia,
a radiance tempered by solstice mists,

a daily rumpus with a fenced-in dog
perturbs his mild-mannered countenance
sends him into twists of baritone
barking , shaking bowel-deep excitement,

quietened by the red-tailed cockatoo
wrestling jarrah nuts, splitting stone-hard
hulls with beaks like iron instruments—

my companion sees none of this (or alas)
has seen it all along, feigns being impressed
seems mesmerised by sand specks
studding a tennis ball that I pitch in perfect,

slow camber over the sated scrubland
over low-dwelling insect sucking rosettes
above purple splendour herbal ringlets—

he goes tearing down the track after it
snaps the radioactive green orb into his jaws
in mid-stride, sniffs for dog sign language,
leaves a vile dropping that consumes the air—

nose safe in wattle churnings of sweetness
it occurs to me, there are too few adjectives
for the tragedies of smell, well, none that egress

Yeah, Axle goads me 'round the sandy track.

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