

For your reading pleasure

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The Fourth and final Highly Commended Certificate in the 2011 Patron's Prize for Poetry went to John Ryan for 'quenda'

quenda

the racket is a feudal lord—
moon's come out, but he's on the roof
full of beans, tack hammering
as my own neighbour feeds the maw
of a diabolic stump grinder,
turns a tidy heap of hedge
into russet dust submission

*ah, the distress of shrill sounds—
you phone me, we lament
the absurdities that assail the gentle senses*

when the last big bushfire blitzed
Forrestdale, they cursed this house,
the warden would have it scorch
in the embers of its pine tree crib;
spongy mulch of seasons' needles
the tinder that might catch light,
catching now the plunks of grapefruits

*incarnadine with the winter
rain brimming with the lake after
daisy chain of long dry days*

too mandarins slouch with verjuice
and festoon limits of each yard
soon to be lit by the halogen glare
of tellies like hearths flaring. from within
the darkness seems devouring until
my apertures adjust from nonplussed
flitting to ease of seeing while being

*unseen i.e. not in those brackets of time
instead to shake my inside out, meet myself here:
you never walk alone at dusk for fear*

past the plangent bleating sheep

where gate divides bitumen and bush
at camber of lake's southern hip
familiar shroud of western Hills and
savoury perfume of the slough
a smell of mince meat in the oven;
I respire sheafs of paperbark air

*corpuscles of bog, decoupage of fences
foot bones creaking with the contours;
in the lepton moon the track is born*

a quenda then across the sand,
moving swiftly meteoric
probing goblets of night wine
Mnemosyne of black water,
dilating the pupils of the swamp.
when you phone we lament
our endless looking for a quiet home

*bathwater shlurps down the drain
fruit sags and drops as I discern
these alliances of the night: to speak, beget, return*

Brief Biography

John Ryan is a doctoral candidate at Edith Cowan University where he has been working on a thesis called *Plants, People and Place: Cultural Botany and the Southwest Australian Flora*. His poetry has been published in the journals *Bukker Tillibul*, *dotdotdash*, *Yellow Field*, *Landscapes* and *ekleksographia*. In 2012, he will be included in the collection *Fremantle Poets 3: Performance Poets*. He lives near Forrestdale Lake.

About the Poem 'Quenda'

The title of the poem 'Quenda' alludes to the Southern Brown Bandicoot, a small marsupial that I have seen in the swamplands around Forrestdale Lake in southern Perth. The poem recalls fragments from a walk around the lake and my first sudden sighting of the swift creature at twilight. Domestic life—and the experience of being at home in the bath and returning home from a long walk—are central here, although, of equal importance, is the disruption of home life by noise. Since 2008, I have been house-sitting; in 2010, I began house-sitting with my partner. The phone conversations with her point to the exasperation of being suburban nomads. The quenda also dwells marginally, as its nocturnal habit of living. But the rapid development of the southern suburbs has shrunken its habitat—and that of most other native animals—forcing the contraction of its range and lending a different sense to the idea of existing at the edge.

Judge's Comment:

A deliberate and tightly structured poem, alternating stanzas of septet with unrhymed tercets. Opening with the trope "the racket is a feudal lord" We find conceit, classicism, a contrast of banal and sophisticated vocabulary and joy in raucous exploration through language. Heightening throughout, a friction between the synthetic relationship of contrived, built, abstract and natural amplified by its capture in poetic form.

Kind Regards

Peter Cowan Writers Centre

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