

John Tranter

Crying in Early Infancy –100 Sonnets

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To Ron and Rivka Witenberg

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1. The Tidal Wave

Now the party is over the beach dissolves
in a morbid and equivocal Brazilian atmosphere
I have especially constructed in the hope
that the book will write itself, but Bill screams
at my efforts. Write another party, he flashes...
total aviator glasses automatic magazine!
Once I put down an astronaut he moves downrange.
Once I loaded the magazine, I ran out of paper.

Once I was happy, at the middle of the party.
The tidal wave hangs about behind the harbour wall.
It has travelled a long way from Okinawa.
Guns thump beyond the jungle's periphery
in a rigmarole of purpose. There is no
weather where the beach repeats itself.

2. Non-Euclidean Geometry

If you think of Bali, that strange
colour stains the horizon. Recognise it,
it belongs to you, even though
it will always be too far away
to be of any use. Think of calculus
and how it has benefited mankind.
You are pleased as well as benefited,
though you're too thick-headed to recognise it.

Be pleased, quickly, and go to Denpasar.
Denpasar is at the heart of Bali
as tiny increments are at the heart of calculus,
though Riemann, Boole and Lobachevsky
long ago ridiculed the role of algebra
in the creation of profitable works of art.

3. Your Lucky Double

It is heavy with the breath of bad images
it is more than you deserve it is easy
like a news lesson in Portuguese it has
a taste for racing alcohol and other
delicacies how lucky you are how lucky
or maybe it reads how disreputable and diseased
it is easy to read like a polka dot it is
madly in love like a silly kid good night

it cries and wastes away utterly
so trendy so paranoid and so infected
you are already sketching its obituary!
so remorseful so immense so damn evasive
while deep in the Mango Trench a team of anarchists
and so on how I love you how political

4. Jet Set

She turns off the radio and listens to the news,
she talks about the 'cultivated appetite' and how
culture is a necessary adjunct to a life
blighted by a greedy proletariat. I guess
her thirst for beauty is a limp disease.
I suppose religion breeds an art that aims
at frigid excellence or graven images,
depending on the climate of opinion that

we can now see from our beautiful balloon.
'Cheat, magician, thief, have explanation
for deceit!' The lady lights her pipe, forgetting
hydrogen, and the soft climate of
South America envelops us in woolly cloud.
Tiny poems flutter from her lips.

5. Ecstasy

They burn the radio and listen to the blues. They
saunter through the cultivated gardens like giraffes
and whisper to each other, they are clever,
they build and revel in a culture shock,
they have an easy beauty and a multiple
limp. I suppose they stock religion in a
Frigidaire, and their prayers for the well-being
of the inhabitants of South America are touching.

We should leave them soon, for their dangerous magic
is a cheat, and none can explain its delicate
attraction: they reach a height of ecstasy by breathing
hydrogen and soft playmates endure them. Their minds
are woolly, loud; their speech is full of gaffes. Yet
they are almost lovely because of their beliefs.

6. Model Behaviour

You love her: she is lovely in her briefs, though
when she plays the blues she does it drivelling
of 'life'. She is touchable in grief, to see her
attempting to turn on the radio is pitiful
and will move you to an elevated sympathy.
She cultivates a walk like an elegant giraffe.
That's about all she cares for, yet her appetite
is not confined. To sex she is polite,

and her strategies are a model of love, for
she imitates the ambush of a thousand softnesses
and will lick your hand like a little puppy.
Beware her cheating, for she gravitates toward
an art that aims at gravid images of profit,
and will bring you down like a limp balloon.

7. F.O.

The kissy blue chloroform is brief,
an antidote for every failing gesture,
thankfully, and swiftly brings you down.
Then you turn up the radio's subterfuge
and hear the bright flicker as the lady's
wishes grow into something huge and indefinable.
Your most desirable woman leaves for North America,
you find her photo in the *San Francisco News*

lighting a pipe, and guess what's in it,
and it isn't grass. The British Foreign Office
has a file on her attractions in a lilac cover,
and they are always fighting over the exact shade
of meaning. As a playmate she is quite delirious,
high as a kite and nimbus as a cloud. Kiss!

8. Chloroform

Move away, leave the cheating magicians
to imitate culture poorly and to be polite
like Humphrey Bogart in *The Treasure
of the Sierra Madre*, for when they are grave
the blues turn to muzak and the whole party
throws up all over your white sports coat.
Soon enough you find their photographs
listed in a folder code-named 'Caroline'

and no matter how they use their useful influence
there's no explanation. (She will give you
the exact shade of meaning of a sticky
kiss enveloped in a nubile judgment.)
Thank the chloroform: it brought you up, after all,
and all of Europe is now your playground.

9. The Lilies of the Field

He abandoned the delusions that culture
strikes you with, avoiding sex polemics, though
the slick and socially mobile ladies are
nubile with subterfuge. They, sweet ones,
have a new altitude, and lick their lips.
When the branch broke he bit the dust.
They have a talent for the game at hand,
yet a deeper lack of age and caution

seems to beg a remedy like 'failure'.
He dropped into the fashionable bar
in mid-flight with a fierce whisper: 'God,
the wife and kids!' and the flock of ladies
are the more beautifully arrayed for his having
said it like judgment, condemnation, punishment.

10. Kandehear–Kabul, 1967

How could she love her? And her, she! Huh?
Like a spent bomb, our estimates
hung low on the horizon. Would you
wear the mystery like a wound
at midnight in the desert with
a mad Italian doctor and his fairy
Afghan friend, like illness in Istanbul,
or was that a rumour? What took the place

of the illness like a rumour?
I have never read a book. We sailed
across the gulf of storms, we held hands
and I believe our grappling was a happy
thing. Then we entered the culture argument,
but that's another story.

11. Fighting the Secret Service

Fighting the Secret Service takes place
exactly as predicted: from room to room
it is an old flame following the bad news
once a week to town for gin and bitters.
That dream turns up again and again,
its purpose obscure and yet malevolent.
The Foreign Office became much older
and slightly more Chinese, then quickly turned

and ate at her countenance. A moth could do that.
She warned them about the Chinese, that Malay
smile, it's no good, this niggling counterpoint,
this heavy threat of rain, summer's ebb
could do that storm cloud easily. Caroline
reverts to bitchiness, and so she should.

12. The Famous Chinese Poet

The famous Chinese poet finds a home at last
on the Northern Border. The troops, those
still loyal to the Emperor, those few
not frozen or shot, weave the pattern of battle
they have devised with tired economy.
Years ago they rode out into the Northern Border
to find a desert, bleached bones and arrows.
Somewhere someone waits for them, but not for long.

And already the famous Chinese poet
has sent back to Tientsin for green wine
and writing paper, though he presents a bland front.
The soldiers loathe his ideology, but his mind
fixes on a young disciple, and the image of the moon
'glowing like a skull in the waters of the Yellow River.'

13. At the Laundromat

FAMOUS POET JETS HOME TO USA!
How lucky to live in America, where
supermarkets stock up heavily on writers!
Thinking of the famous poets floating home
to that luxurious and splendid place
inhabited by living legends like an old movie
you blush with a sudden flush of Romanticism
and your false teeth chatter and shake loose!

How it spoils the magic! In America no writers
have false teeth, they are too beautiful!
Imagine meeting Duncan in your laundromat –
in America it happens all the time – you say
Hi, Robert! – and your teeth fall out!
And you can't write a poem about that!

14. (beginning with a line by David Malouf)

Was that garlic, or old age?
We are losing height quickly
as a doctor might give up drugs
and, finding his wife a golf fanatic,
blow his savings on a mind retreat
or a yacht lost smoothly in the Bahamas.
It is not easy to turn from paediatrics,
the taste of ephedrine is too quick

and you soon see how the monetary clinic
waits at the crossing with a summons
reading 'Come here! We like your breath!'
and for a paediatrician it's too much
to resist – yet how can we sympathise?
We, too, have avoided childhood.

15. Korsakoff's Syndrome

The doctor strolls into the path of her
speeding car and is frozen there I
get out of her bed and smile beautifully
have a drink the doctor says here
is the Grand Canal, there
Korsakoff's Syndrome is a joke I get up
and crawl under the automotive mess
and eat thinking about and so on

a joke not a breakfast cereal I said
last week the syndrome became the major
premise of the doctor who dreamed 'she is
caught up in her emotions' wow! next week
is a digital circuit just as years ago
the IC chip replaced the germanium diode

16. Sex Chemistry

Sex chemistry is elegant and subversive, like
how it comes crawling out of a hole where
the idea of 'Christine' swallows itself
and suddenly begins to bother everyone –
she's heavy, hot off the Paris plane
with her handbag full of perfumed machinery,
with her waterfall of blonde hair blowing
with her embrace for Tony and Louise

especially Louise with whom she has been
intensely in love for centuries
and just like a snap election
the two of them – silly buggers,
they should know better – Chrissy, her machine,
Louise and the hostess kiss and fall in love.

17. Surfers Paradise

'Well? What did you do with it?
When you had finished licking her
where did you put it? Maybe I could
find you there, "Reasonable", or had you
stopped being married? Unh?'
With these nasty tics of anger
the magistrate rushed on the couple
who were expecting Surfers Paradise

to resemble some kind of incomprehensible
modern affectation. 'Well? How did it feel?
When Louie smirked "Was that a literature
or just a grease job?" Christ, you phoney!
And so, silly as a shrunken judge, this
glimpse of happiness stuck in his head.

18. Pickup Truck

Giving up women is worse than animal laxatives,
it leaves you with a spiritual pain in the head
and conforms its shape to a manual of instruction,
a list of spare parts dealerships in New Mexico,
a mournful gift, and how to fall in love with men.
We got up early to look at the river, or the many rivers
reflected in the multiple prism of the strange air.
Men moved like spoons across the drippy landscape.

Golly, said Helena, there goes my sanity! Indeed,
in full view of the dealers assembled on the bank
she stripped off and jumped into the truck.
It was wet when we got back. I think
if we tape the last few lines into the manual
we've got something useful at the end of the river.

19. The Diamond Sutra

The elements of form go like this –
you bang your head with a brick. Simple?
I am thinking of buying a new Volvo today,
my reasons aren't very clear to me,
and clarity is essential to the form of the essence
where the essence has been transmuted from Kathmandu
sealed up in the baggage hold
of a book of Gnostic meditations

locked in the truck of the Volvo
which will not be bought by me
after all, summer is moving in
and Hyacinth has gone off to find a job
i.e. a job like a truckie or a pill
the truckie eats with obvious relish.

20. Double Images

This book's a catalogue of dreams
just like my life in which
every day has a beginning,
a middle, and an end
and then you wake up screaming
damaged by 'reality'
you see how easy it is
and how depressing

'Waking up' is just like
going to sleep in reverse,
if you need a simile
dreams are similes of life
whose dreams are double images
reflecting everything

21. The Function of Dreams

At first you only dream of things you know
a baby in a blue pram drowning in the
pale sunlight, and a bowl of snow
with cream on top, boy
that's the original ice cream
and you were only three!
You had another dream: falling from a car
and you were only four

Some style! Falling on your head!
How did you survive a thing like that?
That's an 'accident'. Gruesome. Stay away
from that kind of dream, it has a habit
of growing on you like an attractive tragedy
and turning into memory.

22. Triage

Yeats rises in the breathless air
as simple as a spelling error
and by the time I'm dry I'm furious.
I travel in a sticky raincoat
and when I buy the gallery I fume,
amazed at 'what paint can really do'.
I'm a monster... why, your breasts
appear reversible –

If you drink that soda hot you'll foam!
And we see stomach pumping as a parable
like easy for you, difficult
for me. Robert's won the Froth Gift,
but is he happy? *Tac tac*
goes the pump. He's gushing.

23. The Pleasures

1. It's easy to be awfully sick, though
difficult to do it well.
2. Plane trips are like eating halva: you get high,
you come down, and suddenly you're terribly broke.
3. Sexual intercourse distends the capillaries
and brings a flush to the back of your knees.
4. I'm thirsty, I guess. Hi. Uh?
Get a drink.
5. It's hard not to hurt the one you love,
though it's easier to kill a vegetable.
6. I love you. I love absolutes. I'm alive,
according to the latest theory.
7. My hand is cold on your neck.
Do you mind? (Move your neck.)

24. Jack's Tracks

We were headed toward Denver
on the Dharma holiday: the pool hall bums
had smashed the green lampshades and lit out
for the hill country. The Silver Lode glittered
in the desert like a rattly shack. We were
tracking Route Sixty-Six in a Buick Eight
under the Canadian sun which had blacked out,
as we all had, that summer... into Paradise country,

Cassady crushed under the Real Train
and the Indian Powder filling the sight like glue.
We tried the Abandoned Prose Line and found the vein
dry. Wet. Slippery. Like you, Baby Blue.
The old writers lost their cool, blew a fuse,
began to cry. We liked that. How about you?

25. (after A. de St. Exupery's Vol de Nuit)

Drifting out of Dakar in a feeble
fit, we noticed floating flock
block the intake. The pilot wiped the wet
propeller; acrobat becoming semaphore.
He left the letters, took the ticker-tape. We saw
the flak smack the snowflakes out of the blue.
We pressed on. Wouldn't you? MacArthur once allowed
as how he'd punch shit out of the Red Positions

and make another Nagasaki of the Yalu. If a
general's gesture could blot a parallel in that
snappy fashion, whom else? Which soldier
seized the cylinders? High compression, low fuel:
we made it to the Banda Sea and the pink
plopdown in a froth of news.

26. Landscape With Automobile

The automobile is not suited to the rough
track across the dunes, and soon quits.
I ate fiercely at breakfast right there,
on the sand. The flanks of the automobile
shimmer with metallic heat and echo
when you bump them with your head.
I leaned against them while the stormy fish
gathered below the cliffs in a family

of light, as it was early for the season
to expand in bruised cloud and mottled rain
against the rock wall. I leaned against the rock
wall on my descent, and my thoughts were obscure
in that they shall not be told. I was not
suited to the dunes nor to the family.

27. Miss Lonelyhearts

It's quite neat to get away to the trees.
You lose something, but then you gain.
Powerful medicine pumps into the brain.
He avoided the gathered families on the beach
and, skirting a clump of pines, began
his swift descent. Soon he was a speck
on the horizon, and just as quickly he returned,
burnt and gritty, having learnt nothing.

Lately I've been reading books on Java,
and that's another lie which echoes back to me
across the page. 'Beloved, move into the city,
there's lights there for the little people.'
Promptly at dawn I roam about the study, musing,
and laugh at the book of the mythical kingdom.

28. Barnstorm

The cave exists only to be found, and the dark
waits as it has always waited. Chequered aircraft
swing around the pylons in the storm,
my girl leading. She's a good kid. Her eyes
reflect my best pair of empty grey gloves
as a pewter mirror, like the cold
gleaming on the wing. Moisture condenses
in the cave, awaiting tourists or adventurers.

Impetuous planes! The race is over,
three dead, and deep in rainy Cincinnati
the damp newsprint and the metal meet.
My girl passed through the grey parade
with honour, and her Dad clinks her medals
for luck. The Japs move in on the South Pacific.

29. Ten Statesmen

We live in the age of the great nerve statesmen,
and each one has the key to a golden bomb!
Night after night we suffer this
unwillingly, it is like a moving penumbra.
And when you close your eyes and press
the lids with a brick, bright spots appear.
You get up and shake your head, and think
of the statesmen, how their spots appear.

Differently, would be the case,
for they travel frequently and very far.
Jet lag slogs those bastards horribly,
though they don't deserve it.
They're a pack of bathing beauties
lined up, waiting to vomit! They're off!

30. Starlight

Just under the water sheet you can see
dim grass photographs, two prints
coloured to the temperature of glass
that glint from one sky refraction to another.
Between the surfaces a reluctant prediction
for an invisible childhood, damaged by the future.
Under the glass and the broken starlight
the water stained with darkness

soaks into the earth. Somewhere below
a portrait is moved slightly
by a wish or a failure, to form
omens that point into the past
and indicate 'That promise, how
a tiny growth drains all your effort.'

31. (after American Graffiti)

Being brave is not enough, this easy
generosity in the loosening grip, in the
strange light which is given off by bottles
when they are tossed from a bobbing boat
and sink, yet do not sink in that
marsh water we have tasted uneasily
and which illuminates our adolescence so that
hot machines are broken and a promise

is a memory as touching as a bad
but well-intentioned movie, though these
artefacts of childhood drifting into age
will never leave us altogether, for our love
even of ourselves feeds on them and on the
endless sorrow of their pressing toward death.

32. The Drunk Thug

The drunk thug falls out of the moving bus,
and when he hits the street he's lucky.
So we find a case of ethics in the papers,
and the account executives will not be happy.
But isn't it foolish to expect everything
to get better as it changes, like a movie?
Soon the city will develop a strange economics
and honourable things will happen.

Is this how you would like the book to move,
eagerly from phrase to phrase, yet casually?
Or are you still a silly young thing in love
with your ability to handle ethics?
The drunk thug falls in love with honour
and begins the painful task of economics.

33. The Training Manual

Was I trained to be a nuisance?
The Training Manual is full of homosexuals;
in it you'll find the key concerns
to the great figures of our age.
When they bomb, they are dreadful,
and terror follows them, I think,
like a dog, a carnivore, of equal temper.
Next year, in August, you will fall in love

with a girl who kisses just like Lesbia
who gave a name to an experience
not foreign to the famous or the great.
You, too, live in an empty mansion; in love
you are a child of light, and of hatred,
and you will learn this to your cost.

34. Art

He was a living legend. He had built
some great structure mainly consisting of art,
though most of those who went through the experience
were knocked around and were inclined to talk about
'a work of skill' and 'admirable diligence',
and thus quite missed the point. Words, paint,
craft, are easily bought, though hard to sell.
Some said he made a million dollars, though

the figure varied, and by the time he got it
he was too far gone to add it up.
Did he really make a work of art?
Did it 'work'? Is it really 'art'?
Is he still alive, or does his 'spirit'
live on in the elegant reviews? Hard to tell.

35. Artefact

To solve the problem of art and artefact
will you go down to the river
to paint a 'painting'? Will you 'paint'?
Will you paint the girl by the river?
Will you make a painting of the girl?
The light is Grecian, is adequate, et cetera.
He is sitting by the water. No,
he will not paint the girl by the river.

The girl is an artefact, the problem
of the painting is an artefact, is art,
the making of the painting is a problem.
Will you paint a painting of the artefact?
The scenery is well composed, the light
is Greek, is adequate, et cetera.

36. Timing

If you're clever you arrive early.
Just before dawn is early enough.
Don't be too eager, heat factories
will be waiting in the foyer.
Outside, through the grimy window
you can see the moonlit Wreck Express
buried in snow dreams, full of vegetables.
You are stronger than a vegetable.

Breathe in. You will live longer than most
members of the vegetable kingdom. Look,
the Ming Dynasty perished. They were not
as strong as vegetables, and you are clever.
You arrive at midnight, full of strength.
Yes; too early, like a fool.

37. Sediment

The sunlight and the moonlight,
how easy they are! And yet they are more
than carefully structured opposites.
Unlike you and me, they have no
purpose. When we see the sun rise
through the bronze layers of the air
we think: ugh! He did it again!
And when we glimpse that gloomy moon

on the pewter bay flatter the oiled mirror,
or when, on a midnight underwater swim
we catch that ancient glint on the silvered
river of mercury in the tidal silt
dribbling from the heavy metal factories
we smile. We are happy, because of that.

38. The Moated Grange

It's bad luck with a coughing baby
and it's just as rough inside the pleasure resort
so don't bother with the Mandrax any more.
You'll get to sleep, and find a business there
that you'll just have to get used to once again.
These palaces you build, or auditoriums,
someone forgot to put the windows in and
all night long you're troubled by a noise outside

so that every day at daybreak you find yourself
asking the keeper 'Was that me? Was that
me and my trouble again?' And he answers variously
according to your face, 'It was a flock of birds,
sir, of red plumage,' or he guesses 'That, oh,
that was you again sir, pleading to be let in.'

39. Film Noir

A baby crawling over the rooftops is a movie
called *The Thief of Paris*. On the wet tiles
at night – whoops, he slips, there he goes – another
baby by the sea, he's trying to surf
and the water's rough, the pilot boat
straining at her moorings on the cruel deep
and a heavy swell lashing the rescue helicopter...
a breaker, and all his valiant efforts in vain.

Pondering these doomed historical necessities
we wonder at the lack of politics, and think
maybe it's a dialectical process: one baby
we're supposed to love, one to hate...
it's called Strain Your Brain, conversely
Put Your Head to Bed.

40. The Age of Mechanical Reproduction

If we laugh and photograph ourselves
which is difficult but not impossible
we create a system for analysing humour
and days later we are stuck with it
like Marxism too quickly understood
and thus betrayed. Is a smile a role?
The snapshots make a guess, and unavoidably
a complex answer is building up inside us

conditioned by empiricism. We love and burn
just for a year or so, then take those photos
and lose a precious ability and a sweetheart
and nothing seems the same, ever again.
This dogging loss chews at my heel and soon
years later, we are less than what we knew.

41. The Bus

My eyes go pale as I grow old, and these
bones, my wrist, are less eloquent than
country radio. I re-live youth asleep
and leave it behind at dawn. In the mirror
there is only me, grey and mumbling.
Who else was in that darkened bus,
driving six hundred miles to a new school?
Only me? I should remember those boys,

but those are photographs, and anxious men
inhabit them; nervous wives cry themselves
to sleep in the country nightfall.
The trawlers are throbbing out of reach,
lost at sea. The mirror clouds over.
The bus speeds through the wet forest.

42. Toxophilus

First it's a matter of being awake,
the sun shoots across at an angle,
low on the horizon. And then
the archers along the battlements,
the flighted shafts impede the flow of light
from the solar wind knifing at an acute angle
across the British Isles, dispersing the fog
as though a hazy photograph

burst into flame and disappeared. In the wet
orchard the problem of lunch arises, and that
easily solved. We both ingest food. First
it's a matter of waking, to the solar flare
and the archers ganging up on the coast:
only at the end the burning air.

43. The Hollywood Version

What can history tell us
that the movies can't? Hollywood is history
and we have already forgotten
Josef von Sternberg, even if we saw his movies,
and few of us managed that much.
We all saw *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*
and quickly went out for a drink. Why,
we've been snatching at bodies ever since,

haven't we? We saw the Indians
dying like flies, but things have changed.
The Indians are making a movie, and it's not
Batman Rides Again. What can the Indians tell us
that the movies can't? How to ride a pony,
how to fly a night fighter well.

44. The Lessons

Today broke like a china plate,
rain and cloud, drifting smoke;
tonight fell like a suiciding athlete
or a bad joke.

I went to bed with a startling headache
and was distinctly no better when I woke,
I remained dumb in the company of those
who were happy only when I spoke.

Something new has moved uncomfortably close,
something not previously seen:
a talent for aiming the poisoned dart,
for detecting the touch of the unclean,
for discovering that, in the pure of heart,
there is something unforgivably obscene.

45. Patagonia

Nothing new arrives from Rio, again.
The geography prevents it. There is a faded
portrait of a general on the wall,
a short-lived rebellion on the muddy plain
and an Englishwoman who moons at a window
and hopes that something will arrive
but nothing ever does.
A rose bush clutching at the rusty fence

dries into brittle sticks. Far away
across the Atlantic, a storm full of rain
swells like a bruise and floods the sea.
The lady moons gently to see her hopes decline.
Across the misty ridges, behind the breeze,
is South America. Just over there.

46. *Two Figures*

Two figures: the great physicist idles home
across the golf course late in the evening.
Sweat glitters on his forehead, rich executives
pause to let him pass – he is puzzling
how to tell his wife the facts of life.
The wife – nubile, sick and sexy
and like a foolish puppy in her eagerness –
is dreaming of the queer brothels of Singapore

which she has never seen. She will never travel
to enjoy the queer brothels, we note, as she is stupid
and soon to be demoted to the rank of baggage.
The proud scientist coughs and dies of money,
suddenly. This Marxist poem is called *The Futility
of the Emotions of the Majority of the Proletariat*.

47. *NW1*

He's older now, and has learnt the need to survive.
The evening's carefully planned, down to the wine;
his income hangs on a favour. Guests arrive,
important, cautious, not quite ready to dine,
accepting a sherry, behind the uneasy levity
catching a thread of music from another room,
politely not noticing the unobtrusive poverty,
looking to see who sits next to whom.

The conversation drifts: who's been betrayed
by the one you'd least expect; who's up, who's down,
who left for political reasons, and who stayed.
An awkward pause at the door. Not much is said.
The engine coughs, a car door slams. They're gone.
He has a terrible headache. He goes to bed.

48. Fashion Shoot

I suppose you're very tall it makes you
beautiful, if that's the fashion, yet
there must be more to love than height!
Getting stoned is out of date, so
getting tall's ridiculous, but I feel
a strange infatuation tickle at my throat.
It's a privilege and it's a job
and it keeps me healthy.

Do you mind if I take a photo? Shit,
that view-finder's like a sonnet,
it chops life off at the crutch, the most
fascinating part of the anatomy.
Do you mind if I lick your mouth
if I swear to God I'm free of disease?

49. Phase Shift

You have immense difficulty deciding
on the time, place and opportunities
for 'love'. It visits you, infrequently,
moves about your head, and you are left
to decide on the bandwidth, amplitude and phase shift
of your rabid devotion. 'Devote yourself'
Tomorrow we are mutton. And yet
you have innumerable friends

Another version of his death begins
'He was born with the Civil War, and was ruined
by his sudden apprehension of the future...'
Ah, futures, fucks, impossible gallantries,
why do you cripple me, why are you stifled
in the heap of carcasses we know as history?

50. (from a BBC synopsis)

John is handling a tidy affair
with Louise, wife of his friend Robert.
John tries to persuade her to leave
Robert, and to burst with him in some foreign
country. She meets John secretly...
she has decided to grow with Bob
but when she laughs at her husband she finds
he has been spying on her. He says.

It seems that he strangles her in a fit
of jealous rage, then phones the doctor?
When the police arrive laughing they find
John leaving the house, and he becomes a murder
suspect... but is Marjorie really *dead*? If so, who
really killed – set in London – *killed* her?

51. Trick Ending

Hydrocyanic acid was the least of his worries,
as he tried the locked door for the third time.
Christ, Marianne is in there! he thought.
And then the ether closed its ranks against him
and a great flame came out of the pit, calling
'No go! No go!' and it was just as true
as his love for Marianne, which was waning
as the effects of the deadly gas penetrated.

He was neatly dressed, and calm in the face
of crisis, though he had not eaten a thing
since his last attack. Through the plate glass
he could discern his nubile girl friends
flocking to visit him, and many of them nude.
'So this is how it feels,' he thought, 'to be in love.'

52. The Museum

The war is over at last
and I have been charged with writing.
I have been ordered to write an elegy,
the dream commands, by bruised boys unable
to command a comprehension of murder.
I am charged with a duty, the committee decides,
to glorify the implements of war! No guilt!
But I make a list of all that is left.

The old world is gone, the Coca Cola
and the Benzedrine, the rifles eulogised
and stacked at attention. An old caretaker
is oiling the barrels with a rag and smiling.
The ranks of blued steel grin in the dark.
As much as I am able, I promise the rifles are rusting.

53. Duty

Unwilling footsteps crunch across the drive.
Someone watches through a misted glass,
hears the clock tick, the minutes pass.
Someone knows that someone is alive,
but needs to be reassured. Pour the drink
and place the record on the gramophone.
You're alive, and warm. She is alone.
Buy her presents, wrap her up in mink

like a Christmas parcel, make a gift
of everything you own. The stealthy attack
where light falls victim to shadow, a cry
starts up from the cellar, in a look the rift
of fear appears – these must be pushed back.
This is your duty. Perform it till you die.

54. I Know a Man Who Lives in the Dark

I know a man who lives in the dark.
He writes in black ink on black paper.
Whatever he writes is wonderful.
He thinks about history. At midnight
in the light from an ultra-violet lamp
he begins to write. The book will be read
by school-children, he decides, and politicians,
and he considers the struggling republics

and the joys of a country childhood. He paints
a picture of raw youth forged into a legend,
a terrible landscape informed with a sombre glory;
but the ground is a turmoil of combat whose name
is murder. Musing on the republic's favour
he writes a manual on the implements of death.

55. A Hard Art

Waiting and waiting, there's an end to it.
Eating bad food, sleeping on the floor,
there's an end to that too. One day
your enemies reach out of your head quickly
and take you to the cold and dirty places,
and you're too old for that sort of thing.
The bad music keeps you there, and makes you cruel,
and you are the loved one you are least kind to.

Waiting and waiting for the good weather,
there's a hard art in that, and a sour man –
too old for that sort of punishment – does it badly.
But one day you wake up and go back home and if you're
tough and lucky you leave most of it behind. Eating
good food, accepting kindness – there's an art in that.

56. Jungle View

A vicious man jumping off a building –
you could make something of that.
The way *Vogue* magazine maintains a colour
suited to the market and how explorers
tramp about looking for a suitable jungle
while the shouting man is dropping into
his own stupidity, you could do something
real fancy with a plot like that

and then the colours run, the print blurs
just for a split second, a crack in time
presents a dazzling jungle view with elephants
and you find a problem mangled on the pavement
like ‘How could you do a thing like that?’ and
you start again, with a cruel man walking home.

57. The Doll

My daughter’s playing with her bloodstained
doll again. And the wireless is breathing unevenly
in Frank Moorhouse’s novel, grieving that the old
petrol stations are unattended, that all the decent
Rotarians are missing in action in Korea,
the only war to feature the Sabre,
the modern exemplar of warfare,
and the ruthless MiG. It’s goodbye to the glue

that used to hold everything together,
it’s goodbye to the trembling Rotarians
and their bereaved children in the light
of stinking kerosene lanterns, it’s goodbye
to the countryside of honorable rifles.
Welcome the doll, the terrible doll.

58. Oenology

Wine is a suburb, not a manner of speaking,
and in its various forms takes on the attitude
to tissue that we regard as magnanimous.
It is bland and very evil all at once
if this is possible, and bears a resemblance
to speed, whose ties to space and time
it struggles to dissolve. No use
complaining once the liver activates, it is not

the temptingly trivial shade of a dark sea
nor the emblem of dignity; as it grows
in the dark your smile is being prepared,
your hoarse laughter measured and examined;
the body's suburb snores into the late movies
and Central Control waits on the lip of night.

59. Absinthe

Absinthe breaks down into a type of wormwood,
look how it takes on the Excise Law and comes off
second-best, and imagines in a hundred minds
dun palaces for its own decline. It is new
and easily obtainable, though it's been around;
it would like to be more openly discussed,
though a certain dryness of approach presents
problems for the willing listener – your body

has a chemical glow in the dark, and that
blond sheen it much admires. Too much
fear comes into the equation suddenly – it is new,
a fizzed-up whore out for a Sunday promenade
as it is hopeful or blue, but never obvious like
'the milk-green lens through which Symbolism shone.'

60. Telescopic Sight

In a crude circle of dust and stubbled grass
children are playing soccer. All else
is olive brown and blue reduced to powder.
Outside the boundary the referee
draws a line, cutting off an easy talent
from originality. A small dog like a movie star
drags a grown man across the field,
and his friends follow, asking what to do

with the stricken afternoon, and why is the man
crying. The circle of burnt grass grows
smaller, and somehow the game is accommodated
in the grip of politics. In a dark brick
building on the other side of the world
a man is carefully inspecting a clip of bullets.

61. The Spy

The spy bears his bald intent like a manic
rattle through the street. A bitter rain
stains the cobblestones. A clock stops; elsewhere
winter tightens up its creaking grip.
Why does the soldier pace the empty field?
Whose war is this, so grey and easily spent?
Slow cars patrol the autoway, children
stare at you cruelly from behind an iron gate

and a brutish gathering begins, somewhere
on the plains far in the hinterland.
The black clock has been still for a hundred years,
and no peasant bears the luck to win
in this poor lottery. Dull green trucks roll out
and the countryside is well advised to be empty.

62. The Exile

The exile returns, at the edge of evening.
Branches are bare. Winter has disfigured
the land he loved, and a strange
exhaustion taints the air. He is
tired before his task has begun,
but he pushes on, inland, hopeful.
He, the only one capable of healing
the whole economy, the one with the key

to politics, wanders to and fro, talking
quietly to the people who are reasonably
pleased in the black and diseased cities,
and finally returns to the rocky beach.
The seasons rise up and pass away.
He thinks: there is nothing to be done.

63. Ballistics

In a distant field, small animals prepare
for sleep, under the huge rising moon.
For foreign peasants, dusk is none too soon.
The bombers fade into the melting air.
In a far harbour boats make for their mooring,
in another town the citizens are glad
the lights are going out. The morning's bad,
the waiting news is cruel, the job boring.

A painter pours a cheap and bitter drink
and drinks it down. His hand's unsteady;
on the table brush and pen and ink
lie scattered. Half his work's no good,
the rest is sold for rent. He's ready;
the loaded gun discharges as it should.

64. Position: Poet

A gift to stir up fevered passions,
in a fit to envision a disastrous future
and to tell it as explicitly as possible,
to see through others as clearly as a mirror
but not to see yourself at all,
this is your basic equipment. As for the rest –
compass, map, a traveller's phrase-book –
use them only if you have need.

You have been provided with a wife and child
and a passport, and a respectable position
with a firm of publishers in the city.
As for the stammering, the occasional
failure of nerve... just do the best you can.
Oh – pencil, paper, one-way ticket. Have fun.

65. Weather Report

The rich young homosexual has passed
the university examination, and soon expects
promotion to professor. That's 'old-fashioned'
but don't worry – soon the horrible wind,
the brown wind from beyond the border
where vulgarity is a means of pleasure
and the peasants feast on bloody jewels
will rush in and claim the chair!

And whose face will be discountenanced?
Whose addiction to a sexual drink revealed? Whose
dalliance accepted, then denied?
And then the wicked deaths, and then the pale
weather report. In the vast library
the homosexuals are dreaming of love.

66. The Wine of the Region

Look, drunk, you spill your drink
and the slow stain spreads, taking
an awful long time to dissolve your
memories, like being in prison,
being in love, being stoned, and painters
fresh from *La Grande Jatte* or
someplace optimistic; that stain, then
the black washes into purple

then blue, as pale as your childhood
where the chilled weather came at random,
dampened the bony hills and drifted
away. Fill the glass with that sour wine,
take a breath of air from the window
and run for your future like a drunk.

67. (after a phrase by Laurie Duggan)

As we sort of step out onto the page the initial
concept of uneasiness promotes the guess
that 'slack humour edges into the factory yard
that good taste abandoned' though
this plausible gesture blurs just at the point
where our humorless imitations push across
the edge of the paper and sort of into the photo
of the ROCK 'N' ROLL CAFE NOTEBOOK specious

images in the mouth like PEPSI, ST. KILDA, 1936
or later, COLO NO.7 BRICKYARD and too soon
their easy, vacant trends are ready to be borrowed
and swiftly rearranged with the 'glass of water'
which is mindless and thrilling at the same time,
jerking at the snap into clear focus and resolution.

68. The Painting of the Whole Sky

The theme of the magnificent painting
concerns a boy groaning under the weight
of numberless governments, and a troop train
moving off to the front. As the train
moves towards the regrettable border the boy
unveils his grief – a whole sky,
storms, and loads of bleeding cloud –
that is his only story, and he cries.

That is to say the train and the wounded
meet like ships in the night. One soldier
loosens a bandage in the wind as the trains
pass in opposite directions. The canvas
flutters, the dried wound freshens, the boys
wave blindly from the painting of the whole sky.

69. The Student Prince

Delineate the landscape where you
grew up. That's an acceptable start.
But in the droll town where I was born
no one ever used the word 'landscape',
nor the concept, nor the word 'nor', ever.
I'm being honest, that's
a good start, eh? Grow up,
who gives a fuck about a 'good start',

I went to college like a privilege
and learnt to wield a metaphor in each hand
and got a kiss on the arse for being good.
Who made a million? The Student Prince?
Who made a profit from a lasting work of art?
Who was improved by the perfect landscape?

70. The Decline of Narrative Painting

It was greasy all over like a widow,
Dad resumed, and later in the painting
we were ready to remember those sad bits how
Ted was dropped from the team and got the shits –
was that the way it – really? all our youth
we spent and blew up and emulated – so smooth!
is it gone away? who was that sobbing ghost?
pleading? pregnant kids? that fishing trip? when,

like other actions, that keen yet mousy kiss
hits you like a big blue punch it went
completely so that young Ted, if this vista
was really an imitation of his dearest memories,
broke down and cried that he was old, that most of his
friends were dead, that, kiss

71. The Chicago Manual of Style

The Chicago *Manual of Style* is really neat
when your composure cracks and ghosts
of silly girls come whispering to bother you –
this happens late at night – just kids
out for a bit of fun with a convertible
and a bottle of vodka like in a movie,
and ‘Hell,’ you think, ‘did I do that? Was I
involved with that mad young bitch

the cops were after down at Sunny Point?
Was that me in Dad’s truck with the throttle
stuck open, cracking ninety down the beachfront?
With that... brunette... uh?’ Just about then,
on the edge of love and terror, the Chicago
Manual of Style appears and takes you home.

72. The Beaches of the Caribbean

The lady falls into a slow decline.
Outside the window, fog and winter rain.
A sticky kiss obscures her design
and the junkies drifting into Sydney Harbour
with their splints and bruises are as mournful
as their mothers calling from the mental home.
A drab idiocy clubs these women so that
even the drunks around the typing pool are lurid

and girls that giggle in heat are soon
seen to be the same as those who weep.
The gangsters have a fondness for their addicts,
calling them by pet names and loving their despair.
Negroes litter the beaches of the Caribbean.
The rain is gentle, *il pleut doucement* in your hair.

73. Winter Cruises

The word 'maudlin' is not French, although
your wish to have it so betrays a truth.
A sickly mist obscures the waterfront
and the liners drifting into New York harbour
from the winter cruises are not as mournful
as the foghorns calling them home.
A vast sadness lays waste to these holidays
so that even 'drinks around the pool' is stupid

and old men brush their silver hair and cry.
The word 'French' is not maudlin, even though
the poets of the period would have it so.
Things litter the beaches of the Caribbean.
Yes, the rain is discreet, painting
these beautiful pictures for your grief to greet.

74. The Soto Zen School (for Duncan Ellis)

Once upon a time I had a dream;
I was in a darkened park, alone
with a demented company director
and he was telling me the endless story
of his life (his life hadn't ended yet,
but soon would) – 'When I was ten
I studied meditation with an ancient master
of the Soto Zen school. I wasn't

ready for it. I was too young and anxious.
My head was filled with nightmares, terror
followed me about, and try as I would
I could never "break through". And now I'm rich
and happy, though a little mad.'
With that parable, he left me to my sleep.

75. Debt

A faint trace of pumice on the lung
and you're lofty – it's called
the Rat Patrol, a childish voice
pipes through the long corridors
it's not Arizona, no kidding
a delicate cowboy, no glue
and it's time for Christmas bombing
could you do that? Easy payment

on a moth and you're flying
but I'm grounded, that's the clicker!
Bat bat he's happy, no sympathy
bank managers exclaim
and far out west the ruined debtor
runs for his wife again.

76. Half Moon

This middling moon is when everything appears
just right, Memory. You and the bubblegum
shock me into an understanding, it's like
breaking up permanently at fourteen and
you're broken-hearted before you're middle-aged
and yet you're lucky, if that response
is totally automatic. What's broken?
Who's lost? Anything? At all?

Ah, me, you're angling again, mister!
I can try this style of treat just right
to touch up trouble in a trick of rage
or love, you indicate it how you like.
Am I bruised? Fourteen? Just a trick,
me and Memory, and middle age.

77. Hunting Moon

It's something like a surf lust
that gets you in the stomach, on the beach.
It rains, and the sand dissolves exactly
into a photograph of the sea, whose surface
flakes into coloured chrome like a dream
of 'chrome' in the Afghan winter.
When you polish your stomach all the
frilly girls fall in love with you;

nostalgia soaks into the dizzy mist,
the mist of the hunting moon, Grandad,
where the lewd desires of a matron
fog the moon as a nudist pokes his stomach.
The surf thunder grows out of your body
until you go crazy with the pain.

78. The Limits of Pedagogy

The shadow of morality drifts over the trenches
imagining itself a biplane in love
a pretty gift looks up at you and blows up
after all, you said you *loved* me, Harold
and then Wittgenstein, Su Shih, those teachers
who left us terribly alone
under the smoky track of the shadow, Harold
that bloody shadow

All too soon it's dawn over the railway carriages
the shadow's deserted, it's about to be shot
there's a champagne party and the firing squad
are all invited; what charming company, you think
and just then you remember something sticky and
unbearable, and burst into tears

79. In the Casino

In the Casino, it's tough in there,
it's dog eat dog and I'm not
invited to the feast. In summer
the eucalyptus trees are smothered with hands,
the tiny bleeding hands insects use
when they want my sympathy.
Cripples disembark from the Sud Express
when it finally arrives at the front.

Naked women poke each other on the beaches
on the sunny Med. Up north it's winter,
and in the muddy trench it's not so good.
I abhor Europe, said the animals,
the animals torn apart by war,
by the stench of European heroism.

80. Lusaka

Come to Lusaka the pace is killing
the surf and grease machine so fabulous –
you call *that* a postcard? That
elfin strain, it's so retractable, and yet
better than an accident that points out
how you will learn to hate Lusaka
as you already hate Mervyn's Elbow
and the bad time imprinted there –

look at that rebellion it's so junior
the way the pantihose ladders as
the army group fails the last exam
and yet manages to remain believable because
they stare at the telephone all night – that's odd,
your eyes go faint and then pop out!

81. Going on Your Nerve

How about the blast front? 'No news'
is terrific if your nerve can stand it,
and a group of enemies promises a happy ending
even if the life insurance is a fraud.
But look – a million postures, each political,
and each concealing a sordid glimpse!
'No chance' is like a dirty singlet
and a pig resembles Wittgenstein

in this pronunciation of the Latin tongue.
And yet he was regarded with a horsey leer
by a dozen spotty girls. He was a 'fumbler'
in that blind yet luminous area of metaphysics
where the concept of the real big drink
jumps out of the blast front into your teeth.

82. Night of the Colonels

The radar nets fluoresce across the docks.
Below, in shadow, troops salute, the ranked
gloves like an abrupt moth attack. Armaments
blast down the autumn bricks, the concrete
blocks, the hospitals. The radar sheet
flutters green, signalling regret. The city
grows into a shout of absence by their help.
Veterans trot across the deck.

Her hands, always moving, on her pale neck
arrange the silver amulets to news of Greece
where everybody's nightmare is at peace. The wet
glitters to a total season of tropic gloom.
Flags flicker from the pole, at masthead's foot
the Captain laughs. She hitches up her pants.

83. Choice

The armaments of burning autumn are those
under which she falls. History's pain
becomes 'real' only to those who lose it
in moving away, as she loads the magazine
and becomes real only by using it, those
silver amulets to which she falls, as
'they fell to a hail of bullets' outlines
Spain and all its troubles through winter.

Always moving, she finds identity
where self is totally expunged. Madrid
comes and goes, and Guernicas travel through
the mind like flagpoles on the *autoroute*.
She hoists the holster, playing at being blue.
The wounded children guess at being cute.

84. The Rhetoric of Fiction

'The Rhetoric of Fiction' is a marvellous thing
being so close to the title of a movie or a thriller
or a brand-name for a patent medicine – this
'blank' verse could easily degenerate
through a slip of the tongue into a fictive
rhetoric too; and so as you become aware
and snap off the radio quickly the room
plunges into silence and there is only metaphor –

'Seen from my head, the reefer on the reef,
distorted to an image of a hunk of beef...'
and you soon realise that you're not alone, you have
the rhetoric of fiction for your adversary; then
there is only the hiss of a cooling valve, as,
inside the radio, a million people are thinking

85. A Knock on the Door

Good night it's the neighbours and the stereo
warming up again – and can you take it?
Remember, you've run out of pethidine
and that strange feeling in your head
is beginning to resemble pain – Jesus, phase shift
through the woodwork at a hundred dB SPL,
and you thought they were geriatrics, huh?
Feel that, kid, and think again.

Is that the stereo? Look out,
it's midnight – once again the light
polarises, and then the knock on the door.
You open up trembling and there it is –
the green light streaming from its eyeballs,
the tears running down its grubby boots like piss.

86. Writing for Television

'It's so easy to write for television!
You make a million bucks!' Is that
possible? And what does a guy do when
teased to death by homosexuality in art
and having written a hundred brilliant freaks
he finds the pursuit of excellence accomplished
and a loudmouth fashion getting off the ground
for demolition? Can this kid resist

the Demolition Derby where the Poem breaks down?
And will the little 'triers', those dumbos,
follow him into the Technicolor accident
and not be damaged? There ought to be
a parable explaining how it's done, like
writing a hundred plot lines for television.

87. Scuba, the Acronym

It's so lonely, hearing Miles Davis
playing underwater, it's also very recent
and 'unforgettable' so you shouldn't worry –
no more worries, and you smile! –
yes it's both forlorn and quite financial
and pretty soon your new friends join you
like they do in the ballads – oops,
I mean like after the movies – *click!* –

when a huge cake is wheeled to the table
and something big and friendly jumps out
all dressed up and machine-guns the scenery,
lots of smoke, and after the cordite clears
the parable staggers to a halt – reluctantly
Miles adopts the aqualung and floats away.

88. Thermal Drift

It's weird when you mistake an oboe for a flute
and have to be corrected by the orchestra –
radio is like a one-way medium or glass
blue on one side and jealous on the other –
and next day it's as mad as 'eagerness'
just because a case of damaged hearing
puts you down in front of all those people –
that crowd, is that the radio audience?

The announcer in his roomy box will never know,
being always on the jealousy side of the equation,
a spot of blue rain against a naked eye. It's lucky
that the radio astronomers make their own mistakes,
like taking a black hole for a quasar or an oboe
playing *Thermal Drift for Flute and Orchestra*.

89. The Blues

I'd like to throw an epileptic fit
at the Sydney Opera House and call it Rodent.
That's what separates me from the herd.
The hand forgives the cutting edge
for what the hand guides it to do.
The knife has no pleasure in it.
I'm eating my way through my life –
they said it couldn't be done

but here I am in the Palace of Gastronomes
crazy about the flavour!
Moonlight along the blade of a kitchen knife
belongs to the ritzy forties, it's nostalgic
like playing the comb and one-hundred-dollar bill
and calling it the blues.

90. 1968

As you get purchase the hate vehicle
you take another quick look at your sister
and the whole cataract falls into place
under the idea of economy at sea
along the edges of the truck
your sister is playing around smoking
with a nudist drinking pot just
having a real bad time in Jamaica

you know you'll make naked friends
in the twilight you're not sniffing glue
between the Principle of Uncertainty
and the invention of Germ Warfare
there you will find your dazed sister
purchase motor conformity.

91. The Chev

He took the Chev out late at night, big motor
hunting in the octane forest for a kill.
Speeded up and freaky, he'd hit the boulevards
and look for junk. Good, good, take it easy, good,
was all he'd say. I'd watch him from the corner
as he tracked the street: good, good,
shake the till, no sweat, home to mother. Bullets
got him in the neck, brought him down at dawn.

Big crash, was all he said, like a taller
tree, yes, a harder fall. Ten years in the nick.
Dreaming, now, is all. He watches
from the window as I take the Chev out
late at night: big motor, shock and rumble
breaking up the light. Bad connection. Motor sick.

92. Egyptian Reggae

Every frightened smile prepares
blood for the borrowed floor and then
morning on the street disrobe
smiling as she glowered when
you and Dick, do the repairs,
fix the blue, the broken globe
in that storm we know how
to treat, now she licks her smile

it's thunder, Dad, a heady rain
froth beside the drifting dhow
the limpid waters of the Nile
below, beside, a lark, a drain.
Every newt with flickering fin
guesses right, and turns it in.

93. Tropics

Sweat is a style of the body
trying to tell us something. Listen!
Tic tic how I get envious
of those cool ladies on the TV ads
lolling on the jungle veranda with a drink
and a sticky lipstick while insects
bother the tropic night I sweat a lot
and in a desperate bid to externalise

a talent for journalese I wring out
my neck and get clobbered. Bid! Bid!
And yet the real storm relents,
and hangs about, a style of cloud sweating
against the windscreen of our means, our
deep trivialities.

94. On the Right Bank

Rod's high on French television. He terrifies
that interviewer with a Yank accent. AAP. PARIS. WED.
POP IDOL ROD STEWART JETS IN FROM L.A!
After that moony pose, off to Yves St. Laurent,
even the dress designers have names like
famous French poets. Rod's happy, I guess,
under the wing of his lady, and she, blonde,
works it out on a computer in her pocket.

It's all right, Rod. I'm still living in
Gasoline Alley, he says – he falters,
struck by millions of dollars. Goodbye, Rod!
This question has worried sociologists for years:
would we all end up like pop idols, drifting
westward, high over L.A?

95. A Drink by the Pool

James Michener thinks of writing a guide book
to Bohemian Balmain, Sydney, Australia.
People are sick to death of the South Pacific.
He quickly flies to Balmain and has a look.
There it is, like a movie! Writers, artists!
The harbour, blue as always, the container wharves
just like it says in the novels, and the lesbians...
My God, the *Lesbians!* Bohemia Gone Mad!

This is too much for James, and he flies out.
TOP WRITER JETS OUT OF SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA!
But is that how it really happened? I like to think
of James in the Honolulu Hilton, older and sadder,
nursing a drink by the pool, nursing a broken heart,
dreaming of a pert little lesbian in Balmain.

96. Hobo, Computer

Hmmm, if you're an old man,
don't be dirty. Along the beach
there are plenty of those, designated
hobo, bum, computer. Sweetheart,
if you really want to be an old man
keep away from Australia. Above Sydney
the stars revolve like broken glass
turning over in an old man's gut.

Get on the geriatric train, Hyacinth,
and get the hell out! The sand,
staining an old man's dream,
sifts into patterns called *hobo, computer*.
There is a sweet aftertaste, and a pinto,
black and white like *caterpillar*.

97. Note Found in a Bottle

Amazing! The acid balance
corrects itself, and here I am
writing a poem! In Brisbane!
It's either a renewal of the spirit
or savage indigestion, don't ask.
Later I'm off to a premiere, that's a
lie, but referential. I'm in love
with a woman not my wife, but she's

fifty-three, the woman, not my wife, she's
young and beautiful at last so
why worry. That's a lie. I am not
a happy man by disposition so forget
me writing a poem at last in Brisbane.
My ghost will haunt you. Always.

98. Fever

Yes, you care if you're happy, don't you?
You and your friend, your dear 'self'. Me,
I'm moving, always, infinitely more romantic
than your lurid dreams allow. Won't you
make a quick dash across the Atlantic
and jump into my arms, delirious, free
at last of all the hassle? The luck?
What punk folly let it happen,

so you could charm away a mob
and get that lucky, how you attract
even the desert into your hollow? You know,
this 'you' you manufacture at night
just for me on the videophone, it's a dream.
You will wake up, feverish. It's 'love'.

99. Dictation

Yes, it's gruesome, but underneath
all that shit there's a moral. Yes,
you're dropping, due for the chopper,
but underneath the gritting teeth
the stink hate the horrible foam
you know in your churning gut that
tomorrow morning *bonk!* you'll come upon
a loose new blonde at the office

win a million dollars buy a Porsche
wake up sainted in Paradise and
all that fearful crap will drop away!
You will be seen as you really are!
Okay? I'm a poet, I'm writing, I believe
every dreary thing you have to say.

100. The Blue Mirror

Okay, I'll take a journey, don't push.
Give me time to think.
I've been to Afghanistan, that's a waste.
I've been through the blue mirror
the natives call 'the kiss of the desert'.
What's left? I've been to the end of the world
half a dozen times; often they call it
'Brisbane, Australia.'

I've seen the machine-guns they used to
carry in Aden and the British helicopters.
That's nasty. With that hardware
adorning the scenery you'd be reluctant too.
I've tried the 'poem'; I'll try it one more time.
But do you really never want to see me again?

END 