

**Classic Poetry Series**

**David Brooks**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**  
2012

**Publisher:**  
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

## David Brooks(12 January 1953 -)

David Gordon Brooks is an Australian author.

He graduated from the Australian National University in 1974. He married Alison Summers in 1975. Brooks and Summers then studied abroad and received their M.A. degrees from the University of Toronto. Brooks completed his Ph.D from the University of Toronto after returning to Australia in 1981 while teaching at the Royal Military College, Duntroon located in Canberra. In 1982 he began teaching at the University of Western Australia in Perth, where he met the poet Nicolette Stasko, who became his partner for the next twenty years. In 1986 he returned to the Australian National University as a lecturer, a post he held for the next four years. Brooks currently is an associate professor of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney. He married the Slovenian translator and photographer Teja Pribac in 2005.

He is a co-editor, along with Elizabeth McMahon, for Southerly, Australia's oldest literary magazine.

His novel, *The Fern Tattoo*, was shortlisted for the 2008 Miles Franklin Award.

He is a vegan.

# A Cry

Why should the cosmos, hearing  
one thing  
complaining against another,  
take notice,  
since everything,  
even death,  
is a part of itself?

Isn't it the one thing  
that nothing leaves?  
If I cry out  
just once  
doesn't that cry go on forever?

David Brooks

# A Possible History Of Consciousness

Jessica, riding  
up and down on her tricycle,  
the dog  
sniffing at his empty bowl,  
Indian mynahs at the  
lip of the yard,  
uncut lawn, the breeze  
stiffening as the storm gathers

a million leaves, feathers, grass-blades  
waiting

in the dark corner  
sheltered by the walnut,  
tipped  
by new spears of green,  
six plants  
not seen before  
rising from last winter's leaves.

David Brooks

# Barnyard Revelation Poem

A academic poetician friend  
while discussing my  
rural adventures  
tells me that he hopes I won't fall victim  
to the endemic poematosis of the region, by which, as he explains,  
he means the writing  
of 'barnyard revelation poems'.  
I haven't laughed so much in years.  
I suppose, instead, I should be producing  
postmodern supermarket odes, or linguo-spatiological  
poematographs of the  
secret life of words—the kinds of things  
a close analysis of 'intimate' might intimate, or the way  
'impact' can become 'impacted'—as if  
the post-modern supermarket were anything much other than  
sawn-up, mashed, sliced, bottled or deep-  
frozen barnyard  
or the forms and paraforms, the traces and  
fathomless abysses of words were any more  
than the cum- and pain- and joy-cries  
of farmers and their  
wives and children, buried under  
layer upon layer of the tangled Western Mind.

David Brooks

# Bird Song

There's a species of  
grey and white pigeon  
in Glebe, New South Wales,  
that lies on its back in the roadway  
while the traffic passes over it.

The soft feathers  
of its breast and  
wing-tips  
riffle in the slip-stream  
of buses and the  
four-wheel drives some like to call  
'Balmain Bulldozers'.

The traffic is loud  
and hard to listen through.  
The delicate beaks  
and fragile  
skull-bones, the  
tiny, intricate feet  
under the  
dark  
rubber tyres  
make sounds that  
nobody can ever hear.

David Brooks

# Bush-Mouse

Night-stirrer,  
raider of cupboards and open drawers,  
skater across polished floorboards, relentless  
worrier of barricades, gnawing itself bloody  
for the skerricks of humans, the bush-mouse  
likes Easter eggs, pistachio nuts, tubes  
of Deadant, the cardboard and plastic  
of tack-packets, parcels of screws,  
but most of all – true  
bastard of Irish  
convict stock – potatoes, new  
potatoes, small  
and round  
and hard enough  
to hold in its determined paws  
and crunch as, intently, passionately, ears  
cocked wide for a movement from the bedroom,  
it stares out the window at the giant moon.

David Brooks

# Continuance

When I look back  
over the past few years  
and think that almost every day  
has had its own new worry  
or some unexpected version of the old  
I'd like to think  
that the years ahead will be different  
and that we will not sit at the end of the next  
or of some year after that  
thinking how every day still has  
its worry, little or great,  
but I know that this is hardly likely  
while you are who you are, and I am myself,  
and the world around us continues  
the way the past has shown us that it will,  
and I know too  
that knowing this  
will do nothing to still the stubborn voice  
that will always come within me to the world's defence:  
wasn't it in February  
that a great moon filled the garden half the night  
with light so strong you could read by it?  
wasn't it September when the honeyeater  
built in the vine outside the window  
and the strange birds came  
singing all day in the fig trees  
and all the night also?  
wasn't it only a week ago, for reasons  
you could not explain at the time  
or even remember,  
you turned, and smiled a particular  
smile as you entered, and your face  
and your hair smelt of rain?

David Brooks



# Eschatology

&lt;i&gt;for Richard Exner&lt;/i&gt;

Mind  
dwells on apocalypse,  
the body digs

the shutting of a gate,  
the turning of a sod, a page  
once done is  
done, a work complete

the change,  
the travelling  
come down to this,  
the great circle of days,  
recurrence of the simplest things.

Between two slabs  
I dig a wine-cellar,  
floor it with brick,  
wall it  
with brick and board

soon I will stock it, build  
a new shed over it,  
soon  
the eggplants will rise, tomatoes  
push up behind the basil,  
and my child will be walking.

You write from California  
astonished at my faith in Things

What can I say?

There is a place, a border  
where chill leaves the words,  
where even the fire leaves  
and all that is said becomes hopeless.

Deeper still  
there is a place where it begins again.

David Brooks

# Gift

After we had paid the singer,  
and the guests had gone  
and we had cleared away the food and the glasses,  
I went outside again  
and the moon, which had been so high over the dancers,  
was already four times larger  
and even more full,  
setting over the hills to the west,  
sharpening the black outline of the pines,  
making the ridges shimmer,  
and I thought of it shining  
on the other side, beyond Isola, a long  
silver path on the rippled water,  
and of the silent ships out there  
some of them with their lights still burning,  
and of the sailors on watch,  
smoking, and drinking quietly into the night,  
and of what they might be thinking,  
and I realised that, undeserved  
and against all odds  
something extraordinary had come upon me, a great  
happiness,  
and for once I didn't question it,  
didn't ask why.

David Brooks

# Mangoes

&lt;i&gt;for Janet Powell &lt;/i&gt;

To cut  
a mango  
one takes a sharp, pointed knife  
and slices lengthwise  
close to the flats of the seed, two  
thick scallops, then  
leaving the skin intact,  
cuts through the flesh to the skin's inside  
three lines the length of each  
then four across, so that  
cross-hatched  
the scallops can be turned outside-in  
to produce  
twenty luscious morsels of taste.

That is one way: another  
is to bite in  
cleanly about the stem  
and pull off the skin  
more or less entire—this  
so they say  
best done naked  
in a tepid bath  
so that the juices can  
dribble down the arms and breast  
and scent the warm water with its in-  
comparable fragrance.

Beyond this  
and that almost nothing else  
beats a green mango pickle  
hard and fiery from one of Mrs Fernando's jars  
beside basmati rice  
and a curry strongly flavoured with cardamom  
I have almost nothing  
to say about mangoes

except  
that the large leaves  
and great, welling fruit  
of a mango tree by moonlight  
are like gigantic tears

and that  
on hot nights  
one sometimes dreams  
of the huge fruit  
split  
and lying on the ground  
its thick juice  
trickling slowly  
into the warm earth  
and wakes  
and finds oneself weeping.

David Brooks

# Menindee

Today it is  
dark clouds  
moving in from the west,  
a deep brown-purple, the colour of sky  
before a sand-storm on the desert's edge.  
A dog is barking somewhere  
as if to frighten them away.  
I realise that I should go around  
shutting the doors and windows  
and bring in the washing from the line,  
but now there is a sudden, eerie coldness,  
like the dip  
before a great wave  
catches and hurls you upwards.

David Brooks

# Pater Noster

Our Father  
who art in heaven  
stay there  
and we'll stay down here  
in the mess you have left for us,  
this bright and hideous confusion, the only  
heaven there is or ever was and the only hell,  
so intertwined they are almost indivisible,  
here amongst the corruption and murder and the nevertheless  
invincible glory,  
the assassinations and the lying, the grief and the  
daily amazement, the poverty and affluence, the anger and  
ignorance, the cruelty and unexpected  
gentleness, sun in the park and bird-flight  
and the cool breeze from the harbour  
and the papers and the air-waves full of death and repetition

we'll stay here  
where the nations clash in their incomprehensible military psychosis,  
letting their own people starve  
while the guns and the makers of guns, the ravenous makers  
devour and devour,  
here where twenty-two humans killed in an ambush is  
international news but the slaughter of one hundred  
million animals each day to feed their slaughterers goes unmentioned  
like the guilty secret it is that the whole  
civilization rides upon  
(you a slaughterer, me a slaughterer, she, he, all of us, yet the very  
mention is blasphemy)  
and the moon too rises, strange and beautiful over everything,  
sometimes white-silver, sometimes yellow as butter (and red, that  
astonishing red, and people gathered on the street corners  
gazing upward, searching for syllables and giving them up, taking their  
silence home like a secret longing, some of them citing you, that  
waste of mind, that emptiness [this no prayer after all, but rhetoric, a frame, a  
conversation with an empty box...])

here where the slugs  
gather about the dog's bowl while the dog

sleeps in his nest on the armchair  
and the spiders on the balcony and in the  
corner of the bedroom  
weave their miraculous webs – out in the park catching the rain or the night's  
dew, glistening

where two out of five  
are so blind there's no seeing,  
so lost in themselves there's no  
finding any way out  
or anything but themselves  
(and I, a poet, no excusing...) and we are all of us, all  
numbed by the narcotics of our culture, the news and the misinformation, the  
art and the music, the opera, the jazz, the movies, the stories and  
gossip and vicarious living distracting each one of us from the  
horrors and our place in them (and if you think this strange  
in a love poem think again, love  
so uncontainable the tax on it is anger, outrage, speaking: the  
deal of it, the contract...)

here with the flood of work and the tumult and kaleidoscope of days,  
the darma and the karma, the maya and the greater illusions,  
the shouting right now from the fight in the laneway  
and the garlic shoots appearing amongst the parsley

here where I sleep so soundly some nights and others  
lie awake long into the early morning  
thinking about such things, the in-  
explicable and unorderable tides of them  
and her sleeping beside me, her calm  
inbreath and exhalation  
the only rod and staff and  
explanation I  
know now, or need.

David Brooks



# Pentecost

At Moody's, the Wharf Hotel,  
in the last small village on the Head,  
a man is reading poetry aloud.  
Until last night, until he said  
that he was leaving,  
we'd known him only as the one  
who stood sometimes at dusk  
on Ocean Beach, casting  
for whiting and for silver bream  
and then came in to drink a beer or two  
in the half an hour before closing –  
until, that is, someone had asked  
just what it was he did all day  
shut away in his tiny weatherboard  
or simply sitting in the yard.

Now, responding  
to our half-request,  
he is sitting on a high stool at the far end of the bar  
and all the rest of us are standing round,  
skeptical at first, but slowly strangely moved  
to find our Head a place of mystery and dark.  
Who would have guessed  
that such serenity could rise  
from boats and nets we used all day  
or that we could feel such sudden, unfamiliar love  
for things we'd never seen?  
Who would have dreamt  
such beauty, or such bristling life  
lay hidden in the promontory scrub,  
or thought that on that beach  
a man could talk so readily to God?

Between the poet's hands, it seems, appear  
not papers, but rustling birds, or fish  
that move as if the smoky light  
were water, or were shifting leaves.  
The pages turn, and on them are not sounds  
but things, not lines

but memories and dreams:  
worlds open, where we'd thought were fields  
and teeming forests where we thought were trees;  
forgotten loves, like great red flowers  
bloom painfully within us  
and slowly our skeptics, like our joking, cease.

Later, when Moody  
has reluctantly called time,  
we issue down the wooden steps  
and quickly scatter in the dark  
impatient to hold our sleeping children  
or to see again  
our oldest, most familiar things  
convinced that they have somehow changed.  
Tomorrow, perhaps, not all may think so,  
but tonight,  
in a dozen darkened rooms across the Head,  
the unaccustomed words will circle us  
like feathers, or like flashing fins  
or a hundred other visitings  
of sudden, unexpected light.

David Brooks

# Strange Fruit

I dreamt I was a tree  
covered with strange fruit.

Well, no, I lie:

there was no dream,  
there was no tree

but what am I to do  
with these dark things  
breaking out about me,  
splitting,  
oozing with sap?

David Brooks

## Su Shi

Leaving the town in the mountains  
after seven years' exile from his native province  
the old poet meets a woman one third his age,  
the most beautiful he has ever seen in this place.  
"Will you not write a poem about me", she asks him,  
"since you have written so many others?"  
He looks at her a long time  
then nods his head regretfully.  
To write, he thinks to himself, or be haunted:  
some questions do not have answers.

David Brooks

# The Balcony

I

Straight from the airport and already, in two days,  
she has taken my virginity in more ways  
than I can count. She is  
outside on the balcony, translating poetry again,  
carrying words  
from one language to the other, bribing  
the border-guards, arguing with the grammarians,  
pulling the wool  
over the eyes of the lexicographers.

I go out  
and kiss her, so long this time  
that it gets dark  
and the street clears of traffic.  
When I open my eyes  
the moonlight almost blinds me.  
She is  
writing a message  
with her tongue on my neck  
in a language I don't understand,  
there are birds  
nesting in my hair,  
my skin  
is singing  
a wild, untranslatable jubilate.

II

The flying foxes are screeching in the trees outside the window.  
They are angry and jealous and want us to stop.  
We have been making love  
for almost eighteen hours, they say,  
and they are afraid for their reputation. We must  
love to rule, they plead, no  
moaning like this in the bedroom, no making  
the floor-boards creak, no

sudden, explosive cries, no  
comings without goings – only  
launchings out from the balcony, ridings  
on the evening thermals, glidings,  
fruit-ward, arms  
extended, against  
the night sky.

### III

She is  
riding me, facing  
away,  
and I am  
deep inside her.  
The moles  
and freckles  
on her back  
are an unknown constellation.  
On the other side  
of the universe – much  
too far away  
and far  
too dark to see –  
there are  
her perfect breasts,  
her face,  
her closed eyes.

### IV

We are sitting on a beach at night  
and there is a storm out to sea. The lightning  
illuminates the headland  
with a regular, sudden halo  
then races off, horizontally, for South America.  
In the dark it leaves behind  
the white

crests hasten toward us  
wave after wave  
as if there were almost no time left  
as if there were almost  
no time at all  
and they were so desperate to touch us.

V

10pm  
on a midsummer evening  
and again  
we start to kiss on the balcony.  
Someone on the street  
whistles  
and a small group gathers.  
There are cat-calls, cheers, mock applause,  
someone else  
arrives in a taxi,  
a bus  
pulls up  
in the middle of traffic  
with all of its windows open.  
After a while  
the crowd  
stops jeering. People  
watch on in utter silence.  
When we look up  
no-one is there,  
the leaves  
have fallen from the trees,  
the koels  
and swallows have departed,  
it is almost winter.

David Brooks

# The Barn Owl

In late summer  
I feel the chill again  
the first marauding  
from the high plateau

I can sense the teeth in everything  
and claws under rock and ti-tree  
biting down

in the dry sand of the creekbed  
I find the skeleton of a barn owl  
and snap off its skull  
with a twist of my thumb and forefinger

I string it  
with a length of fishing-line  
and for days  
I wear it around my neck  
dreaming at night  
of the crack of lizard-bones  
the death-cries of small marsupials

the hard beak  
as I work  
knocking against my chest

the great, absent eyes  
as I sleep  
watching from eucalypts  
or waiting in dark rafters.

David Brooks



# The Bees

I dream of myself  
asleep upon a hillside,  
those huge black bees – crawling –  
emerging from the  
dark hole of my mouth.  
The bees  
are groggy  
and struggling toward the light  
What have they  
left in me?  
What will they bring  
from their slow  
groping  
over the bright fields?  
How will I store it?  
How will I take it home?

David Brooks

# The Cold Front

It was coming

the cold front  
and the complex weather

we returned  
and the difficult loves were waiting

the long conversations  
with pain in the final sentences

winter  
gathering her parcel for the victory

stones, feathers, bottles  
brimming with light

the troops  
breaking in through the syllables

the empty cups  
sitting before us in the snow

this  
like all the others

a lullaby

a few grains of salt at the centre

David Brooks

# The Dark Trees

Leave your house, rise  
from the table  
where the candles have guttered  
and a blue light  
through the shutters  
creeps over the fishbones and the broken bread,

go out  
under the dark trees  
to where the boat  
lies waiting by the rock,

pull it  
across the grey sand to the water's edge  
and push  
out over the glistening bay.

As you row  
along the bright path that the moon has made,  
think  
that the soft light of the moon  
has entered everything,

that somewhere  
far beneath you  
a sunken boat  
lies waiting by a rock,

that all around  
the dark trees of the coral and the weed  
bend gently  
as the cold winds through them,

that fish  
the colour  
of moonlight  
drift all night through their branches.



# The Gap

On the pond path by Campbell's  
amidst the wheel-ruts and the fallen leaves  
a gap nothing fills

it gets late

birds  
cross in the half-light  
lugging their haul toward Tumut  
Bimberi  
Kosciusko  
the great lake of silence beneath them

flight after flight after flight

David Brooks

# The Ibex

My panther is active tonight,  
hungry, intent,  
nobody's business but her own

not content  
to leave me  
gutted by moonlight,  
I must be  
her lair-thing,  
her skin-to-lie-on,  
her gnawed bone.

David Brooks

# The Lyrebird

Early

on the way to a meeting at Batemans  
I glimpse a lyrebird  
on the edge of the Mt Agony road  
gone as soon as I notice it

I slow down

and look at the place where it entered  
but there is nothing,  
the bird  
become dry branch, scrub-  
shadow.

Later

writing this down  
I wonder what part of the self it is  
hides amongst language

– looking at  
these words, this  
page,  
trying to find where I entered.

David Brooks

# The Tree

I go out to see Chloe, for the first time in ages,  
and find her pacing the driveway,  
looking ten years older  
and even more exhausted than she is.  
There is a man asleep on her sofa  
and she can't get rid of him; he's burnt  
her arms with a cigarette the night before  
and stolen three packs of Marlborough,  
and earlier, a month ago, took  
her mobile phone and all her pension money.  
That's how he got in, she said, claiming  
to have brought it back, but all he had  
were a few tabs of speed he told her she could sell.  
I throw him out – it isn't hard: he must sense  
the fury in my bones – then take her off  
to eat something, buy groceries.  
Afterward we sit out in the yard  
talking. Life has been so hard for her  
and Lord knows I've been little help.  
At the bottom, near her fence, there's a tall  
and slender eucalypt, with salmon-coloured bark  
so smooth you want to touch it. When I say as much,  
she tells me it had been in bloom  
until only a few nights ago, large golden crowns of it,  
and that for two weeks now  
the flying-foxes have come each dusk  
and clambered about it all night long  
getting drunk on the nectar, treating it  
as if it were their local pub. The trunk  
has borers, she explains – what I took  
for splatterings of fruit-bat dung  
are actually the gum-tree bleeding.  
Now that I look more closely I can see  
their traces all the way up  
and places where the foliage  
looks greyer than the rest.  
It stresses the tree, she says,  
it has to dig deeper than you'd think  
to find the sap it needs.



I think of you, of course,  
how drunk I can get on the taste of you,  
how the sap rises, and then of my sister, how tall  
and slender she once was,  
then of the tree in all of us,  
nothing more, just of the tree,  
stirring gently in the breeze, swaying  
in the night wind,  
drawing its sap from somewhere, deep down, as all trees do.

David Brooks

# Without Warning

My father spent most of his adult life  
working for the Commonwealth Public Service, shunting files  
from one end of his long desk to the other.  
When he died he left half-written  
a History of Australian Immigration,  
only half-joking when he willed that I should finish it.  
Why didn't he tell me  
how little would ever be completed?  
letters left unanswered, accounts not settled, promises  
never fulfilled, the parts of that motorcycle  
unresembled, lying ten years  
on a concrete floor in Westgarth St, people  
dying without warning, mid sentence,  
taking the next words with them.

David Brooks

# Yes

You know how  
just before we die  
our whole life is supposed  
to flash before our eyes?  
Well, should that happen, we'd surely have,  
while it is flashing,  
to come to that moment when our whole life  
flashes before our eyes,  
and while that was happening  
all over again, we'd come again  
to that same moment, and so on,  
which is only to say that, while I know  
this might not have been good enough for Zeno  
and that it's a certainty  
that death happens anyway, for that one  
minute, when that thought came  
and I imagined  
living this life  
over and over,  
I said to myself, despite  
all the effort, all the  
pain of it,  
despite  
all that has happened  
and is likely to  
again and again,  
Yes, I thought, as I was watching you  
getting ready for bed tonight,  
Yes, though I knew  
even then  
it was crazy beyond measure,  
Yes, I would, Yes,  
Please, Yes.

David Brooks