

Classic Poetry Series

Bruce Beaver
- poems -

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Bruce Beaver(14 February 1928 - 17 February 2004)

Biography

Beaver was born in Manly, New South Wales. He was educated at the Manly Public School and at the Sydney Boys' High School. He worked at a number of jobs, as a cow farmer, in radio, as a wages clerk, a surveyor's labourer, fruit-picker, proof-reader and journalist, before deciding to write full-time. From 1958 to 1962, he lived in New Zealand and Norfolk Island.

In 1961 Beaver's first book of poetry was published. He wrote his first poem in response to the dropping of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima, and continued to write even while working as a labourer. Thanks to his marriage, he was able to become a full-time writer. Even though he suffered from bipolar disorder, Beaver was able to continue writing until close to his death in 2004.

When asked to list their favourite books, Dorothy Porter named Bruce Beaver and is quoted as saying:

<i>Bruce Beaver is one of Australia's greatest and most magical poets. I have been carrying his book Charmed Lives(UQP) around in my bag like an amulet. His poetry is pungent, discursive, feral, disturbing, wise and very funny. Charmed Lives is out of print. It shouldn't be.</i>

Cat Lady

Outside the cathedral at five
the cats congregated and I was fulfilled
feeding them. I would shuffle
in my modest skirt and tatty shawl
towards the drinking fountain, its base
sprayed with the territorial signatures
of toms warmed by the effusions
of tabbies. The air charmed by a broken
mewing, the cheap scraps replaced
by a glottal monotone of purring —
my poor ones — so many types
of the single need. So many desperate
appetites. An insane male
human once accosted me
and asked why didn't I think of the starving
children in South East Asia, Western Africa.
I said what if I did?
What good would it do them?
He jumped up and down and tried to kick
my cats. I am known as the Cat Lady
and not the patron saint of the world's
starving, or this city's.
It's all because the sexes cannot
cease from procreating. I saw
on the television frogs copulating
in their green myriads. Sometimes the female
would die underneath the onslaught
but another male would mount her dead
body. In the park the other
day I watched a sick pigeon
collapse beneath the weight of another
then with her last life surge
somersault backwards and lie dead
while the male moved on uninterruptedly
pecking towards another breeding bird
I have no argument with people in other ways;
I move among them in no deliberate disguise
I am no cleaner than my cats. It is
my work to feed them, not to breed them.

Nobody else will help to keep them alive.
Every epochal now and then
I know who I am actually. I think
I know who I was in a personal sense. I recreate
thoughts of the past under the shade
of the cathedral's walls.
I think merely of our breathing sanely together.
Only not here, not in this sometime city
of madmen and deprived cats,
where values are all equated with money
and the highest prayer is for power.
I have no prescriptions, interpretations, prophecies.
With no comment other than Share
I waddle towards my first three thousand years.

Bruce Beaver

Death's Directives (I)

When life was all about me
like a constraining womb
I wrote poems about death.
I did not call them death poems
but thought they were all about life
in extremis, life as an agony.

Now at the end of winter
death seems to be everywhere,
in the brown and grey of dead leaves
in the dull and unscintillating glare
of the midday river's surface,
in the heavy smells from a nearby factory,
even in the stormtrooper's strut and stance
of a foraging magpie,
the awkward rigor of an excreting dog.

So many sights and smells
even a sound or two
of TV commercials
and the feeling of frost in the toes
and the back of the neck,
my wife's cold nose and my own
cold, pen pushing fingers —

So many ciphers of the year's
dead end that will not
in a week or two transform itself
for September's sake but will hold off
for as long as it can from celebrations
of sneeze inducing pollen,
the clashing colour schemes of new
blossom, the pallid blue of warmer
skies, the faintly honeyed air,
the paraphernalia of spring.

Not life or death, just the first kicks
of continuity. So that now,
still surrounded by death —

death of this, death of that,
fly shells in the window groove,
beattle shells among the brown leaves;
death of these, death of those,
5000 in the Philippines earth quake,
3 children in an Ulster family —
I write madly about life.

In another month it will be on
again, the girls will stop hugging their cold
tits, the boys denim flies
will be bulging, the little kids
here and everywhere else
on the continent will be rolling
around in clover grass and on
the warming asphalt. Dogs, cats
and birds will go madder than usual
about their courting. Everything
and everyone will come alive
until summer burns or sulks
its way through the wreckage of
December and everyone celebrates
the birthday of the king of life,
death notwithstanding.

Bruce Beaver

Death's Directives (Ii)

Death beckoned me towards the beach
the same one on which I'd spent days,
weeks, years made up of the hours
of my life as a child —
The hidden in the warm salt hazy dusk
of summer evenings I'd moved mesmerically
from end to end of the darkened sands
feeling their mush of powder between my toes
at the phosphorescent tideline
or breathing the tired air
beneath the seawall.

Or forgetful of everything but the now
of sunlight and spray of the breaking wave
shouts and cries of the playful surfers
at morning, midday or dreamily fading
late afternoon of the interminable days
of summer, blue white sky and the jade
and opal of the everywhere reaching sea
and the illimitable horizon line.

Or walking forward towards the central
Steyne's mid-point of beach and my home
two streets back from the sands and the blowing
spray, walking beneath those colonnades
and high cathedral rood of healthy pines
where the pigeons clustered and rose to fall
gently irresistibly to the grassy verge
of the path beneath the pines, where I heard
walking a music moving with my steps
withing me as I was within that landscape.
Or kneeling again on the cool sands
of autumn, following the line
of wrack, on my childish knees, shuffling
forward like some pale and smooth skinned
animal snuffling its way from stick to weed
and other relics of the ocean's saga.

It was death that walked with or knelt

beside me there — Death the colour of dawn
or sunset, bright midday or dark midnight
of deep summer when the sleepless people
come to walk within the lukewarm shallows
or sit beside the wall in the breathless air.

Whether in heat or chill air I moved
beside the ocean it was death that led
or accompanied me — Not mine, but the myriad
around me in the streets and every second
house, the simple cottage or the foursquare
block of flats. Up from the beach or down
from the hill I'd watched death knock at many doors
and the dead come out and move towards the ocean,
go lightly across the sand or heavily
dragging reluctant feet to fade into
the neverending cortege of waves —
Until I knew I moved and went with the dead
in pretty costumes or the plainest cloth,
lightly or heavily garbed to suit the season
until the great storms would come and neither
the partly living nor the dead could cross
the battered shelving sand or find a way
into that abyss of the transformed ocean.

The I would huddle in the sheltered room
and make new myths about the life of things
until death beckoned once again
to me to go out into the streets
of Limbo, down to the sands and waves
and wait a while as forever came and went
across the calmer waters towards and from
the perpetually falling horizon.

Bruce Beaver

East Of Atlan

<i>for Dorothy Porter &/i>
Square white roofs with square white towers.
Above them, balconies of white
abutting, tables richly bearing
fruit and wine, with amply cushioned
curving divans of carved wood.
Several figures, fair haired, supply
tall in pastel gowns, one white
as the shining bright of the balcony.
Infinite unspotted blue
above, immense unclouded zenith.
To the east the glinting turquoise
of the high noon's restless ocean.
Speech as music intermingling,
words as notes and chorded phrases.
Someone wanted to fly off the
balcony and be a seabird.
Nobody at first restrained him
for he often poised for flight from
everything inanely earthbound.
Flapping sleeves he stood and chanting
challenged ocean to receive him
as the first to be engulfed by
watery impatient lavings.
He would be the first and others
by the million follow him
for the continent was crumbling
slowly from the southern edges.
Surely it would take so many
years to rob us of our birthright
but we acted out the barely
yet believed in last submergence
of the first of continents
foremost still in all our dreaming.
Ships were leaving daily nightly
packed with passengers and produce
even to barbaric landfalls.
We would be the last to witness
high untroubled noons like this one.

Not a tremor underneath us,
only fruit and wine forever
and our poet scarce restrained from
leaping from the radiant rooftop.
Holding him we felt a sudden
chill breeze on our backs and bare heads.
Evening had come early to us.

Bruce Beaver

Lauds And Plants (Xiv)

<i>Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down
Simon & Garfunkel</i>

what does the world know of you and me
together what does it know of us together
why should it care

if separated we should depend on substanceless
memories and make much of moments
gone into the timeless

not far from where you are now is still a beach
at the side of a Bay of Islands township circumspect
of history and tourism

white board roofs and walls salt-white sunlight
abutting the beach a road of residential
front row of a summer place

we came there in mid-winter torn from a hibernating
cover by a need to distance ourselves
from a nest sullied by unrest

impending ill-health and the threat of a Damoclean
future pressing us into temporary exile
from the hill-encircled city

inclined but unable to be lovers we walked
the open streets of the town and promenaded
the beach front road accompanied

by an old black dog who picked us up and posed
for our photographs looking up understandingly
into our bewildered eyes

along the harsh sanded tideline heaped with shell
and a wrack of pebble-smooth green glass fragments
coin-sized and shaped

the worn pieces of china plate and crockery

cameoed still with gull's eye glimpses of willow
pattern blue and white

others with roseate reminders of a durable
past of generations of meals and afternoon
teas the beach was homelily

haunted by endurance we sat on yellow ochred
rocks at one end beneath a small cliff
and looked across the bay

towards the treaty house handsomer than
though somehow not so self-important as
the gravure tourist brochures

advising us we were now part of the country's
history during our stay at least as significant
if not in our own eyes

then in those of the quietly possessive locals
as the bullet pocked walls of the oldest church
the hill-top high flagpole

lopped down by a rebellious Maori and re-erected
several times to the alternate chagrin
and amusement of the settlers

on the far side of the bay we found a long white
beach empty of visitors and walked our apprehensions
down and underfoot

for the day I have the photo of you fawn slacked
and mohair scarved as chic as Laurent model
perched upon a log

walking we talked of things in front of us there
and then the instantaneous gossip of being
opened our minds to the mild

onrush of winter sunlight and the keen
salt-edged breeze on the verge of gusts seated
you sketched shells and stark branches

in charcoal or sepia ink which I inscribed
with almost appropriate imitation senryu
skeptical zen tyros

I read Wu Cheng-en in a paperback translation
Witheford's third book of hermetic verse
and you Waley's versions

of never-at-home-except-to-convalesce Po Chu-I
our English landlady told us with fevered eyes
and parched carping voice

that D.H.L. was filthy and so was sex
her husband made us over-seasoned meals
with an off season enthusiasm

we had to cross the road when an old horse farted
back at us from a sparse field even here were
disturbed stomachs and minds

all this so little to recall so less than nothing
to the world was our first time alone
together released a while

from the terrible slavery of money minting hours
our continent honeymoon in the tiny room
at an empty guest house

the short breathed prelude to the dinning long-winded
cantata of collapse and agonising
rehabilitation

separately always together even now
bridged over troubled waters of bereavement
consummation consummation

Bruce Beaver

Letters To Live Poets (I)

God knows what was done to you.
I may never find out fully.
The truth reaches us slowly here,
is delayed in the mail continually
or censored in the tabloids. The war
now into its third year
remains undeclared.
The number of infants, among others, blistered
and skinned alive by napalm
has been exaggerated
by both sides we are told,
and the gas does not seriously harm
does not kill but is merely
unbearably nauseating.
Apparently none of this
is happening to us.

I meant to write to you more than a
ago. Then there was as much to hear,
as much to tell.
There was the black plastic monster
prefiguring hell
displayed on the roof
of the shark aquarium at the wharf.
At Surfers' Paradise were Meter Maids
glabrous in gold bikinis.
It was before your country's
president came among us like a formidable
virus. Even afterwards —
after I heard (unbelievably)
you had been run down on a beach
by a machine
apparently while sunning yourself;
that things were terminal again —
even then I might have written.

But enough of that. I could tell by the tone
of your verses there were times
when you had ranged around you,

looking for a lift from the gift horse,
your kingdom for a Pegasus.
But to be trampled by the machine
beyond protest...

I don't have to praise you; at least
I can say I had ears for your voice
but none of that really matters now.
Crushed though. Crushed on the littered sands.
Given the coup de grace of an empty beer can,
out of sight of the "lordly and isolate satyrs".
Could it have happened anywhere else
than in your country, keyed to obsolescence?

I make these words perform for you
knowing though you are dead, that you "historically
belong to the enormous bliss of American death",
that your talkative poems remain
among the living things
of the sad, embattled beach-head.

Say that I am, as ever, the young-
old victor of communications.
It's not that I wish to avoid
talking to myself or singing
the one-sided song.
It's simply that I've come to be
more conscious of the community
world-wide, of live, mortal poets.
Moving about the circumference
I pause each day
and speak to you and you.
I haven't many answers, few
enough; fewer questions left.
Even when I'm challenged "Who
goes there?" I give ambiguous
replies as though the self linking
heart and mind had become a gap.

You see, we have that much in common
already. It's only when I stop
thinking of you living I remember

nearby our home there's an aquarium
that people pay admission to,
watching sharks at feeding time:
the white, jagged rictus in the grey
sliding anonymity,
faint blur of red through green,
the continually spreading stain.

I have to live near this, if not quite with it.
I realize there's an equivalent
in every town and city in the world.
Writing to you keeps the local, intent
shark-watchers at bay
(who if they thought at all
would think me some kind of ghoul):
rings a bell for the gilded coin-slots
at the Gold Coast;
sends the president parliament's head on a platter;
writes Vietnam like a huge four-letter
word in blood and faeces on the walls
of government; reminds me when
the intricate machine stalls
there's a poet still living at this address.

Bruce Beaver

Letters To Live Poets (Vi)

Pain, the problem of, not answered
by dogma, orthodox or other-
wise. The only problem being
how to bear with. You may have an
answer ready. I, only the
long-winded question breaking words
up and down the crooked line,
the graph of pain. Burns got it
in the neck. That's where it gets me.
Coleridge wrote "My sole sensuality
was not to be in pain!"

Some of us are supposed to sing
when it's bad. Old Graves says he
whistled once with it white-hot.
Beethoven maybe wrote the "even"
symphonies when he was at odds with
feeling. At midnight Nietzsche's eyes
turned red with it. Valéry cracked his
knuckles, succumbing at mid-day.
Freud chewed aspirin,
his cancered jaw half-plastic.
Whatever else it isn't, pain's
feeling. Maybe the most intimate experience
we're capable of.

Tonight my head's clamped and hearing's
affected. Rheumatism's in the
neck. We knew it was in the air
today. All day the surf roared
till the spray was thick as fog.
Everything's salted down. I like it —
the primal salt-lick in the air.
Both of us like the old sea breath,
but she with her sinusitis, I with
rheumatics, ache and gasp, winded
before the big crass statement of pain.
And its talent for metaphors:
it piles up a tide of breakers

then subsides leaving pools
full of little twinges. But there's
this much to be said for it:
there's no falsity in it at all.
There's no ambiguity to pain.
You've got to fight it to the death —
its own, or yours. You don't relieve
yourself of it, you use a pain
killer on the understanding
it's born and reborn again.
Pain shows eternity as hell, but
without it you're dead. How does it feel
to be without any pain?

Bruce Beaver

Letters To Live Poets (Xii)

Three anti-depressants and one diuretic a day
seven and five times a week respectively
save me from the pit.

I pray while I'm taking them and in between doses
because, as Dylan Thomas says, I have seen the gates of hell.

Once I drew back in distaste from the metho drinker
and his bleary lady friend — you've seen them
weaving a way through non-existent traffic.
He, swollen faced, with a backside kicked in
by what the tougher call life. She,
the terrible veteran doll of Pantagruel's nursery.
Let them pass into the peaceful holocaust.

In Rushcutter's park they congregated over bottles.
Walking, we avoided them as mined ground,
fearful of their implosions bloodying the day.
Later I fell so far into self-sickness
I envied them. My thoughts
haunted their submerged wreckage like a squid.
At their groaning subsidence I retreated
into a pall of ink.

Whatever I tell you,
you have heard before.

I remember Swift's
fascination with the insane. I whistled
Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came
outside the grimy walls of Callan Park.
Inside — il miglior fabbro — the best of us all
chewing bloody knuckles, wept dry,
daft as a headless chicken circling dust.
Where are prayers said for him and the parkside horrors?
Some prayed for us, I know. I'm still here
partially, trying to live detachedly.
Is it only the exceptional ones, the broken battlers,
shred me into uselessness? Does it mean
I'd pick and choose in hell? Discriminative?
Like a dog in rut — no,
self-abasement's out. So is complacency.

I'm never likely to forget
the day I walked on hands and knees
like Blake's Nebuchadnezzar, scenting the pit.
So it's one day at a time spent checking
the menagerie of self; seeing
the two-headed man has half as much
of twice of everything; curbing the tiger;
sunning the snake; taking stock of
Monkey, Piggsy, Sandy's belt of skulls.

Bruce Beaver

Lunch Date

Ten adults at a laden table,
two children sitting on the floor,
one dog to bark when it was able,
who could ask for anything more.
The same old senses intermingling
in spooky ways above the food.
The same old psyches blending; singling
to help inflate the same old mood:
love me, love my lone uniqueness;
listen, tell me what I've said
while the world outside in bleakness
loses count of all its dead.
Two go out and three come forward,
ever older grows the mass.
I have only my and your word
that the end will come to pass.
Here it's just another weekend,
summers flame and winters freeze.
The end of spring is not a bleak end
in the land of cows and bees.
We all ate and drank together
being more fortunate than most.
The wind played havoc with the weather
the rain boomed like an invited ghost
to be sent about its business elsewhere
haunting the rest of the stricken state
casting its watery gift of spells where
it would make the dust abate.
Over our zany conversation
the dryness blew its hurricane.
our wine helped water conservation,
our wind rattled the windowpane.
We raved a lot of first and last things,
Five courses vanished in an hour or two,
The outward gale stayed on to blast things
to nowhere known to me and you.

Bruce Beaver

Merging Aspects

Another king I knew had twelve champions,
each chosen for his astrological sign.
My favourite was the Piscean who combined
courage and gentleness but who eventually
was slain by the Aquarian, a mess of
ambition and impeccable manners.
The women of the court barely differed
from the harems I had once pretended to guard:
brittle, fickle, beautiful and intelligent
in matters of court affairs and male intrigue.
In everything to do with the quotidian
they were vulgar, inept and invalid.
This time I had a savage paramour,
a magus like myself with no more regard
than I for inbred kings or their progeny.
In the ambling course of things we made a good
bad pair and parted the best of enemies.
He made me think of love's discrepancies:
how with the best will in the world and a spilled
cornucopia of physicalities
two can pass from strangers into strangers.
There was no intimacy we had not shared
including several of our own invention,
no finer or grosser point of the body's being
we had not explored, the stupra and beatitudes
of the mind's behaviour mapped. Once and forever
our feelings and ideas were exchanged
and the emotions' gamut intermingled.
Yet all we had to show for it were ashes
of the long caress, the brief orgasmic pyre
ensconced three moments longer with our magics.
And not a single scion of the harrowing,
no daughter to reheat our tepid ageing.
All I remember of his individual
features is a single red-flecked iris,
a stem and testes like the stele at Delos,
taste for wine made slightly effervescent
with minuscule amounts of scented sherbet,
and never the slightest wish to know himself.

The king expelled all of us from his court
a periodical purge. The eleven remaining
champions were auctioned to barbarians.
I have never known the date of my birth nor want to.
The stars are incandescently impersonal.

Bruce Beaver

Monolith

At the foot of a northern pylon of the Harbour Bridge
I have kept my vigil since the mighty span was built.
I come early in the day from worn-out corners of the area
and sit when the sun is out until the waning afternoon,
thence to another role, another manifestation of duty.
On my way I pass a cavern echoing with traffic noise.
When the sun is setting it blazes up like a testing tunnel
of the cosmic fire at the beginning and ending of universes.
It reminds me we are not that far in time from a kalpa's ending.
More than four thousand million years in the lives
of the starry and the planetary entities
who influence us and are never truly seen.
At the pylon's base I meet with seeming fools and sages,
more of the former, alas, but it was ever the same
at the other Thebes. The great towering stone columns could fittingly house
the troglodytic priests and harbour an inward turning flame
in bifurcated flowering for the known and unknown god
and my own dilapidated dispensation.
The only way the scene differs now
is in the lack of overt piety,
the thinning out of conscious pilgrims passing by me
here upon the seasonally withered grass.

Bruce Beaver

Myth

I'm on intimate terms with so many parts of the night
daylight seems duller and far more prosaically formed.
At first feebly I learned night's calisthenics
then how to apply them in the arena of day;
that blood-bespattered sand-coloured circle.
Once or twice reprieved by a favourable hand-signal
on whose part I shall never know,
only to begin new confrontations
before taking up the old ministrations of night.
I had companions there, men, women, children
who knew me as their friend and uneasy guide
about the unilluminated beauty
of towering columns and marble moon-webbed pavings.
Some I knew better than others and openly loved
yet one it was I turned to above all
for something like the night's refreshing favours,
an intermittent gift of sweet renewal
all of her own inimitable giving.
The taste of day was grit and unleavened bread,
while bread of life the lord of night bestowed on us.
Only the upturned chasm of the blue
was looked to as the promise of a god.
We exercised on sand, resting and sleeping
in stony cellules like the veriest prisoners,
escaping only at night within ourselves
to an inward and an outward realm of beauty.
A reality more tangible than day's
despite the terrible exercise of power
it was in each of us to take advantage of.
Of course — I see it now — we all were truly
prisoners, not merely alike but actually
imprisoned in the day's parching arena
for the duration of our savage lives.
Nothing but death would ever set us free;
nothing but night renewed our will to live.
For I was not alone; like some half-hearted
faith, unsure and doubtful of its sources,
of us learned to trust each other, telling
tales of the templed avenues of night

and families of their own that sojourned there:
beauty of the children and the deep
radiance of the women, the quiet strength
and wisdom of the men, brothers, fathers.
In all their company that which we ever lacked
reflected on our own terrible lineage
of kill and ultimately to be killed.
Then on a morning like the rest, a body
found in its cubicle without a mark
and we all knew its owner had escaped
into the lasting night and was at home.
Then another and another went to join him.
I know for they met me in my share of night.
I begged them to release me from the day
but each one said the same: not before time.
No falling on one's sword would bring cessation
from the cruel day's long exercise of power,
merely return in another shape and form
to the arena and the stony cell.
So each night as I move among the growing
company of the old and ever new
I know that as they wend continually westward,
their star-centred ways forever with them,
that on a morning I will wake no longer
to sand-blasting sun and blue like a madman's eye
but to the darkening hills beyond the luminous
city, and slowly descend them to my heritage.

Bruce Beaver

Old Flame

I was friendly with a woman once.
It was an unusual experience.
There were certain innate boundaries
and the inevitably marked frontiers.
Occasionally one crossed them to meet the other.
It apparently had something to do with sex.
Before I had a chance to explain my shortcomings
she quickly justified her limitations.
A woman senses things at once — so does a man.
Though not wholly man or woman I call myself man
because as they say a womb makes all the difference.
(This living in the sphere of double distortion
is everything the priests promised and more —
sometimes they threatened but mostly they promised.)
Nevertheless, we confided to a certain degree.
She told me of varied potions and the effect they had
on people. I told her of poisons and the way they tasted
when cleverly disguised in food and drink.
She was less than half my age which may have had
something to do with it all. She was not beautiful —
neither was I. We offset rather than complemented.
I met her at a banquet and liked the way she spoke,
sibilantly and surely. I also admired
the way her ears flattened against her coiffure.
Between us we managed to account for
a number of politicians and several self-confident
business people. Quite detachedly, without fuss.
We were employed extramurally
by a society of leading citizens —
but that was aeons ago and besides,
she has been dead it seems to me far longer
than I have been alive. From time to time
I miss her, for after all we had been partners
in something like crime or catering an almost domestic
arrangement, a limited company of two making
the best of things in a world of all possible sexes.

Bruce Beaver

Poem For Adrienne Rich (I)

Wonderful woman, proud to be a person
in this day and age of swapped sexes.
To feel love for one's own kind
(sex is just an arbitrary accident) —
always clinical the other,
the open-hearted surgery of love
between mere opposites in most things malleable,
a never quite melding agreement
to disagree on most things in life.
And yet you were friends with what
sounds like a "perfect partner" for
half of your life; a "good match", productive
for both of you, even redolent
with healthy children. You've had
the best and worst of all possible worlds:
wife, mother, poet, lover, a piercing
intellect and a truly inventive
art. I can only envy in a friendly way
your giftedness. I heard you interviewed
on that poor rat-bag of usually second-rate
opinions the radio by a talented
journalist on lispig leave from the hell
of Zagreb. Your quiet, calm and yes
charming replies sent me after your books
when I had previously thought you
not only immune from but averse to
all men. Not quite, it seems.
You'll talk with some who'll listen to
their dreams and yours. O stay alive
good lady. We all have need of you
and every book of fine poems
from the fecund fingers of your writing hand.

Bruce Beaver

Poem For Adrienne Rich (Ii)

Reading your poems makes me want to
make again. Something stirs in me
that is no longer man-root,
no longer the male imperative
that drove you and your sisters
under the skin up the wall
down which courses the wailing
and weeping of a myriad women.
Survival of wits is hard come-by
in this world of warring families.
We know there are too many people
here including ourselves and that each
appears to have the right to be so.
Ah love what is your true form,
your true self among five billion selves?
As you and I age (we were born
a year apart) I pray your health
holds together. Mine has collapsed
from the congenital start.
And yet I lived to write and love a lot.
Not with your fiery vision of words,
your smoky camouflaging of pain.
And such anger held in barest
check. Dear God forgive the males
who ploughed your sensibilities
like an open field, sowing rocks.
And the women — the later lovers
who didn't quite rise to your
occasions (I tend to think in cliches
now I am only half alive). I didn't mean
to obtrude in this your poem. But
we are quite personal in what we write
and the world may eventually be
a tiny bit the better for our speaking
out of ourselves.

Bruce Beaver

Poems For Adrienne Rich (Iii)

As you say in another way somewhere
men just dropp women gradually
wear-out. The men all nose-dive
out of life after getting all entangled
in it like a massive spider-web
sticky with their own self-pity at
their always predictable predicament.
The women after losing them learn
new loves, new lives, for sometimes
quite a long while then into the earth,
that ash-can for used up humans.
Sometimes a couple stays together
a man and a woman, a man and a man,
a woman and a woman, your latter
way. But the pain of loss, of one's
potency or a whole partner, remains
with you for the fragmentary whole
of life. It takes some getting used to,
life, then death. Between the two of them
we don't quite know who or what we
are this or any other time it suits
the cosmos to renege on our aspirations.

Bruce Beaver

Poems For Adrienne Rich (Iv)

Halfway through one of your longer poems
I paused for the breath of these words, unclamorous
to come onto the page. As it happens
this minor poem is happening now.
I know you are part semitic as I, your father was Jewish.
We see most things clearly but I not as wholly as you.
Reading aloud that last bit would sound as though
I thought you "holier than thou". That wasn't my intention.
Just to let the small part of a world that gets around
to eventually reading some of the stuff I write —
chiefly this: that you do see a difficult world
clear and whole most of the time. This is worthy
of more than applause, mere bravos and hands rattling together.
You deserve the fullest allegiance we can bring to the reading
of your vision of this, the afflicted world and all
its afflicted denizens, chiefly human. Though broken spouted
teapots and varied familial bric-a-brac figure in
its totality. I can't come to easy terms seeing things
like these effortlessly with you but that's the way it is,
the way they are, and I along with them awkwardly
fitted to something like a role in a bad play,
not comic, not tragic, just endlessly, kaleidoscopically bad;
a shaken shambles of the half-real unreality.

Bruce Beaver

Prelude

The only space I've inhabited
has been my self.
Ask me where one street intersects
with another hereabouts
and I couldn't tell you.
Ask me their names and I'd say
Never heard of them.
I wouldn't exactly get lost
if you blindfolded and spun me
around three times a kilometre
from here. All I could say though
when the blindfold was taken off
and I was asked where I was
would be Manly.
Not the one I learnt by heart
as a child, or the other
I knew as a young man
its main street full of good
and varied shops.
It would be the one I call
the rotisserie with its
food shop souvenirs food shop
souvenirs all the way from the
wharf to Ocean Beach
in summer another kind of
rotisserie with the black coffee
coloured bodies and the bare
breasts inviting more than hot
stares. But that's the South
Steyne end we're in the section
somewhere back from that
portion of the lengthy beach
called North Steyne about its
middle flavoured by some
surfers and cultivators of
skincancers. It has plenty of
pleasant trees left pines figs
and gums most too old
and large for their own good.

But the only thing that shades Q'cliff
beach at 3pm is a 14 storey
block of units not a plot
of pines as they did 50
years ago. I was nearly
drowned there when I was sixteen
one year before the WW2's
ending. Sucked out and under
by a rip I was upheld
and tossed on a shoreward
wave by 2 young lifesavers
as true to their title as I was
to cowards. I never swam in
the waves again or body surfed.
That terrible stranglehold of
green coils and black depths
fascinated like a cosmic
anaconda from the distance
of the beach no closer.
I'd walk the shore to see
the women's bodies and watch their
minds trying to keep up
with them sexist and suicidal
at seventeen at nineteen
saved by a fate worse than
death by two of them
at loose ends with and without
husbands. By then a poet
but just as I didn't know
where I was geographically
I didn't know more than
four flowers from the others
three trees from the rest.
Reading Keats and Shakespeare
shamed as much as gave me joy.
I couldn't even tell what a piece of
cake tasted like. In fact
I avoided that word and the first
person singular almost from the
start. I fussed about with what
I saw and tried to reinvent it.
After writing about practically

nothing but love for several
years I tried to write about anything
but it for another 50.
But it squeezed itself
in and I know as much about it
as the streets trees flowers
ocean and all around me
that's next to nothing until I met
you and then I started Oh
so slowly to set about
learning something of it
from you by you with you
and finally got it into
my system and out onto
paper once and for all
but even then it was over
30 years after the event
of events and of course
illegal in its intent
but by then I had learnt
to lose fears of that kind
and poured out my small amounts
of passion into thimblefuls
of additives to otherwise
almost impersonal poems
and finally before too
late opened what was left
of the floodgates rinsing
our landscape known
once and for all.

Bruce Beaver

Rationale

Youth, you say. What of it?
I could say I was as fair
and handsome as a hero.
But I was always plain. I hated
and loved much as a young man.
Once, I had a preference for women,
to hate and love them ceaselessly
rather than avoidable young men.
That came gradually with my riving.
But who's to say the ungainly
pursuit of young ephebes
wasn't as daft and ardent
as the chase after hetaerae.
Much time was wasted in the hunt,
much in bewailing its necessity,
the rest in eating, drinking and sleeping.
I never gave a hoot for what
they call the minds of either sex,
their messy cerebral selves
or mixed-up Chinese puzzles
of egregious emotions.
What else did I do to justify myself
and my existence to the neighbourhood?
(This was before I haunted the metropolis.)
I gathered their dung nightly and distributed it
over a field half as big as the town.
This made some of the more venturesome
girls and boys I fervently pursued
swear I stank constantly of merds.
The others tended to like my odour —
not I theirs, unfortunately.
Forever in nature one finds the clashing
of opposites. A truism throughout
the system; only Cathay had it
partly reconciled. India used it
as the basis of behaviour. But youth, youth,
I love its manifestations now in others
I must not touch. It refreshes me
As beef tea does an inutile vampire.

I come to terms with feeling
And play across a spectrum of
Responses in the ancient game of love.

Bruce Beaver

Seer

When I take up my position
at the base of the westering wall
of Thebes, it is midday.
This time I'm blind; that time I see.
Ifs all a matter of convenience.
The first thing I feel is the heat
on my backside, now as flabby
as a worn out saddlebag.
My brace of genitals
are so disordered as to be almost self-sufficient.
My shape is uniquely eunuchoid.
My breasts. . . but everyone knows about them.
The sun is not terrible from this
aspect but the dusty ground
heats up and before you know it
your bottom is blistered.
One of my myriad acquaintances,
a youngish debater in mathematics,
has kindly lent me a cushion
embroidered with the symbols of his calling.
I feel (and see) their utility, their sterile charm
but I haven't the temerity
to sit on them.
My face — do I have a face?
A mirror reverberating
with past and future tenses.
The present is here, at the foot of the wall;
oracular, prophetic, procurative.
Hardly in love with life, I am
its esteemed and lousy sojourner.
My blindness has gradually departed
but I find no point in advertising the fact.
The sun palpating their thicknesses,
I can see through the lids, see a thousand leagues
into the aspirations of women,
into the hearts and covered minds of men.

Bruce Beaver

Visitation

He'll come back to you in the darkest night
shambling, robust still, not a little noisome.
He'll perch his large object-overlapping frame
on the edge of your bed and unravel a repertoire
of dreams and nightmares. Then from his capacious
sleeve — raw silk this visit — he'll produce
beads of opium from a small box,
from the other sleeve two pipes.
An ensuing sweet tumult of colour
and feeling, pacifically centred.
For the rest of your evening you'll make his acquaintance
as a young not unattractive man. And he will
read you like an uncut book, your edges
sealed to all but this two-bladed psyche.
"The reason why I came to you
was to dream you awake.
Not necessarily to wean you away
from drugs and hard drinks.
I've had my share and found them efficacious
in a disquieting enough fashion.
(I jest, long nights of vision and headaches
no longer elude me after a dozen
lasses of popular wine.) I come to
terrify you, to make you think of death.
our barest knowledge of it just won't
do. You have to lie with it, rise with it,
and then forget it again while you know
it is everywhere about you — you'll remember
just as quickly as you'll forget. In fact
you'll live with it, consciously, and that's
one of the things we're here to learn.
You'll throw away your pipe in disgust
then pick it up again in a little while."

Poet's Note: Poem 'III' from the sequence 'Tiresias sees'.

Bruce Beaver