

Classic Poetry Series

Luke Davies

- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Luke Davies (1962 -)

Luke Davies is an Australian writer of novels, poetry and screenplays, born in Sydney in 1962.

Davies' first poetry collection, *Four Plots for Magnets*, was published in 1982, when he was twenty.

His novel *Candy* was made into a film starring Heath Ledger in 2006. His other works include the novels *Isabelle the Navigator* and *God of Speed*, and several volumes of poetry - *Four Plots for Magnets*, *Absolute Event Horizon*, *Running With Light* and *Totem*.

Davies' brother Ben Davies, an Australian television producer, now teaches at Armidale Film and Television School in NSW, Australia. Youngest brother Felix Davies, is a Sound Recordist and Composer, residing in the United Kingdom.

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A Short History of Polar Exploration

The snowlines, moving in, and light failing fast
as aurora borealis throbs there like a walrus heart,
all the land so wide, so all around; so vast as to
haunt. Mythology, the oil flares far away. Lightning
down the pipeline, a shiver down the spine of Alaska.
The Arctic poppy, ambergris, a narwhal tusk, and all
the massive muskoxen delineate the one soft curve
when moving. Further out the pack ice is a camel caravan.

A snooker table built from blocks of ice (we do not
want the men to go insane, have hooked up mirrors
at the cabin doors, to catch what little sun there is,
this for the worst of the scurvies.) At night my dreams
are green, blue, gold: hues I cannot see out there. The bear
is white, the land is too. Nothing to name into existence.

Luke Davies

Body Surfing

Reading physics in the Charger
at North Bondi; after a while
it gets hard to concentrate.
All that sunlight.

Clouds moving just fast enough
to be boring if you watch them,
totally different the next time you look.
All that wind.

Two drunks sway down the ramp,
drinking white metho. They argue.
One punches the other in the face.
He falls on the sand.

Three boys, two frisbees: hypnotic
laws of flight and silhouette,
curvature and tracteries of air.
All that aerodynamic stuff.

You think of Hebrew etymology.
Grace is God's smile, or God smiling
on us. Mercy means running towards
someone in love.

So you go swimming. The wave looms
dark, you stroke twice and are launched
into fierce velocities of green.
First wave of spring.

Under the water the sunlight bends
when waiting for waves you practise
being weightless. Just you and the light
in a pale green world.

A westerly is blowing all the waves'
bellies hollow. You sweep
to the base and they burst in a silver
chaos of splintering;

and in this swollen place
of light and speed
you are beside yourself with happiness,
airborne, almost,

for an instant
on the inside of a wave.

Luke Davies

Crescent Moon Over Over The Eiffel Tower

First I think of Jesus, or not actually Jesus,
but the vapour trail from a jet, which makes
a line across the hard sky parallel with the top
of my window, which makes me think of Apollinaire
who said in a poem that Jesus is the holder
of the world high altitude record, a truly modern
aviator, and that's how I think of Jesus,
being in Paris and all, the thing with Apollinaire.
But I'm looking at the line the vapour trail makes,
which way up in the sky would form a perfect T
with the tip of the Eiffel Tower (the tip of the
Tour Eiffel sounds better in a poem) if the Tour Eiffel
were a fair whack higher. You know what I mean:
blue symmetries of summer. And then I notice,
and here's what the poem's about, when my eyes
are making the imaginary T, just above the point
where my imaginary much higher Tour Eiffel
would meet the vapour trail, a crescent moon.
A crescent moon so thin and faint it's almost not there
in the hot white Paris sky. But it is there,
and it's above the Eiffel Tower, pardon,
la Tour Eiffel, and it's above the vapour trail
that Jesus in a jet has made. What do I learn
from this experience? Well, in two weeks' time,
if the weather holds, and it should, there'll be
a fat full moon over Paris, and I'm up the hill
in Montmartre, with a view to fucking die for.
I can see three quarters of the sky, so I'm sure
that around two weeks from now, one way
or another, I'll be seeing that fat full moon.
And this is a thought that is not at all unpleasant.

Luke Davies

From Theory To Pulse

Church of St Etienne du Mont, Paris

Because that force through green fuse drives all flowers
(which we would call the greater force, or God, or minor gods)
and gathers in a place like this — things gather, here and there —
then it's a good place to come to sit a while, though
the first postulate of relativity, and I believe it, says to me
there's no such thing as place. But here I am. It's nice to sit a while.
Protect me, then, in the gathering up, in the going away.
The gargoyles do the warding off, the message gets projected
through the spires. That's the theory. Sounds beautiful
to me. Okay. So you know nothing about anything
except what you recognise as instance, as kindred appearance.
Suffering, then. And then compassion. There are older agonies
than churches. You go home exhausted in the middle of the day.
Sunlight floods the apartment. The turtle dozes by the window,
more solemn than a thousand cats. You lie down,
place her on your chest. For two hours she stares at you
and feels your heart move her shell. Older agonies.
You are as little as you could be. Protect me — why?
No need. The turtle, mute, knows nothing too. That force
that through your black heart pumps conjoins the turtle here.
Of her own will she is still and yet at eighty-four beats per minute
you watch her body make that tiny jolt ten thousand and eighty times.
We'll all be dead. And very soon. And yet unblackening is relief.
The diamond glint in the ancient eye. Small suffering joins
with the greater that of the ages of blood. Agonies of evolution
and beyond that, as always, geology. The lilac knows nothing of this.

Luke Davies

Gawain

Helluva day the day I fought
the lion to the death
when the women found me
prone across its flanks
and couldn't work out
whose blood was whose

"Pardon me that you see me
in this disgraceful condition
I hope you won't mention it
to anybody," I said
They took me upstairs
with my 500 wounds

(where the enchanted women were 500,
though that was coincidence
rather than symbolism)
I looked from one woman
to the other
and my heart was simply aching

I had had courage
I had had great one-pointedness
when I sliced at the lion
as he lashed. "You feel pretty fancy,"
the women said, "with that lion paw
stuck in your shield,

don't you? But you do much harm
through courage."
I conceded the point
It was that kind of century
It was a long day
Still the damned Green Knight to go

What a saga
I knew how to pack it in tight
I looked from woman to woman
and my heart was simply aching
Three red drops in the snow
that's life

or a castle to curl up in
hallways wide enough for horses
a bed of straw to dream in
the hoar frost is evaporated
an end to all this staggering
I was not entirely good but I

became entire

Luke Davies

Lisbon

Da Gama knew not fear. At ten we read these things
and still we became clerks.

Vasco da Gama. Yet there, back then, in the wailing
of the wave-torn seas; in the strain and the squeal

of the ropes as thick as wrists; in the sacred heart
of Christ dangling golden round our necks, Christ

Master Mariner of the Charts, Christ
believed by all of us to be the last port, Christ

the Diver who would swoop us from the mouths
of sea-beasts and kiss into our blue lips

His serene oxygen; in the gale's dark fury
and the venom of the clouds — there, back then,

at ten years old we foresaw the world this way:
the vigour of things, of the spirit and the storm.

Ourselves thrust into that fury and force.
Innundated by the onrush. Loving da Gama

as metaphor more than history. For a short while
we entered the salt-soaked air sweeping us

to the horizon; then we became clerks and I,
for one, was a clerk of the damned.

And so it is surprising to become a child again.
In Lisbon the air is awash with perfumes, orange rind

and jacaranda and a thousand swallows reel
through the bruised-plum sky. A tender city. Legend says

these are the Thousand Swallows of Lisbon and will always
be there and I, for one, today, am entered

into the heart of legend. In Lisbon's blue spring I have
myself. Blossoms fall heavy from flowers like figs

and rain down the hills of Lisbon until the sidewalks
are a carpet of petals. It's a love poem, somehow, then.

Luke Davies

London, Winter

Pass unseen through a godforsaken floodplain,
city of treachery, siege and publishers.
No backbone here at all, nothing to fight,
or with. All sunken in unmerciful decay.

Every girl who ever rode a pony
prostrate in the stables. The one thing
that would save us, that would clatter
through the galaxies, a chariot perhaps, evaporates.

Frost rime blackened on the ponds is left.
The ducks and swans have lice enough
for all of us. The publicists eat Spam;
manners holds the rest of it together.

Luke Davies

Lucky

He stabbed through winter and back
in a place of great beauty; he stabbed
through water; he kicked his legs through the waves.

The water was freezing despite or because of
a pink sky at dusk but some surfers stayed out there.
The waves were closing out now;

a board snapped in two. Above the so rounded
white noise of the breakers, that crack
was like a whip of light and the world

went very thin. Well, seven hundred dollars
of his own pain but I didn't know that guy;
and there'll always be pain. The central

problem was rather time than all the little injuries
that make us up, the gasps, the sorrow, the world
suddenly and for no reason making itself thinner

than what we could reasonably hope for: Life.
The waves were fury; to be consumed by the possible
meant simply to be lucky, even in love.

Luke Davies

Mythic Sacrifices In The Friendly Summer

Another airport, another bull to be slaughtered.
I had changed greatly in a personal decade
but little in eleven thousand years.
When I saw bulls I saw red and felt a kinship
with necessity. I felt very relaxed knowing
the world was overflowing with procedure, even in
its younger phase. One gave one thing to get
in turn another. Seeing red was like seeing
the future, the sliding of the blade, and I felt
much closer to God. Sunny times, old Memory.

Mithra didn't know shit from clay.
I liked my own communion in the desert:
felt I was onto something, and that if I just
concentrated hard enough, I could invent
a tradition of stillness. The hummingbird makes the hum.
But every time I travelled I'd see, many and fierce
and snorting, bulls I knew no one else could see,
so unnerving in their love of fate. One cornered me
in the Men's Room. You must change your life,
indeed. I buried him later, high in a tree.

Luke Davies

Nature Poem

But the fact
the tendril creeps around the tree
and might have been doing so for hundreds of years
is not important.

It is not important
that the forest floor is padded with pine needles
or that ferns suddenly proliferate
where sunlight reaches.

The thistles leak their foam at midday and this
is not important. In the time it takes
to write this it was sunny and now it has darkened.
Nor is rain important.

What remains then is the awkwardness
of being alive, the unshakeable awareness
of self as intrusion, and the ridiculousness
of consciousness.

Even the windhover
has no idea what tradition it's in;
death not Romeo takes
its maidenhead.

Luke Davies

Nine Hours

In Studio City the hummingbird
Sucks from the stamens.
The kitchen is silent. Outside, the sky
Of L.A. has been baked of its demons.

The tuberose blooms to remind of tomorrow's
Petals on the surface of the swimming pool.
The pool wall drops stilts to waiting earthquakes.
Everyone's off making films today. A kestrel

Hovers. We cannot do great things
But only small things with great love.
To travel is to be still. Then sunset
Highlights tenderly all the flight paths above.

Luke Davies

North Coast Bushfires

Reverence. How the afternoon
comes down on you like that.
In a microsleap you can travel
hundreds of metres — into trees
and cars. I thought I would
just close my eyes. After that
it is all pretty random.
The universal joint, the bearing pins.

So I tried to focus on clouds.
They billowed just like anvils.
I smelled smoke long before the cops
closed off the highway.
On backroads the sunlight slanted
through dust and I pictured the roll
of the earth. The sky turned orange.
But everyone had the same idea.

At dusk a black soot filled
the valley where a lone tree stood.
It was like driving through fog, only
it burnt the throat. Then lightning
lit that tree which said, "I have
grown into a god." And stray thoughts
were telling me how badly I needed
a motel. Because life is long.

Luke Davies

Poetry and Blood

The leaves are budding on the trees. The buds
are popping everywhere. Spring as in spring in the step
makes sense. In Paris there is the dead of winter
as in you think of death as in great boats
of the dead ploughing through oceans of sky.
And then one week, bang, there is spring
and it feels like summer. You can almost hear
that popping and the blood quickens in the turtles

you're minding, in that they're slightly less spaced out
than usual. I read once that's how reptiles work.
But for us in sun the blood slows down to dream.
There's a pulse in the world you're beginning to take.
The blood too sails through the long repair.
Eyes closed in the quiet you hear both beats.
There is you, which is good, who you like, and
then the trees ready to explode into light.

Luke Davies

Poetry And Flowers

Lark and rose go mad, even with winter
coming on, the garden beneath the verandah blooms,
the park is dense with sun and soccer balls.
By lark I mean generic bird, God knows
the names for all these things with wings. Ditto
the rose: the garden drooling colour and bloom.
Lavender I recognise, and jasmine climbing
the concrete wall, and a real rose in the corner,

red as blood. I meant to say: birds and flowers
go ballistic, even with winter coming on.
Carrying on their own life. The earth drowns
in the blooming. Even when there is no wind there is
the solar wind, whipping our bodies from the depths of space.
Ferocities of trees bent double. Playing soccer,
nobody notices this. The far park flutters in mirage.
The jasmine is awash with butterflies.

Luke Davies

Refraction

'(1) Of light. The change of direction that a ray undergoes when it enters another transparent medium.' *</i>*

Penguin Dictionary of Physics

There is more blue up here. This is good. There is more light careening in the air. The haloes are in form. Light floods the cerebral cortex all day long; the toughest wildest physicists acknowledge this, agree with this. And certainly the angels know and watch the light flood into certain minds. This is something they do when they tire of aetherial tag and aerial dogfights and general angel larrikinism. They take their cortex watching seriously.

The brain is a cabbage with a bit of electrical wiring and a few computer chips thrown in. But mainly it's a cabbage. That is to say a vegetable, a plant. So photosynthesis occurs, of course. The Cortex Gate for chlorophyll is opened up to let in light: the psyche glows a phosphorescent green, I walk the heat down Pitt St and my glowing is like arsenic to the rats that nibble souls.

Luke Davies

Selection From 40 Love Poems

(Transparent)

Sugar Lee you are the sun today,
Pervasive light and heat, and I
The valley floor, the birch pine slopes,
The snow-capped peaks, transparent sky

Through which you spread, and oh how
My toes are tingling miles away.
Then let us spread this picnic rug;
Come let's play mortals Sugar Lee.

Come stay a day, come lie an hour,
A lunar month, a solar year;
The world will organise itself the while
I whisper praises in your ear.

(Suck)

Come let's play mortals Sugar Lee,
That fierce embrace. And all my fear
Of loss, of departure, will dissolve
In the light of your limbs. Come stay an hour,

Or less. And don't trust any technology,
And even the clocks are lying.
The only thing sure is the pleasure we'll know
When we're done with trying

To be polite, to suck all the juice from delay.
The only solution is abandon.
Come I don't care — come you be the pyre;
And I will be the burned one.

(Shudder)

Idea that earth crunches and body repairs
Is idea conceived in love.
Impatience is the only sin.
We all get fidgety but love

Is the medium in which even
Flickers occur, through which tectonically
The spines of mountains stretch. Here today,
Gone next ice age. Ironically

We're not equipped to deal with this. So
I float through fields of unknowing
Under Spanish clouds, a summer bliss. Oh:

But the Pyrenees still shudder in their glowing.

(Breathe)

Across your back
Those freckles strewn
Are every constellation
I have known —

All galaxy and godhead too —
An astronaut would weep
At such a view: as if,
After dreams, in the deep

Heart of dawn, he'd wake
To that expanse, and breathe it in.
Home! O Milky Way!
O milk-white skin!

(Sketch)

It's not that I could sketch the red
Gunwale of the boat
But that what emerges on the other side of red
Could go anywhere: that's what they call art.

Nor that the white swan over near the bulrushes
Flaps up out of the water terrified
By the barn-owl's shriek. Nor that the barn-owl wishes
For anything other than its own hard

Cry to shatter the darkening day.
Not the mist moving into the pines beside the lake.
Though all these things are true in their own way —
Without love I am broke.

(Adam)

Oh to lie upon her
Her nakedness is all
I simply orchestrated
That horizontal fall

And had no wrong intentions
And cared about no tree
I simply lay with her
And she with me.

It is all Chinese whispers

It all gets told askew
I simply kissed the lips
That kissed the apple dew.

(Plateau)

All that there was was beauty and bluff;
Then a deeper thing grows.
In the coinage of rapture
I will pay you my praise.

You will tell me every story
As we drive; in your eyes
Whole forests will flicker past,
Whole skies, enormous mysteries ...

That beauty can malfunction
Is a given. Love knows
Of all the beauties beyond this.
At every plateau, praise.

Luke Davies

Spastic At The Beach

Twisted body silhouetted
in a flood of summer light
he seems incongruous down here.

She leads him to the water's edge
(sister, nurse or doubtless both):
he lurches under her loving grip.

Against the emerald waves his skin
the white that white can be. He tilts
his head to listen, he tenses as

his paper-thin monastic feet
touch the wet sand. The water sprays
his ankles then the surf engulfs

his legs. The sun beats like a jugular,
the heat of day descends. He cries
a primal howl of fear and joy,

he bellows like some dinosaur a long
foghorn of linkage, disbelief.
Escapes her grip, allows himself

to fall. The small waves throw
his body like a doll. He gasps
and screams again, and those immense

gut vowels reverberate,
cut through the noise of day,
resound along the beach. She takes

his wrist. He balances and sways,
a trail of saliva like a mad silver
pendulum flailing from the pivot

of his mouth. He howls again.
The moon would burst. He is
howling for a cup full of moon

and her love is the moon for his cup.
He turns to her uncertainly, he turns
away and shudders as he laughs.

He cannot stay still and the earth
moves too. His splayed fingers
stab at the air, at the sun,

the ocean continues to throb.
He has dented the day
with the hammer of body and voice.

She leads him away where the salt haze
enfolds them in fading, his frail figure
dims in the warp and mirage of the spray.

All is pulse. In the pulsing of blood
and of light he will stay, the immaculate
hammer of presence embedded in day.

Luke Davies

Summer

The sky broods like the whole of Sydney's
done something wrong and it can't quite put its finger
on it. Christmas stretches into New Year and
Sydneysiders wear the vacant stare of the slightly
troubled. This is nothing, you think. Humidity
of gathering crowds. Everyone heads to the beach
and the beach too is not quite right, the way
the water stalks foreigners, the way the seaweed

crunches underfoot, the way the wind whips sand
into your fillings. This is nothing, you think.
Diving onto the sandbar, the boy breaks his neck
and the helicopter takes him away. Too much sun,
everywhere. All a helicopter ever meant
is Apocalypse Now, the way its blades shimmer
in the salt haze. The gulls go more insane than ever,
if that's possible, and later you learn the neck boy dies.

Luke Davies

The Madness Of Need

I never knew that nerves were so geodesic;
the straightest line from A to B is North West
Africa (the coast: you need the rain, you need
all the water to feel that you're able to breathe.)
Take the money and run, the honeymoon.
You make love then it rains. Unholy Garden Dodsworth.
You make love. Huge fragments in the wilderness
where Melbourne, Sydney stood. Two headlights from
a Chevrolet — we were two travellers in an antique land.
We make love. Baby Doll. We fuck. It rains.
In sandy silence all alone there stands a giant Cadillac.
Change the flat. Fuck again. (God I love you, tear my back,
I love you forever, whatever we do.) The absolute clarity
of Station Seven Sahara : we want each other, strongly,
like we want the fanbelt fixed. The radiator (water, water again),
whatever it is. Look for rain. Smell it out. Lick your lips.
We make love. Two fragments in the wilderness are clouds — we fuck
to celebrate. You quiver sultry, violent in the sand. Then
that is peace. The making of love and the driving to rain,
to the coast! At last I think I can relax. Freetown
was not named by accident. So misery will always feed, so
slam that bonnet and foot to the floor and your sunglasses glint
in the Gold Coast sun. Don't look on it and don't despair,
I smell your sweetest infinitest body in the air.

Luke Davies

Totem (I)

"Flowers, bees, mangoes, cuckoos: it was into you that Desire dispersed when Siva's blaze consumed him... "
— ROBERTO CALASSO, Ka

In the yellow time of pollen, in the blue time of lilacs,
in the green that would balance on the wide green world,
air filled with flux, world-in-a-belly
in the blue lilac weather, she had written a letter:
You came into my life really fast and I liked it.

When we let go the basket of the good-luck birds
the sky erupted open in the hail of its libation;
there was a gap and we entered it gladly. Indeed the birds
may have broken the sky and we, soaked, squelched
in the mud of our joy, braided with wet-thighed surrender.

In the yellow time of pollen near the blue time of lilacs
there was a gap in things. And here we are.
The sparrows flew away so fast a camera could not catch them.
The monkey swung between our arms and said I am, hooray,
the monkey of all events, the great gibbon of convergences.

We were falling towards each other already
and the utter abandon to orbits was delicious.
The falcon rested on the little man's arm and falconry
was the High Path of the World. Whole minutes passed.
We were falling and the jungle fell with us.

She said I came, I came to my senses really fast
and you liked it. I was surrounded by the fluttering
of wings, nothing but a whirring in my ears,
and the whole earth tilted and I lost my reason.
For a time falconry was the high path of the world.

At night the sky was filled with animals.
Ganesh loomed large among those points of light.
He said Change! and we said Lord we are ready
to bend. Thou art the high exalted most flexible.
He said Then I will enter into your very dreams.

And the yellow-tailed black cockatoo, ablaze
in his own musculature, soared all night above the sunlit
fields of whisky grass that stretched inside me
to a river's edge. The great bird cawed its majesty,
a sonic boom; and even I was barely welcome there.

There was a gap in things; and all the lilacs bloomed.
Words split in our grasp. We were licking the cream
from the universal ice. Words foundered and cracked.
How the bonnet was warm on your bottom! And the metal
continued tick-ticking though the engine was off.

And the evening shuddered, since everything is connected.
I was licking the cream from the universal saucer.
I was all of Cheshire and points between.
You saw the great sky turn blacker, you saw the spray of stars
and your hair got tangled in the windscreen wiper.

At the hot ponds we stripped as night closed in.
I secretly admired your underwear, your long
elusive legs. In the spring where we lay side by side
we held hands. Up above the steam the sky. I said
That one is called Sirius or Dog Star, but only here on Earth.

And when since the stories foretold it we parted,
those birds were all released again. Such buoyancy.
They go on forever like that. How else to say thank you
in a foreign place? We are ever in the arms of our exile,
forever going one way and the other

though sometimes of course on a sphere that is not so bad.
I will meet you on the nape of your neck one day,
on the surface of intention, word becoming act.
We will breathe into each other the high mountain tales,
where the snows come from, where the waters begin.

In the yellow time of pollen when the fields were ablaze
we were very near bewildered by beauty.
The sky was a god-bee that hummed. All the air boomed
with that thunder. It was both for the prick
and the nectar we drank that we gave ourselves over.

And if every step taken is a step well-lived but a foot
towards death, every pilgrimage a circle, every flight-path
the tracing of a sphere: I will give myself over and over.
I have migrated through Carpathians of sorrow
to myself heaped happy in the corner there.

Nothing seemed strange in the world, you'll understand —
nothing ever more would. Monkey Boy came to me saying
Look — the moon of the moon. The little one circled the big one.
He crouched in the palm of my hand, tiny, sincere,
pointing at the sky. There was something sad about him.

The python was nothing, nothing at all, nothing
but strength shed to suppleness, nothing but will
encased in itself. The python was a muscle of thought.
Coiled and mute, in a place where nothing but rain fell,
the python thought: this is the beginning or end of the world.

The python was everywhere, everywhere at once, aware
only too much of that ageless agony: its existence.
I am tired, it said; and the stream burred by.
I am waiting for the recoil, the uncoil, coil of night,

coil of stars, coil of the coldness of the water.

The python said Who are these people?
The whole city sweated, moved like a limb. The air
fitted like a glove two sizes too small and too many
singers sang the banal. The bars roared all night.
The kite hawks grew ashamed. All nature squirmed.

In the yellow time of pollen there's a certain slant of light
that devours the afternoon, and you would wait forever
at the Gare de l'Est, if time stood still, if she would come.
She is the leopard then, its silvery speed; where will you
wrestle her, and in what shadows, and on what crumpled sheets?

And all those sheets were pampas and savannas, the soft expanses
of all that would be absent forever, all that was
past, and future, and not here. And in a white rose
there were not to be found any secrets, since in its unfolding
there was no centre, nor in its decay. Only the random petals fallen.

In the yellow time of poppies when the fields were ablaze
those invisible pollens rained around us.
The days held us lightlocked in golden surrender
and all night long the night shot stars.
When my chest unconstricted at last, did yours?

The real issue, of course, was this: atomically, energetically,
everything was wave function. And a wave continues forever into space,
the wavelength never alters, only the intensity lessens, so
in the worst cosmic way everything is connected by vibrations.
And this, as even a dog would know, is no consolation.

Ah but the dogs will save us all in the end & even the planet.
Not the superdogs but the household friendlies, always
eager to please, hysterically fond, incessant, carrying in the very
wagging of their tails an unbounded love not even
therapists could imagine; their forgiveness unhinges us.

We were reduced to this: this day and night,
primary gold and indigo, the binary profusion
of distances guessed at, heat and cold, colours
logged in the retina and lodged in the spine;
we were dogs who knew the infinite is now,

that celandine was buttercup, that buttercup was marigold.
The dog star marked the dog days and the wild rose
was dog rose. The crow's-foot was wild hyacinth.
By day the correspondences were clear.
I walked across the whin land. Speedwell bluer than sky.

A practised ear could hear, between two breaths,
deep space wherein the mind collects itself.

Words foundered and cracked. Nearly
never bulled the cow. A shining isomorphousness
rang out. The roussignol sang all night.

All colours were shuffled endlessly but never lost.
A practised ear could hear, between two breaths,
the secret blackness of the snow
come flooding in. On summer's lawns
the ice-melt sprayed its figure-eights from sprinklers.

And everything stopped working, second time around,
as if it had never happened before. Fans
moved the corpses of fireflies through the rooms,
suppliant, pathetic, pleading in brittle postures.
Everything was magnified by their bug-eyed deaths.

We became solemn in that profusion
of dying. Cane toads fattened the asphalt
in the mist and the rain; our headlights caught them
tensed as if listening: they were waiting,
mute, for the imbecility of eternity.

The clocks merely pulsed, or rather the days.
Like shotgun spray on the weatherboard, sleep
scattered itself through the blurred heat
and secreted itself in the nooks of delirium.
Sometimes the magpies would wake us, or the phone,

mid-afternoon. And we needed nothing, not even hope,
being no different from the dragonflies,
or the cows in their despair. It appeared we lived
on sunlight and chocolate bars. You blossomed
so from not ever reading the newspapers.

Things came and went—the years and all the airports.
I was a shade scattering my shade seed
liberally to the winds and weathervanes.
There was not enough absence to go round.
I heard voices, *stabat mater*, in the whine of jets

and in air vents and headphones a stream
trilling over rocks. On tarmacs and in transit
I saw your lips, your nakedness, the trees,
that dappled light. I dreamt of orchards.
The preciseness of the world came flooding in.

For every blossom there could be no turning back,
one path only to cup and fig, beyond
the belly of the heart's content, each precipice
a flood of salt and jewels. Tang
of the overwhelming, flooding in.

I saw a kestrel quiver but not move
high in the air as if a sculptor left it
unattended, incomplete, just waiting for
a sign, just give me an excuse. I heard
the bush rat squeal. For there is nothing

lost may not be found if sought.
The minotaur in the corral
who called himself Asterion
tramples me softly with his song and, frustrated,
head-butts the posts. I can but admire him.

In the yellow time of pollen when the air was weighed down
there were bees plump with syrup. There were figs
fit to burst at the seams. I understood
how language had emerged: in the Flesh of the Fruit.
I spoke my tongues against your breathlessness.

Down there nothing but eternity and praise.
To be alive I had to praise, to praise I had to
learn to speak. Speak loudly though to drown
the blood about to burst, to drown eternity
whose howl floods every canyon into nothingness.

In the blue time of lilacs the last colour standing
was the mauve that jacarandas leak when all else
has gone grey: last glow before night,
the brightest that earth ever gave. Far across
the estuary the mangroves rippled in the rain.

Pelicans plumped on the tide-posts, world-in-a-belly.
There was mud for the taking. The orb spiders
clung during storms to the high-tensile webs.
Much later the fruit bats, insane with greed, tore into the fig trees
and gnashed at the edges of dreams.

Time was merely the measure of motion
with respect to before and after. Meanwhile
the universe expands. The pine trees creaked.
The pine cones cracked. On a windless day there was time
to dream of you. The pine cones snapped open the silence.

All the fields and force fields stretched away to snow caps.
Gravitational, magnetic — there were even fields undreamt of;
and the green one where we lay, where we organised to meet,
where the wildflowers parted and the gorse looked like light,
was hidden in the cleft our kisses made.

Light stretches as it moves away. The peaks and contours
we explored had taught us time was malleable. All things
have mass except ideas. A hammock was therefore a metaphor like
breathe. A diamond meant nothing but carbon-later-on.

The flight paths of the pelicans smelled ... like luck.

We were falling and the jungle fell with us.
It rained all through the pass; at every plateau praise.
World-in-a-belly. From the photon's point of view
the universe contracted to one point
and even as it left it had arrived.

To us the photon spread through space
in studious propagation. In an ocean the waves
had water to ride on, and sound waves fought their way
through air. But light was the medium itself.
Thousands of birds, the tiniest birds, adorned your hair.

In the driest season I drew my love from geometry.
I cried to learn a circle was a curve
of perfect equidistance from a point. In summer
wild sage grew in tufts on the slopes
where in spring the sun would melt the snows to scree.

All the while I was asking myself what was the
howling outside the hut I was mistaken I couldn't
recognise my own voice it was so loud I was having
trouble with inside and outside. You came to me
from God-knows-where in wider arcs than birds can make.

You made me calm. I said to God God
how often do I thank you God? I had had
so many years of beauty intruding on all I did I did
not think it might intrude on others. Others
showed no signs of it. But you said laughing Taste it Taste it.

And a wet front smothered the whole south coast &
our hazard lights flashed in the cloud of unknowing &
the semis overtook us and blinded us with spray.
I said to God God I am speechless I am
contented I am very tired and I am rather in love.

Luke Davies

Totem (II)

In the dead of night in the dead of time
the private creatures nibbled, milky under moonlight.
Not a pine needle dropped. A salmon pulse throbbled muted
from the slumberous cold waters. The lake's meniscus shivered.
Dragonflies flinched then picked up the void where they'd left off.

There were clouds of leaves aloft had darkened
the sky like schools of fish the water, armfuls
of elmleaf and lily pad scooped from the air. And you'd
thought it meant rain. There were owls so asleep
one could die of old age in their dreams.

And death knew naught of this: no fool was death.
Velocity wound down. We all relaxed.
Even the tetchiest rabbit was engrossed. Even the ash horizon
budded and cornflowers flared. Then what I knew
to be the case was death has no velocity.

All the leaves vibrated in their stillness. We began to see
what others had not noticed, how the sky brushed
against us and bruised us with the graces of dusk, how
on the path were strewn bright bones and lions gluttoned with poetry.
At night the sky was filled with animals.

Monkey Boy came to me saying Look at the moon.
Everything repeated through scale and always did,
every pattern down to neutron. I said How you going he said
Not too bad but everyone seems to be mistaking my death
energy for my sex energy. It has caused no end of bother.

How the head throbs on the tumbling through accretion
zones my darling. Superheating, superheating. In the red
time of planets there were lilacs unthought of and the blue
lilac weather was denied from desire. Time had to move
through us. The curve of all around us pulled us here &

the opaque weight of the world was dissolved &
the vines grew not on trellises but breeze and piebald light.
By the open window, on the table, where the curtains
billowed like giant bells, there were always oranges,
sliced into quarters, on a bone-white plate — those bones again.

The softest city, perched on water, exhaling and inhaling
like a lover deep in dreaming, at the end of every avenue
a dock, a gentle lapping and the pear tree thick with wisdom
and the salmon leap to graze it in their fight against
the downwardness of everything.

Oh my most girl of light who, astonished, accepts.
We traced out paths, of helixes. We dozed for days
into each other's heat. We found the frangipani
at the end of each desire. The salt air sent

good-humouredly the concrete and the plaster to decay.

I grazed the plain your belly made, a long day's languor
for a lamb of god in the lily fields and the holly clefts.
In the salt-licks I was lost, and lost again, o shepherdess.
Mirages bloomed and burst into oases. I came to drink
my fill at last where all the sky was mirrored in a pond.

Oh my most girl of light who, astonished, accepts:
the curve of all around us pulled us here &
everything rode on stretching space. To grasp the eternal
and the ravenously brief we had to learn
to begin to come to terms with imperfection.

On a bone-white plate there were always oranges
sliced into quarters. Footfalls on the marble floor.
Curtains higher than waterfalls. The things of the world
had clustered on the doorstep. Devotion and adoration
cartwheeled through the yard. The wind stayed soft.

We toppled happily by the wisterias where a little
girl pulled garlands from under the gathering bees.
We dreamed the world worked not in pairs
but clusters, including the galaxies. Sunlight
bloomed into gardens from the thin air it rode in on.

There'd been a planet swirled with dust. We called it luck
to be alive in the epoch of the foliage. To have not only
poetry, grand luck enough, but the long wheat swaying
and the peonies its subject. To say nothing of the daisies.
I dreamed three hundred and twenty times of you.

I thought of an era when popcorn and clouds were enough,
when an airplane might be the Amazing Fact of the Day,
the prop wash and the physics and the paths we took
to the, not even knowing it, the inevitable, the well-here-
we-are, and not because there is no choice but because

choice in fact is the single thing that made us.
And the fact the wind howled every canyon
(those facts again, like bones) into nothingness meant nothing,
since love we came to understand was held
in life just as the world was held in time.

What rang out as lament found consolation
in some lost principle more permanent,
on evenings when the softness of the sky
relaxed the heart. Totem. Aspiration of species, density
and emptiness of matter, animal interloop of memory.

Abandoned in a field near Yass a cobwebbed car once kept us warm
and when it rained, though we shivered with sickness,

there came a moment of perfect happiness, faces nestled
in the vinyl, sleep coming on, surrounded by metal
that in upcoming decades would oxidise to flakes.

Asleep at last, last of the valium, we came to know
a car too is a flower and pollen its decay.
In the dry air at dawn the cicadas kept still. The space
that mass sat in decided how mass was to move.
We dreamed of valleys of olive trees, silver side out.

The lions preened. We shivered with need.
A mechanic showed me once how the spark-paths from spark-plugs
looked, if you looked close enough, like mountain ravines
from the air. The deeper the groove the faster
the current. We shivered, this our habit, this flowing.

It takes the breath away. There are gum trees crackling from it
two decades later. I slept so still beneath that mass of dreams
like sediment compressed beneath a lake. I woke and the
tributes and glory were gone and the crops all withered
and money was merely the index of anxiety.

When we realised this our hearts swelled in exultation.
Even time would forget there was reason for fear: that decay
seemed to will itself upon us. I was off the air, delirious
with substance. The kite hawks grew ashamed.
All nature squirmed. I was off the air, light-headed with voracity.

The theme just kept repeating itself, year in year out,
same demon different bodies. A nurse said When you stay,
when you leave those wet imprints in our airspace,
these sheets smell like formaldehyde, like death. We had merely
reached early, down the end of the river, the leprosarium

of feeling, and all things stood for every other thing,
creepers, vines, tendrils, anacondas, inert surrender,
such listlessness, and yes the very rage with which
we chased the very forms of it, the lineaments
of nothingness, the powders of the comatose, the bliss.

This was the state of the world. Heading backwards we learned
the flea-fish was the smallest animal before the insect kingdom
began. Forwards, there were only the sudden deaths
of galaxies. And yet when we practised love there seemed
on certain days an awful lot of space; and so much sky.

Never had I lain then at Kangaroo Valley so comfortable
in my own body. A virtual flatness and that centrifuge
in the stomach stilled and my spine a spirit-level. The smell
of coffee drifting in brought back to me that lily-white girl and that
sad hour of need. How brittle every bone was then. How

could one not be completely bedraggled by time or compulsion or duplicity? I was all those things and am. I was so tired with the not-being-here inside of it all that fatigue was like oxygen, given of all the givens, sensurround of the gods. But I was gulping and heaving by then.

And that is all so long ago. Though when you forget the last time: most likely it is not the last time. And when dreams don't come, when mastodons and minotaurs curdle in the night-reaches and the bulls lie fallow in dawn-sweats: sleep some more. Wait. Sleep on. And swim.

In the yellow time of pollen I dreamed myself clear. The sex vibe thing came off me like a god and everywhere I looked: expansitude. The streets becoming boulevards, my head held high I steered a cracking pace and sparks came off my shoes.

God it was so damned good. The pollen country was exactly in the right place. Whenever I was in it I fared well, but outside that the evil things abounded. The places reeked. Some people are just bad. It was then I knew that love

was the only godhead. And still the sparks came off those Cuban heels. Was I dealing with mercy or grace? A great bear grated hailstones upon us. From planes the storm-drenched horse studs flashed like lakes. The systole held us clenched so long the diastole flooded the world with tears. The trees

began to steam. I lay great and greatly fallen. But relaxed. Put the old world behind me. I shall conquer a continent. What ho what damaged universe is this? The paean ploughs through its detritus like a glacier. We calculated and lineated the flare of wind in the shape of trees.

In the yellow time of pollen there were dandelion heads, transparent, you would weep. I gave it all away, love come to me now, come to me. Come to me love. Come to me love. What have I learned? How much you're supposed to enjoy every sandwich, he said.

Because everything began to change and we called it luck to be alive in the epoch of the foliage, in the green that would balance on the wide green world, air filled with flux, world-in-a-belly in the yellow time of pollen near the blue time of lilacs.

We were everywhere at once. And each thing now stood once again for every other thing: but bursting at the seams, awash with light. If your hair was light, if the night was peppered with light, there were no surprises left except that light, that everything

including light, came cloaked now in its self–astonishment.

I had ratcheted all my experience up to a newer level.
Whoever could come along with me, I had pocketsful
to share. Boatloads perhaps. Your hair was like a starburst.
We unmoored ourselves. It was even disingenuous
to say there were no surprises; but wonder upped its frequencies.

In the time of pollen, this is even in the cities,
where leaves had fallen entire footpaths bloomed, Lisbon
for example one whole summer, a state of emergency, flowers
bursting from mulch, pedestrians forced to the streets and the cars
had nowhere to go. General breathlessness, but no heart attacks.

At first we looked back. Through soot-fog of the bushfires,
through willy–willies of pine pollen, through flight-paths
of the fruit–search, back even through the gamma rays we saw
there'd only been an interrupted cadence. Splendid
but hollow. We saw events careering, as they will.

The sky tilted. Clouds turned black and scudded. Wind
sent us mad with indooriness. Nothing for it but to make love.
In the morning the ground hissed with heat. Sun split the stones.
Down Razorback Pass, fan–flash of the lyre–bird. Every moment
shall not be repeated. When you know this deeply —

everywhere you look: expansitude. The day extends
its limits. In the green time of sleep, of afternoons,
the hammock contours sacralised, those distant lions gluttoned
with poetry and ancient light dripping from the honeycomb
of the skies, the world is a gap. We enter it gladly.

You came into my life really fast and I liked it.
From that point every animal, real and imagined, began
its transformation. Densely packed inside us every
death stood in for every other death. From that point we began to love
every beast more deeply. So much honour is at stake.

Allowing for the Doppler effect it is all possibly
closer than we feel. Matter and movement were one &
the same. Even the rocks were awash with electrons.
Shadows had no colour. Objects sprang from every corner.
I wasn't a daredevil: I was a risk technician.

I could tell the difference between a horse and a seahorse,
underwater, with my eyes closed. Finesse it was to be alive
that day. There was a falcon on my arm. There was a hood
to be removed. When he blinked he gorged himself
on the plains that stretched away. We said only Devour.

He took it all in. He dropped out of sight on the tendons
of his wingtips. His invisible ribs were a ladder of hunger.

The tiny mammals felt thunder, quivered in crevices.
To the dust mites their quivering was thunder. Everything repeats
down to scale. Falconry was the high path of the world.

He dropped from view. He scanned. The day lay still,
the century in fact, so middayed out, so void with glare
de Chirico might have stayed indoors. The falcon
was peeling back layers of time. Not even the fossils could feed him.
The air burned shrieking his flight arc to flame;

then the plain became the ocean and he dived,
the wetness was opaque, the great whales glistened,
and far below where palaces lay drowned
manta rays glided through minarets and the falcon
wept. Three atmospheres down was as far as he could get.

In each direction wingspan led to the end of all things
on the edge of the deep. He had suffered long enough. Was he dealing
with mercy or grace? Every dream was a half-stutter
towards waking, every waking a wetness wet with dream
and dream-slicked hair, and wingbeats fading distantly to flutters.

At night inside his eyelids in the heart of the maze
the Minotaur kept counsel with the void, singing Clearly clearly the deep
forces of the universe are hope and electricity. I was the only human
for dreams and dreams around. In there with him
one dream inside another. Far off the falcon wept.

The python pulled heat from stones. The world was old.
We cannot live forever but we live. The yellow-tailed black cockatoo
cawed out the sonic boom of dawn, ablaze in his own musculature.
The curtains flared like giant bells. There was a gap &
we entered it gladly. The preciseness of the world came flooding in.

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The whoosh of whisky grass; something had been and gone.  
We woke. Ganesh was gone, and every bull and bull-god,  
gone. How change became good fortune, how love streamed.  
In the yellow time of pollen, and the honeysuckle blooming,  
the preciseness of the world came flooding in.

Open your eyes, love looks back, cipher of every hieroglyph,  
bedroom thick with foliage, morning buds enormously  
from dream, from flight-paths of the fruit-search, from bed  
a ship of flowering abandoned to the pollen winds;  
how best to taste the plumness of today? I'll speak my tongues

against your breathlessness. The good-humoured power of one's  
personal bear, and all that honey, God almighty, honey everywhere.  
Something has lifted the lid off the labyrinth. We get to be every puppy,

every beast, all the animals one by one, every day a feast.  
At last we start eating the food, not just the menu.

Something has lifted the lid off the labyrinth. As if  
that hot-breathed contact with your lips were a kind of Spring.  
The sky takes on its brightness like a skin.  
Love protects the twinned and the untwinned, the set-upon,  
the cast-adrift, unmoored, unhooked, unleashed, unhinged.

World-in-a-belly. The Minotaur rounds the final bend,  
weeping with fear and elation. The ocean opens out.  
He doesn't move a muscle. It all goes in. Fine day for a brisk dip.  
The fluttering of butterflies, glorifying his name,  
clustering around his astonished head, soaked in sunlight.

Heart of the world. From the yellow time of poppies  
to the blue time of pollen, lament becomes epithalamium.  
A gecko after rain means happiness. The sky has burst;  
the air is wet with blossom. There is a gap; at every plateau,  
praise. A shining isomorphousness rings out —

the deep peal of bells and how the heart would hold the day.  
We have tumbled through the years to meet it. You say laughing  
Taste it Taste it. Static crackles in your hair, lightning  
in your breast. Stop we will hold each other here.  
I am listening, I am listening.

Luke Davies

## Valascere

*'I feel blood, I feel blood,  
Though I feel it in my veins  
It's not enough ... '*  
Marianne Faithful

She stays asleep: tonight her soul huff-puffs;  
for pain is forthcoming, she knows it and waves the white flag  
(as if giving up the world's finest imported sweet stuffs  
for a pain that begins at the scraping of the bottom of the bag.)

For the pain is a twitching and itching, new boredom and Now,  
now what shall I do, the next minute, next second, next hour?  
— a twisting and turning of muscles, and sneezing and how  
can the cramps and the sweat be relieved by the day's seventh shower?

Well, a weak kind of suffering, then. But you'd rather be dead.  
And the world, that is you, is aware of each click and each clack.  
The day shouts with children outside, you stare from your bed.  
It will seem so obscene you will want to jab in and sink back.

Well, a weak form of loosening then. But you'd rather be dead.  
And still you're aware of each clang of the terrible clock.  
The day shouts with children outside, you stare from your bed.  
There is nothing to utter, no love to offer, and nothing to hock.

So I hear her sleep; her soul goes all awry,  
and sleeping is getting another few hours through hell.  
She will wake and be bored and disgusted by an ugly bright sky,  
but it's one hour less to joy's violent cardinal yell.

Luke Davies

## Wave Function, Bondi

*In the odd world of the quantum, things appear to exist in a multitude of states — describable only as the set of probabilities known as a wave function — until tipped into a definite outcome by an act of “measurement.”*

John McCrone

... the absolute flight and rest  
The universal blue  
And local green suggest.  
- Robert Frost

I

I am floating or falling. I am light  
as a feather, or even my thumbprint

fills the sky. The water near shore  
shines silver on a cold Spring day.

A helicopter punctuates the air  
and I imagine, further out, there are fish

drifting mindlessly in subtle currents  
deeper than green goes. Fish made from atoms

streamed and condensed to the hard steel bliss  
of shape; fish

of whose precise location  
I am dreamily uncertain.

I imagine the bends: how pain swoops  
to painlessness the way smack takes you

away from yourself. Vertigo. I feel bubbles  
of nitrogen fizz distantly in my cool toes.

I imagine fins, or changes in current  
surmised, in the dark, as fins.

Yet the heat in my head and the light  
on my eyes are the same blue day's

convergence. This is a miracle of sorts,  
a fleeting miracle between horizons.

The same blue day, one world below  
and one above and one world here and now.

II

I am a wooden boat.  
From the wooden deck of me  
my anchor drops away  
to sound the fathomless sea.

The mossy chain gains speed  
uncurling through my hands.  
On the wooden deck of me  
I stand between two lands

and neither made of land:  
the lands of sky and sea.  
Deep in the wind my kite  
unfurls transparently.

It reaches far away —  
this kite is quite a thing;  
and yet I touch the sky  
because I touch this string.

And touch the ocean floor,  
that ache of dull content.  
But the wooden deck of me  
is the place of measurement.

Luke Davies