

Classic Poetry Series

Kaye Aldenhoven
- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Kaye Aldenhoven(-)

Kaye Aldenhoven is an Australian poet and teacher.

In 1971 Kaye Aldenhoven moved from South Australia to Umbakumba on Groote Eylandt, Northern Territory. She then lived and taught at Yuendumu, Amoonguna, Alice Springs, Darwin, Jabiru and was Principal of all three NT Area Schools (at Jabiru in Kakadu, Alyangula on Groote Eylandt and Batchelor). These moves were important for the direction of her work.

Her first book, *In My Husband's Country*, was a clear and deft response to country in a way that is peculiarly Territorian, as is her involvement in cross-art performances of poetry, dance ritual, and textiles. In 1992 she won the Northern Territory Red Earth Literary Award. She has edited a number of anthologies and was included in artist's book/anthology *Terra Australis* edited by Chris Mansell with work by artist Tommaso Durante.

Her chapbook, *Skin* (PressPress, 2004) extends Aldenhoven's engagement with (and explores the conundrum of) living in country. This is an important theme in non-metropolitan Australian poetry which is not much taken up in the urbanised fringes. Poetically, Aldenhoven eschews overtly decorative language and aims for a clear and clarifying diction to illuminate her themes.

Kaye Aldenhoven likes visiting unusual places (and has travelled extensively in Indonesia, India, China, Turkey, West Papua, Nepal and Sarawak) but she likes reading and writing poetry more. In her poetry, the usual becomes strange and the worlds to which most of us are strange come closer.

Becoming Fluent In Wailpiri

Hey, your kids are learning to speak Wailpiri.
It's good, eh?
How do they learn so quickly?
Them boys more clever, you know, than their mother.
Nungarai laughs.

Jangala's in the carpenter's shop,
hiding from the cutting desert wind.
After school my kids visit him, swap stories.
He's teaching them bush business.
He teases them.

One afternoon
Jangala looks deadly flash.
See, beautiful, eh? Proper flash this one.
He removes the fine bone ornament
from his nasal septum.
See, him made properly.
Beautiful, eh?
Wailpiri technology.
See these red feathers,
from Major Mitchell cockatoo.
Put feathers in kangaroo bone,
little bone from leg,
stick with spinifex glue,
make him smooth so him won't hurt.

Look me now.
Jangala takes a biro and pushes it through
the hole in his nose.
I make a hole in you mob nose now,
you be deadly flash then,
like me.

My darling first born
jokily declines this offer,
in Wailpiri.
The words knock the breath from Nungarai.

She mutters a warning:
Big trouble now.
Them words secret words - men's business words.
Women and kids can't listen.
Very dangerous words.

Jangala grabs his boomerang.
I thrash you mob, you mob too cheeky!
My three sons run screaming
out of the carpenter's workshop,
and run down the red dirt road,
run for their lives,
yelling, dodging, whites of their eyes huge,
yelling in English:
Sorry, Sorry! We didn't mean it, Jangala!
Sorry! Sorry! Don't hit us!

They run for Nungarai,
hide behind her, hanging onto her skirt.
Sorry, sorry Jangala.
We didn't mean it!
We're sorry Jangala,
Don't hit us.

Them three Jambidjinba.
Them kids.
Very rude in language.
No respect.
Too cheeky! Too cheeky!

Who teach them Jambidjinba these words? Eh?
Nungarai asks.

Kaye Aldenhoven

Curcuma Australasica – Wild Ginger

In shadowed gorges
erect pink bracts brim with rain
unseen, turmeric roots engorge.

Kaye Aldenhoven

Delonix Regia

ablaze against thunder clouds
flamboyant poincianas
flame red as lust

Kaye Aldenhoven

Full Moon Wakeful

I watch the full moon
slide down
a dome of dark glass.

His silvered body,
disturbs my peace of mind.

Sleep averted, I wait.
The moon sets.

At dawn the speargrass flowers
while we make love.

Kaye Aldenhoven

Haiku

lorikeets gossip
busy brush tongues lap nectar
from eucalypt cups

Kaye Aldenhoven

Haiku

Young man stretches
for hibiscus flowers
heart-red they grace my bed

Kaye Aldenhoven

If You Were Here

The coming down of the Magela
after the first storms,
we chased that front of water all day.
It surged slowly,
calm in the surety of its fulfillment
trickling unevenly into dry spaces
filling hollows, spilling, collecting
pushing the debris of the Dry before it.
The hot sand gasped,
giggles of bubbles escaped
as the water soaked deeper.

Beetles dragged their sodden carapaces
onto the island havens of your legs
the swirling froth tickled your skin
you laughed and rolled in the rolling flood.
The swell of water
gouged the sand from under your hips
rolled you roughly along
dragging you underneath the paperbarks
the luscious wet warmth
tangle of sand and water and your hair
your grazed knees.

In the stone country
a taut pod explodes, kapok floats
king fisher dips into dark pool
the coconut smell of rock fig
Yamitj calls out from the escarpment
yams grow
the waterfall drops, stops, falls again
Black Walleroo leaps the gap.

Laughing
sucking mango juice
the smell of pandanus fruit
the gurgling cackle of a Koel
pursued by her male
golden-eyed frogs on lily leaves

flying foxes vibrate
then fold their silky wings.

A thousand whistle ducks lift and turn.
If you were here I'd make love to you.

Kaye Aldenhoven

Lilium Auratum

stamens quiver
saffron lily pollen stains
indelibly

Kaye Aldenhoven

Magnolia

hairy calyx splits
wine dark magnolia
unfolds to warmth

Kaye Aldenhoven

Pandanus Fruit

On the edge of the floodplains at dusk
beneath recursively barbed leaves
shards of vermilion enamel
dropp onto burnt black earth.

Now delicately dismembered
the knobby sphere
displays like jewels
on a jeweller's cloth
smooth inner membranes of vivid glass.

Stored in a basket
beside my bed
glossy cinnabar fruits
exude a dangerous perfume.
The floury smell of semen
penetrates my room.

Kaye Aldenhoven

Terminalia Ferdinandiana

the scent will catch you first
look up! from leaf axils, long
creamy flower spikes extrude

Kaye Aldenhoven

To Prepare For You

To prepare for you
I scrub the soles of my feet
and cut my toenails.
I wash and brush my hair
Flicking it out with my fingers
so each strand will dry fast and sweet
in the breeze of the ceiling fan.

I smooth oil on my elbows, thighs, and knees;
brushing oil from my palms
over my nipples
so they'll stick to your fingers.

I wrap myself in a silky sarong
choose a cunning earring
which will jangle in your bed
when I shake my hair over you.

Will you notice that I've cut my hair?
One side is longer than the other
but I won't neaten it.
I'll wear the earring on the long side.

I streak perfume through my hair.
Bought near the Jain temple
in Udaipur
palest green scent distilled from a root
dissolved in oil of sandalwood

Last time I left you
I could smell you in my hair all day.

Kaye Aldenhoven