

## hotel bone

the street resembles a neck  
from a wayward guitar  
with Hotel Bone sitting idle on a vein,  
wedged between two frets  
                    where the bad tunes can reach her

these white stucco walls, I imagine, once carried a vision of pearl  
now a gourd for asylum seekers

                    Iraqi, Indonesian, Sri Lankan  
and one crazy Aboriginal ... who lives with a typewriter  
but not with the brevity of a visa on my head; no,  
my longevity was guaranteed before I was born  
                                    in the 1967 referendum

                    the freedom to practice the voodoo of semantics  
within the marrow of Hotel Bone

existence only 2 minutes walk  
from some of the best latte lounges in the city  
                            yet, white faces don't come down here  
until they've been classified unfit for duty  
no longer permitted upon the chorus line  
                                    of the cappuccino song  
                    where multi-culturalism is in an airline format  
first-class, business and economy seating

but those of us who submit to the chance of mystery-flights  
                            end up on the tar, of Hotel Bone

                    a haven from Saddam, Suharto, the Tamil Tigers  
                            and One Nation

                            this Hotel Bone;  
                                    it is hard

                                    it is reachable

                                    it is home

## jetty nights

it was an arm that stretched over the mud and sharks  
from under the song of the swaying pines in the darkness,  
the night water fondles the pylons  
as mullet dance in the cold blackness afraid of nothing  
we too, walk against our curfew  
we see the eyes under the jetty,  
phosphorescence and ectoplasm  
under the death of the floorboards  
looking up from the muddy grave  
stealing a glance at the clear cover of stars

a fishing boat drones somewhere out there on the water  
and in the distance a buoy flashes red lights and green  
and you suddenly feel the loneliness out there  
that's where you can escape to

the smell of mashed potatoes and chops hang in the air  
drags our attention back to the shoreline cottages  
Ray Martin chatters somewhere in the glow of sixty watt lighting

we turn and face the clatter of dead wood  
our lifeline home  
and leave our jetty,  
leave away the mystical squawks of curlew in the swamp  
that eerie bleakness we came to love,  
this innocence we behold  
that we had nothing to fear but our parents' scorn

a bent neck black and flustered feather  
mallee

deaden crow with eternal lockjaw  
a bent neck black and flustered feather mallee  
not as gracious as a magpie,  
neck bent into the wind  
and bitumen madness that claimed you  
scorched mark  
and tears  
fallen into the blackened tar and earth  
blood soaked earth through massacre  
war  
and plague

this is someone's land  
played host to someone's lust of  
a bent neck black and flustered feather mallee  
ants scream  
wage war  
and curse the rain  
black feathers scatter the highway  
teasing the frozen bitumen spirits  
locked in the heat and tar  
sealed forever  
like the constant anger  
and sorrow within  
a bent neck black and flustered feather mallee

## deo optimo maximo

*for Matt Foley*

lurching onto the highway  
sporting a rushed pair of \$5.95 truck-stop sunglasses  
facing off with this intermittent black line,  
its cusps hidden in gullies forging south  
as it does northward

curvaceous segments of road  
like black smiles and frowns  
either gazing in the direction of the Pacific or the hinterlands,  
dark horses upon the clearing of the dreamtime tabernacles

this stretch from Brisbane to the Gold Coast  
since the 70s, its character has been raped too  
in what was briefly Joh's country  
yes!  
multi-lane monument to the Gods of old and new,  
the bandits touched by the spiritual fingers of radar guns  
and speed cameras,  
the all-knowing, all-seeing  
deo optimo maximo; on the tongues of the rogues  
— *to God, the best and greatest*

yet, by God's hand  
what happened to the beasts that inhabited the African Lion  
Safari?  
and did the UFO above the roadhouse just fly away?  
or can we even recognise the cemetery  
where the solitary Anzac stands  
that the surfers would salute  
to secure a pact with Huey and his crystal palace on the early  
morning tide?

protected from the glare by \$5.95 truck-stop sunglasses  
no one respects the speed limits  
and no one owns up to the roadside crosses

'cause I know  
there is no God —

there is only the living  
and trailers of the dead

## gas tank sonnets

1 hour out of Byron Bay  
and no dreams for three days  
when the snakes in the engine  
hatched a mutiny

the radiator hose was the first to go

a roadside heart-attack,  
meatball surgery with a swiss-army knife  
and almost hijacked by hitchers

the days and days of service station pies  
finally ripped through my spare tire  
and cocktails of on-edge nerves did their work

while all the time  
across the hills, the Pacific  
looking good enough to eat

feelings of withdrawal

leaving

Byron Bay and the muse,

for the likes of Brisbane-town  
and this want of becoming a writer

tongue dragging along the bitumen  
regurgitating yesterday's gravel,  
the mind aflush  
with gas tank sonnets

## cheap white-goods at the dreamtime sale

if only the alloy-winged angels could perform better  
and lift Uluru; a site with grandeur  
the neolithic additive missing from that seventh wonder of the  
world expo,  
under the arms of a neon goddess, under the hammer in  
London,  
murderers turning trustees  
a possession from a death estate  
maybe flogged off to the sweet seduction of yen  
to sit in the halls of a Swiss bank  
or be paraded around Paris' Left Bank  
where the natives believe  
that art breathed for the first time;  
culture, bohemian and bare and maybe brutal  
and how the critics neglect the Rubenesque roundness of a  
bora-ring  
unfolded to an academia of art  
yes, that pure soil in front of you  
the dealers in Manhattan lay back and vomit  
they're the genius behind dot paintings and ochre hand prints  
rattling studios from the East Side to the Village  
and across the ass of designer jeans  
porcelain dolls from Soho wanting a part in it so bad  
as the same scene discards their shells upon the catwalks  
like in the land of the original Dreaming

comatose totems litter the landscape  
bargains and half-truths simmer over authenticity  
copyright and copious character assassination on the menu  
sacred dances available out of the yellow pages  
and  
cheap white-goods at the Dreamtime sale!

## jaded olympic moments

for Jennifer Cullen

they made their way through the sliding-door  
and stole the lot

video, mini-disc equipment, fly-fishing reels, my  
son's piggy bank  
and my literary award

all on the eve of the Games  
capping off a *sterling* period of post-funeral melancholy  
after my young cousin's passing

then, sitting on Jen's couch  
as the ochre-kissed women came out  
and did their thing in the center of the stadium  
we had tears in our eyes

thinking, *that's our mob!*

but no,  
only a romantic would think that  
it's still very much an US and THEM kind of deal in this  
modern dreaming,  
we're city people without a language  
and some of us have even less  
but then the coppers rang  
said they'd caught them  
three smack-head white boys  
18, 19, 20

the gear was gone without a trace  
the video, the piggy bank, the literary award  
and it made sense  
'cause if blackfellas had broken into the house  
they would've taken Dad's 10ft Landrights flag

'cause it was worth just as much  
as Cathy Freeman's gold

## cribb island

For a while, Dad worked in a ghost town. He'd take us there on weekends after the government moved an entire community. Empty building after empty building, like some big science-fiction filmset. Wandering through deserted houses we were the first Aboriginal people to analyse the remains of the first Europeans to be cleared from this soil. Streets strewn with all sorts of treasures; Armageddon with its apocalyptic merchandising. Earthmoving equipment droned in the distance, always closing in. And the birds: dark-wings scuttled from silent twisters of smouldering debris and detritus. Doorways whistling breezes, a cadence of toothless old skeletons that filtered the smoke encrypted whispers of this mass grave. I think of those whispers every time my plane lands on the unmarked tombstones of one of Brisbane's least known burial grounds.

*on deserted streets*

*forgotten newspapers dance,  
dust keeps its appeal*



## fisherman islands

It was where my brother caught the tiger's skin, shoved his entire arm down this hole and pulled out the abandoned mojo of a venomous snake. Fisherman Islands on the gape of the brown river, land reclaimed from the sea. This place was a construct of dirt, sewerage works and shipping terminals, scarecrows of smokestacks. Void of life ... void of soul. The deadest soil you could ever walk upon. No substance. No song. But we explored the shoreline anyway, turning up the jetsam of Brisbane, listening to the mystic whispers from the mouth of the river. Slowly, fishermen waltzed on the pipes of the dredging-lines, their forms a distorted mirage in the midday heat. Maybe they too were props? Cardboard cut-outs on this man-made archipelago. Artificial land with its artificial spirits, and the luck that floated here, with nothing to guide it.

*the anglers are poised  
like hungry cranes on the tide,  
fish lift their spirits*

## ghosts of boundary street

New year's day, 2003. The sun was loud, but as bland as yesterday, last year, 2002 AD. In the early postmeridian hours, the temperature took advantage of the deserted streets, spirit-dancing inches above the bitumen, a seductive helix that undulated on the horizon, like an exotic dancer, *you can look ... but you can't touch!* And the breeze was curt, as scarce as traffic on this public holiday. Houses side by side vibrated ever so gently. The lizard rhythms of lounging bodies behind screen doors, lethargic organic masses that slither, physically and emotionally depleted in the lull of celebrations. The siesta of new year's day ... the only moment on the Australian social calendar when every citizen is almost equal; *hungover we are united!* Trekking down Boundary Street, West End, Brisbane, the residue of Moet on my forehead, the cinder of last year's resolutions in my scalp. I needed coffee to pull me up as the bitumen pulled me down. One litre of milk was going to cost me 10% extra for wisdom: a public holiday surcharge worth the returns of a frown. When suddenly my ears popped! A lone shark hooked the rise in front of me, tearing through the glutinous skin of Dreamtime and Earth, scattering the wings of those haze-angels with a high-octane Beowulf growl. Veering past me, I did not wave, because none of the passengers wore a face — expressionless. Just white linoleum wrapped from foreheads to jowls. I stared down into the puddle in the gutter. It was decorated with a petrol-based rainbow. My reflection was disappointing. I hadn't changed since last year. But if I'd stayed long enough, my reflection might vary.

Oil takes longer to evaporate. The litter in the street ruffled briefly in the car's wake. There was a saunter of hooves from synthetic leviathans. A cool vent of air stroked my ankles as the car disappeared into a solar flare on the next rise. The silt of silence resettled.

*empty coffee cups*

*blown across the gutter*

*song of city ghosts*

## 'revolver' by Samuel Wagan Watson

From my balcony I can read a strong poem that the moon has  
pasted on the river. Everything is quiet. Now and then, a wave  
breaks the message, temporarily changing the font from **bold** to  
*italics*. The moon in its crescent appearance is the precision blade  
of a Shaolin warrior. I'm concerned that if I gaze too long, I may  
carelessly jag my retinas on its razor points, pierced globes adding  
vitreous humor into this serious stretch of river. A mullet leaps  
from the water and reconstructs the moon's message; it is now the  
sound of one silver hand clapping. Above, an anonymous comet  
breaches the sky a small eternity, but shooting stars don't have the  
recoil of a poem executed in the lull of moon fire.

*oval mirror lights*

*seduction on night-water*

*flagrant moon kisses*

## Monster

I can't speak my grandmother's tongue and I've never been on my grandfather's land,  
I've travelled here and I've travelled there,  
my culture replicated in government-funded laboratories;  
I am Frankenstein of the Dreamtime,  
I am Frankenstein of the Dreamtime.

Reanimated flesh that once sung natural song-lines  
surgically removed my Christian soul and repaired it with Indigenous design,  
a patriot to a black, yellow and red flag, yet I am colour-blind.  
I am Frankenstein of the Dreamtime.

I am a mutation of the white Australia policy!  
I am Frankenstein of the Dreamtime!  
I am the Australian Dream's living nightmare; I am an educated Aborigine!  
I scare some white people with my English; I am a Frankenstein of the Dreamtime!  
In today's society, my neighbours will sing, Advance Australia Fair, and like the abomination that I am I can only ask  
Advance Australia Where? Thinking black is a thought-crime, I have no need for Queen or desecrated country and only  
Australian nationalism can define, I'm a renegade of Indigenous context; I am Frankenstein of the Dreamtime . . .