



SKETCHES : ASHFIELD PARK

Margaret West



At night
the trees speak in leaves
darkly.
They've heard dealings,
probings,
shrieks.
The drop of limbs,
Heads.
Ravaging of gerbera.
Bats.
And red jelly frogs.

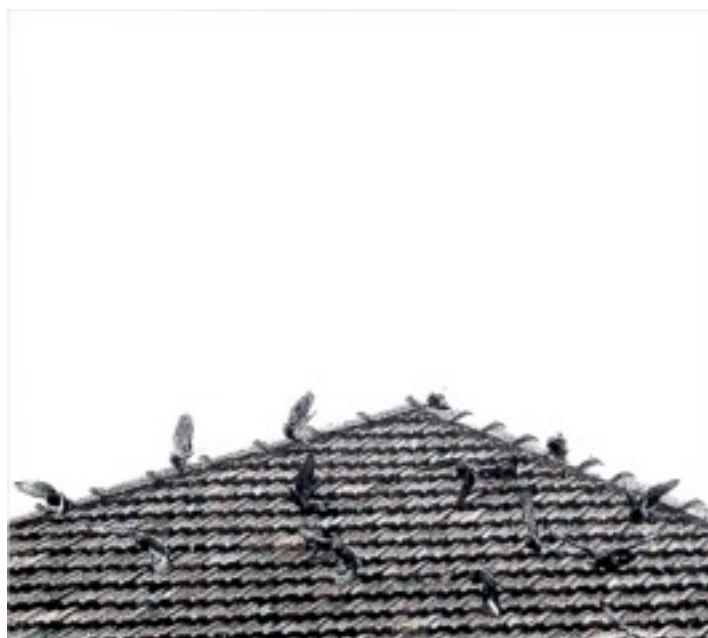
But early each morning,
when the hour lightens the temper
and footsteps darken dew,
there are such signs.

A southerly buster has lightened the air.
The ground is strewn
with the skin of the great eucalypt.

Cockatoos flourish their sulphur crests.
Scrape at the softer edges
of the morning.

Chinese ranked in sixes, tens, move in a dream
where air is water.
Water, air.

Sounds of the squares of the people
spill
from their eyes.



Clattering with a hundred clockwork wings
the grandstand roof shakes itself free of grey flocking,
revealing the precision of its tiles.

And deep spaces between the buttresses of Moreton Bay
fill with cooing and bobbing,
billing at the edges of loaves,

softening crusts of the elderly
who spare crumbs
of their loneliness.



A woman walks alone with care

backwards
on a path
between palms.

Her arms swing almost free.



Aloof from the swarming pink excess of prunus
shrugging the sky around its blossom,
magnolia strikes awe
raising magenta fire.

Its petals lie as faces of the drowned,
now purple, white, now burgundy,
slip browning into earth
before our feet.



The pale fawn feet of emus step into morning
amid the fall of liquid amber, plane and golden poplar,
alien as angels perched wistfully against a clock-tower;
smiling.

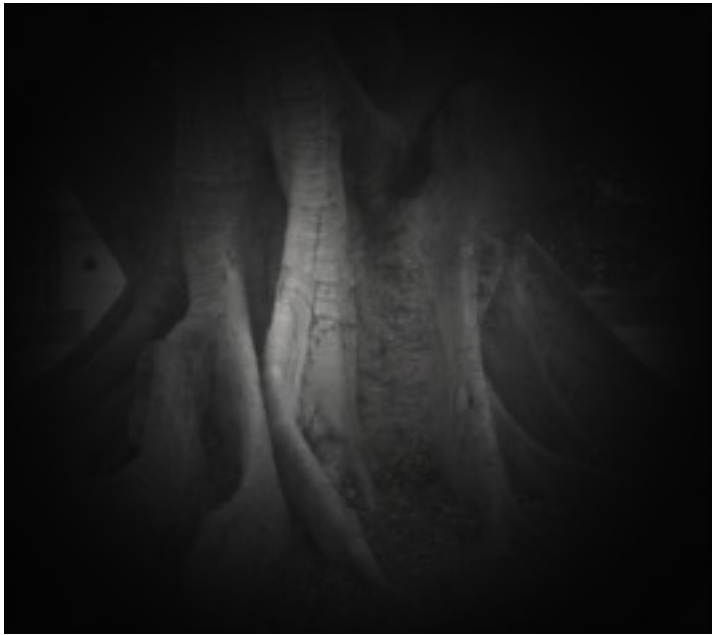
A gardener has lost his Latin in grass clipping. A tulip
tree perhaps. His beard glints ginger in the morning
and high stepping angles of emus make precise waves
through red and yellow seas.



A lopped limb gleams in morning light.
Twigs litter the ground and leaves
lie open as hands on the bare earth.

A knot twists in the throat of the magnolia.
A handful of feathers beneath browning azalea.
A bird dives, cries.

A truck backfires.
The buttresses of Moreton Bay hold sanctuary.
I walk unveiled.



The poplar has been eaten from within
but green shoots rise from its husk.
One might attempt such strategies, seasonally

adjusting foliage, face or figure. Dissembling
but with the innocence of trees, the hope
of pale green leaves, in springtime.



(for Waldo Emerson)

Between sky and jacaranda is a space where all
is more spare, backs austere, vulnerable the angles
of shoulders, elbows, knees; heels infinitely poignant;
and artifice a mockery.

(Yet this space
beckons. . .)

Without vanity morning breathes its own poetry;
so turn again to sky and jacaranda, wisp of a cloud,
backs and shoulders, elbows,
knees and heels.



So early. The earth still sleeps
warm under grasses, leaves, sweet clover,
doves grazing over it
a slowly slipping doona.

Such warble, chirp and twitter.
It will awaken soon to see the jacaranda.
Feel the rubbing of its flowers
against the sky.

Something to be stepped around or over,
back to for inspection:
a fallen chick - naked, visceral,
warming in sun to its destiny.

Already flies sip at the small seeds of its eyes
and ants have found their way
through the transparent membrane of its skin.
So little smell. So little grief.

Further the ground is littered with feathers
and the small old man, as every morning,
bends and rocks his frail body
through movements from another time an place.



(After Melbourne Cup Day)

Once the swirl of feathers became a hat
glossy
blue-black
jauntily perched
then every patch of clover
or bare earth
fawn leaf like the footprint
of an emu
bunch of leaves or deep red
roses donned and doffed in the morning
pantomime
the whole jacaranda
a hooded cloak and doves
and magpies merely awaiting the right
head or moment
cat
shot or hat pin to skewer it
to this morning parade
led by the death
of a butcher-bird.



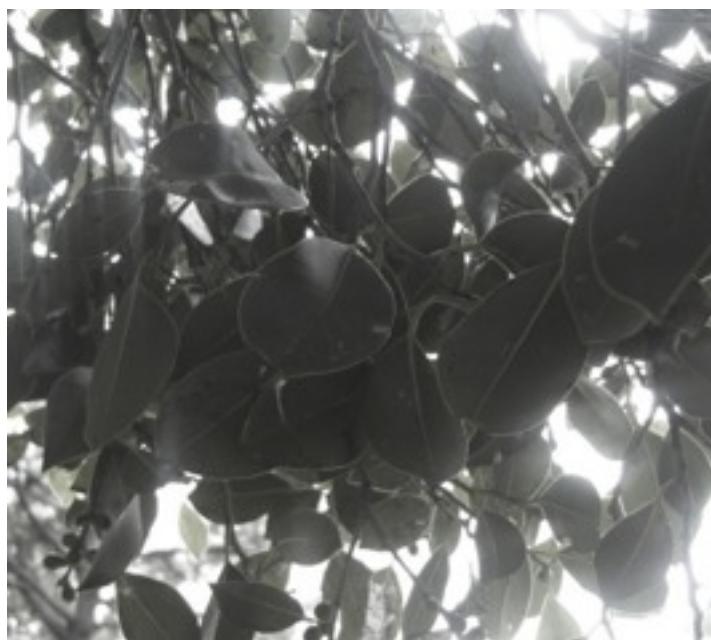
(Moreton Bay)

Its roots dark-gnarl their way
to press against threadbare grasses

darkly curl as the sleeping
hands of the peat-bog man

darkly grope
beneath pale grasses

beneath the dark whisper
of its leathery tongues.



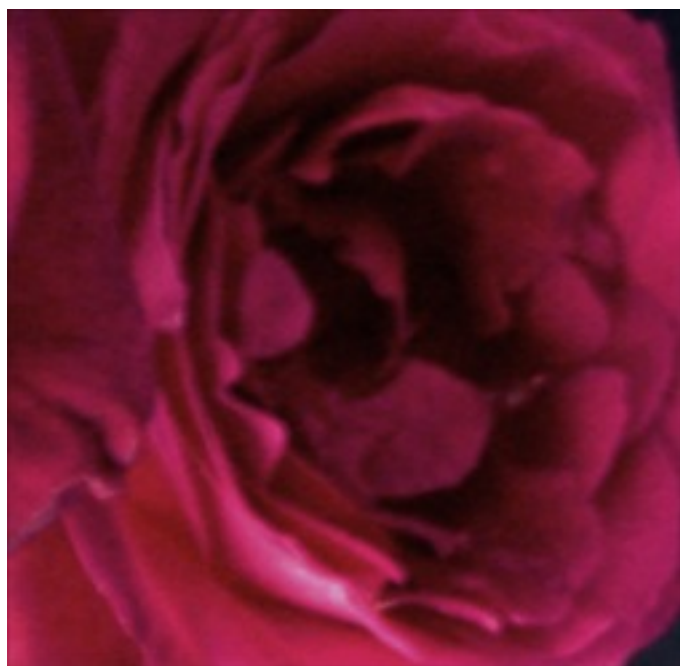
For two days now
it has been sitting at the edge
of a bed of red roses
with the frailty of the very young
or old
shrugged into itself.

Full-blown
it might have been
a dove perhaps or pigeon;
now just some thing slow crawling
to death as lice
among barbicels.

Naked
the ants will cover it
with dark and swarming shroud
while flies sip
at the corners
of its eyes.







She gasps as she encounters the spurt of water from the sprinkler
 drops hold the light to her hot pink shorts
 vermilion T

She runs as a flower round each round bed
(Gerbera Geranium Impatiens Petunia Rose)
 swirling dark green figures-of-eight on the dew-
 pale grass of early morning

early but already hot
 and hot from such running
 and gasping
 flushed
 flying a black mane
 across the whirling jetting water

The gerberas watch her unblinking
 a spurt slaps her arm, her shoulder
 drops on her skin on petals
(Gerbera Geranium Impatiens Petunia Rose)

She flowers as she runs round the bed of nodding petunias
(Gerbera Geranium Impatiens Petunia Rose)
 a spurt across her back and gasping

round and round and round the rose round bed for multiple
spurts (ear breast flanks)
flaying the heat off her
t and shorts clinging vermilion hot
pink wet-close as skin or petals
(*Gerbera Geranium Impatiens Petunia Rose*)



Boys behind
mesh in whites.

It's the season.

A ball
is caught.

The pigeons
flap and roar.



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Here

a young sock

(no red runs
into white)

There

stitched
a blanching cricket
ball

(rolling
light)



The monitor blank
unblinking at an apple
core. Pale

young leaves impaled
on dry sticks — five on one
ten on another.

Skin dries the colour
of blood. The plug
snakes on its cord.



The park now bleached to silence
Bare
Bereft
Desiccated.
The leathery tongues of figs
stick in their throats.
Unutterable
Only the grass gasps
sere beneath my feet.
There will be wailing tonight
but no weeping.



In memory of Lukas and Oskar

We shared the time and the place
each in our own way.

SKETCHES : ASHFIELD PARK
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Margaret West
15 Braeside Street
Blackheath
New South Wales
Australia 2785

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