

## Selection of published poems by Edith Speers

### **Alone among others**

a nothing special van gogh  
a self portrait  
one of many you'd flick past in an art book  
but here he is staring into your eyes  
with mismatched eyes  
one too bright too blue too piercing  
too sharply focused outward at you  
at what you're wearing  
at the room  
a beam of blue awareness peering  
through a hole in time  
and the other eye looking inward at the pain the past  
and all that was and all that might have been  
a gentle benediction is that wise green eye  
it is almost serene in the bony hungry haunted  
never handsome never cherished face  
of a man who did not hesitate  
who gave everything and got nothing  
gazing out at you and your world from beneath  
the brim of a straw hat  
through the mirror that became a window  
with a view of the future he faced without fear  
one eye cool green and dreamy  
and the other eye blue and hot and clear  
as the sky behind him  
only hinted at by flying flakes of blue  
and everywhere showing through is the raw canvas  
as though he and straw hat and all are hovering  
like a vision seen through a glass dimly  
all except the eyes that find yours  
and do not let go

*(Island Magazine Issue 104, April 2006)*

## Oasis

The long road home  
lets you settle for a while in some kind of oasis  
that might last for a lifetime it's so peaceful  
or addictive because it reminds you of home  
and near enough is good enough  
for a weary traveller  
until in a quiet moment  
outside in the deepest dark before dawn  
thinking of nothing at all  
you hear the creak of leather harness  
as a waiting warhorse shifts its weight  
then the faint click  
of the bit being champed  
or brass rings chinking  
or is it the tinkle of links of chain-mail armour  
as someone turns in the saddle?  
Of course not - it's only the towering bulk  
of gum trees creaking in the wind,  
the rustle of gum leaves brushing together  
and the tinny clink of something metallic hung in the shed  
or slung over the fence wire.  
Rest easy, rest easy -  
that flutter and soft crackling sound  
is laundry on the line  
or a filmy plastic supermarket bag left out in the garden  
weighted down by punnets of lettuce,  
not the silken drift and snap of pennons  
on the morning of battle.  
And the grey shapes that drift through the trees  
are only mist whorls moving up from the river,  
not the cowled monks at prayer  
nor your waiting comrades nudging each other.  
And the rings of pale brightness out in the paddock  
are daffodil clumps,  
not the cooling coals of the campfires  
from that last night  
before the day of the battle that will bind you together  
for ever and ever.

*(This canto from a book length poem, 'The long road home', won 2nd place in the poetry section of the TFAW Christmas Competition 2003. 'Oasis' was published in Blue Giraffe3 in April 2006)*

## Thylacine

We pursue your footprints  
as though they could cure history.  
The fabulous beasts  
have been plundered  
as mysteries and meanings retreat  
from greed.  
Whatever is left, we drown for power  
and placate with consumer conveniences  
an atavistic dread.

But like the babe in the basket  
we suck on plastic substitutes  
and frown  
at the unsustaining emptiness  
earned by our efforts.  
We learn to desire  
you who suckled milk in the mother's pouch  
and gorged on the blood and giblets  
of slaughtered cousins.

No dog, you did not wag your tail  
but turned a striped rump  
and disappeared  
more vexingly than human predecessors.  
When the last habitat is destroyed  
& roars with the hysteria of our mechanical toys  
we might glimpse you gazing over your shoulder  
gaping  
a yawn big enough to swallow the world.

*(Published in the 1980 anthology by TFAW, 'Here Today')*

## Sonnet 7

Why are the girls, in romance books, so nice?  
They never spit at rivals or pull hair -  
Not even verbally. It isn't fair  
How they win praise for simple lack of vice,  
Which really means the lack of sexual spice -  
Or guts, to put it plainly. Don't they care  
Enough to fight for love? Is it so rare  
For women to be cats instead of mice?

I, for one, won't play the hypocrite -  
Touch another woman and you're dead,  
And dead men are not welcome in my bed.  
Try to cross me and you'll be in shit!  
But I can freeze like flame and burn like ice,  
So if you're good - then I'll be more than nice.

*(Published in Overland 132, Spring 1993)*

## Hot Flushes Hurray!

This is the warm embrace of farewell  
This is the hug goodbye  
Now is the shedding of fetters and shackles  
That anchored your ankles  
Whenever you started to fly  
Now all your burning your glorious yearning  
Your brightness and lightness and mirth  
Can sever the tether that made sure you never  
Got clear of our dear Mother Earth  
She claims her tithe each month you're alive  
And we pay her in blood we all know  
But you've paid your dues, say goodbye to the blues  
At last she is letting you go  
Goodbye to the grumpiness frumpiness down in the dumpiness  
Goodbye to all that, goodbye  
Goodbye to the grouchiness pouchiness goddamn it hurts ouchiness  
Goodbye goodbye goodbye  
Arrayed in your raiment of radiant white  
Or cloaked like a witch in the blackness of night  
Or fashioned for passion in rich gold and red  
Or wearing whatever comes into your head  
Now you're the eagle with wings spread wide  
The listening owl from whom nothing can hide  
The star in the galaxy steady and bright  
The comet who fills mere mortals with fright  
O hunter on high with eyes that can see  
O soft-feathered killer of lies that hurt all  
O guide to the many who live all at sea  
O message of magic that thrills and appals  
You are free at last you are free

*(Published in 'Running through the Stars'; TFAW 2005; ed. Megan Schaffner)*

## **Crow Committee and Raven Review Board**

On every road you travel, they are there  
a delegation from the one big government  
picking through the facts like a royal commission  
reading the entrails as soothsayers do.  
These are the beaks who can't be bribed  
whose gravitas cannot be shrugged aside  
like a mournful garment only worn sometimes  
to hide the ordinary mortal underneath.  
No: here is principle personified  
pacing the corridors of power like metronomes  
their gait ponderous, delicate, but never undignified.  
Hereditary chamberlains born to serve,  
their life's mission bred in them bone deep  
and extruding outwards into stiff formality  
crisp practicality, never cruel nor compassionate,  
simply elegantly factual and dispassionate.  
On every road you travel, you will see them  
a conference convened at the scene of the crime  
a coronial inquiry examining the evidence  
an independent committee investigating corruption.  
Here is such plain uncomplicated probity  
the whole process transparent, conducted publicly,  
no decision of theirs is ever disputed,  
no conclusions they make can be refuted.

*(Published in 'Best Australian Poems 2004'; Black Inc.; ed. Les Murray)*