

## Coral Hull / FOUR POEMS

### ROAD FROM HILLSTON TO COBAR, VIA MOUNT HOPE

a committee of apostle birds, tiny black eyes looking out at the world  
from their group,  
during a morning feeding, the grey flock eating amongst leaf littered  
red soil,  
by 1080 fox and rabbit poison, on the edge of a nature reserve, nature  
reserved for us,  
a pine covered ridge on the road from hillston, is assembled through  
glimpses,  
a little cemetery and a tennis court, in the middle of nowhere, like at  
twin rivers,  
where the women all brought cake on a saturday afternoon, while the  
men got drunk,  
too drunk to play tennis, one fell off the back of a ute and hit his  
head,  
his dog looked concerned, it was very boring,  
blue bonnets, parrots, flash red, blue, 160 km south of cobar,  
it is the face of the blue bonnet that is blue, with the sky washed up its  
cheeks,  
they have thrown a bucket of sky paint from timid cunning eye to  
beak, wise parrot,  
the little blue bonnet in the tall open mallee, on the ground, beneath  
the trees,  
or up in the trees at midday, or in the deep galaxy of night, extremely  
quiet, hard to find,  
a patch of painted sky thrown up, awash and finally rested on a  
branch,  
95 kms south of cobar, mallee ringnecks in the pine woodland

break the fatigue of the drive with colour, with a look like a started  
paper fire,  
they pause to drink at sunrise, unlit the feather is lit,  
there is nothing as precious as a wild bird at this moment, the flare of  
feathered colour,  
the small squawks and workings of bird societies throughout the day  
of perfect weather,  
the winter rainfall triggered hormones in them,  
the cracking of branch and seed on the moist forage trail, deep along  
the shady ground,  
coming into cobar, the last 30 km stretch, of white cotton, fleece of  
the plant,  
and sheep fleece turned dust red, gone to seed, brutalised sheep, on  
the red clay,  
hard rose quartz beneath the broken hoof, hurt cotton, soft sheep,  
white-winged choughs gliding across the roads, eject their soft  
parachutes,  
spreading their tails like fans, fanning the red earth hard,  
they scoot across the road, the ground black bird of open woodland  
and scrub,  
easy targets for shooters when they are not still and quiet, they fall  
with insects in their beaks,  
they say, *'we were only taking what we needed,'* precious sheep, precious  
choughs,

## EUROPEAN RED FOX (VULPES VULPES)

the black and white rooster whose tail feathers blew like emergency streamers,  
puffed out his chest for the nervous hens and crowed all the short afternoon,  
there was a starving fox prowling around, night comes so soon in august,  
rock and tree sundials predict the short day ahead, hens go to the sheds early,  
the ice that blows off the snowy mountains is a cool wind clock,  
the european red fox was first released near melbourne for recreational hunting,  
it is hunted still, hounded deeper into the inland from the snowy country,  
in fifty years it was in western australia, driven towards the edge, widely spread,  
slimline, on the red trot, like a ribbon blowing between trees and roots,  
vulpes vulpes throughout the lightly wooded areas, rarely a life beyond four years old,  
trapped, shot, run down and a lack of prey, they are exposed to this life in the full,  
born to be hounded for four years, four years of the great disappearing act,  
four years of flooded silence, four years of sunsets, aridity and drought,  
they bring in their bright eyed cubs to face the small term, in a land that is hostile to foxes,  
that striking red coat is one year into its sentence, its hunger inland on legs,



as it makes its way towards the desert marsupial, chook pen, the  
wildfruit, the dying lamb  
and roadkill carrion, it makes its way towards a darkness greater than  
sun down,  
it has learnt to be adaptable, by keeping its secrets close to the  
crumbling edge,  
in a land ruled by the minds behind machines that harvest wheat and  
cattle,  
it slithers along the same routes taken by the rainbow serpent,  
prisoner to an island,  
vulpes vulpes watches the extinction of the numbat and the black  
faced rock wallaby,  
it is witness to them being chopped up into dirt by transinternational  
cooperations,  
economical compost for big crop growers and animal harvesters,  
one fox is blamed for the extinction of a nation's wilderness, yet it will  
soon join them as nil,  
as we turn everything into meat, the meat for us to eat and shit out,  
it comes red with blood from ripped hemorrhoids, soon we are busily  
shitting out foxes,  
we bring in our buckets to the government offices, for the payment of  
a bounty,  
when proof of death is provided, the more elusive variety are poisoned  
with 1080,  
poisoning campaigns are carried out, by the politically correct, the  
greenie,  
biological control combined with conventional control, animal  
murder is conventional,  
for vulpes vulpes, slim red dogs, with soft white bibs, a long way and  
time from europe,  
one half grown cub was curled up in the middle of the road mid  
morning,  
an unsealed back road that no car had driven along for at least that day,  
there is something about a pristine road that no-one has driven along,  
that warm red dust that hasn't been disturbed, that an australian red  
fox can curl up on,

## COBAR AND BYROCK, N.S.W. LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

welcome to the cobar and byrock shires,  
incorporating wooded undulating country, with rugged hills and dry  
water courses,  
the shire boundary is formed by the darling river in the north  
and the lachland river in the south east,  
much of the land used around the town district is for sheep grazing,  
emus, echidnas, snakes, lizards, giant goannas, 200 species of bird,  
including parrots, major mitchell cockatoos are common,  
along with the eastern and western greys, the euro and the red  
kangaroo,  
fork tailed kites, and wedgetail eagle feeding on rabbits, kangaroos or  
sheep,  
in reservoirs and farm dams; heron, ibis, ducks, wanderers or even  
gulls and terns,  
other common birds include honeyeaters, wrens, robins and the  
apostle bird,  
a walk in the bush can reveal a suprising variety of wildlife,  
one or two ranges of rocky hills dominate the landscape in the east,  
flattening to sandy river plains in the west,  
the water supply forms a 135 km pipeline to nyngan,  
the floodplains are naturally treeless, saltbush and mitchell grass  
communities,  
here, the banks of the rivers and minor creeks are lined by red river  
gums,  
in the south and south east of the cobar shire, lie extensive areas of  
mallee vegetation,  
most of the district is covered by semi arid woodlands,

some common trees are bimbale box, red box, rosewood, behal, and mulga, vast expanses of wildflowers bloom in spring, before european settlement the area had a park like appearance with stretches of perennial native grasses scattered with trees and shrubs, more than a century later much of it is dominated by shrubs, such as turpentine, buddha, hopybush, puny and mulga, they are known as densities and have been insidiously increasing, creeping over the dune dominated lands, at the expense of pasture for livestock, warning; the increase in density of these woody weeds is the largest threat to sustainable pastoralism, land holders are now using fire to reduce woody weed densities, other methods being utilised are goat grazing, sage chemicals and clearing by mechanical means, where there is predominately the grazing of livestock, byrock, a small village 78 kms south east of bourke on the mitchell highway, named after the renowned 'rock-hole', a natural gilgai formed in a table of granite rock near the present site of the village, the old saying was '*meet you by the rock*', which gradually became '*bye-rock*' then later *byrock*, or more recently '*bye bye byrock*' or '*bye bye outback*,'



## ROAD CONDITIONS WHEN IT WAS FLOODING AT BREWARRINA

winter rain affects the local roads from walgett to brewarrina  
whereas flood water moves down slowly through the rivers,  
seeping across the flat land, it whistles at the billabong's perimeter  
and cuts the dirt roads off,  
rain and flood; each have a different effect on the road's surface,  
making roads impassable and places inaccessible, locals are frightened  
of their own roads,  
even in an eh holden station wagon, built for australian conditions,  
the annual rainfall 352 mm, this decreases as you travel further west,  
where rainfall is unreliable,  
where there is a winter rainfall dominance, and prolonged periods of  
low rainfall,  
soon we are fully submerged, obsessed by rain and flood,

there is always the last road out of town,  
it was a long stretch of road, would you do that stretch again?  
we had a long dry stretch around december/january,  
as long as a dry spell from broken hill and that stretch of road to the  
accessible outback,  
in the rain I learnt that the desert can turn damp and grey,  
and the way in which the desert disappointed me in the cold, as  
though it was now unwild,  
but I spotted its crumbling dry edges just beneath the thunderheads,  
in the untamed rain that followed, the washaway, flash flood and the  
art of the 3 point turn,  
*'don't touch the red clay on the sides of the roads,  
or you'll slide into the table drain and get bogged,'*

dad woke up, *'more rain,'*  
*'fucking shut up will you,'* he woke me  
and wanted to buy emma a bottle of scent with a few scratchies  
wrapped around it for her birthday. (*'get her a bottle of scent coral, women*  
*love scent'*)  
and called homosexuals 'shirt lifters' so john, coming from melbourne  
asked him, *'what about curtain raisers?'* (to dad this sounded pretty  
serious)  
and in reference to my second book from penguin, the one that  
displayed red on the spine, dad said *'red's a pretty colour, the black*  
*fellas will like that,'*  
(meaning that the book should sell well in the outback)  
well, I don't know about that,

road conditions;  
caution, water is over the road at carter's swamp, please check with  
the shire council  
before traveling in goodooga or the weilmoringle area,  
the shire workers are really pissed off, mud up to the axles, they're  
buggered,  
you've only got to smile at them and they'll throw a rock at you,  
whilst doing nothing well,

meanwhile, birds are feeding in the floodways, coot, black ducks, wood  
ducks, pelican,  
white necked heron, sacred ibis, straw necked ibis, egret, seagulls,  
grebes,  
wedgetail eagles along the roads,  
we are dodging black beetles around 11.00 am on the unsealed road to  
coolabah,



rainfronts are coming, in the way that the animals behave,  
the wet red mud eating away at the bitumen, signposts toppling,  
brown rivulets streaming over roads, graders along flood affected  
causeways, flooding,  
traffic hazard ahead, ahead of the rivers not ahead of the rain,  
this rain will affect unsealed roads, whereas the river's flooding will cut  
through the bitumen,  
will create flood affected roads, will intersect and isolate,  
worried mothers, stranded sunlight in the window glass of stranded  
properties,  
took me six hours to get to bourke from bre, trees placed in the  
middle of the road,  
to indicate where the big holes are, roads submerged and washaways,  
  
eddie's from the city, doesn't know any better,  
put it into four wheel drive to go through a bit of horse piss on the  
road,  
but now the road is flooded, you can't see the ground, cloudy weather,  
gary's from the bush, waited til it all dried up,  
he'd been caught out before, mud up to both his ankles, sticky black  
mud,

if it rains along this stretch we're up shit creek without a paddle,  
big thunderclouds moving down across the tarrion,  
the blue heeler's tail is low with moisture, a barometer for wet  
weather,  
in the summer she wags her tail in a more economical way,

cyclone; a clockwise circular motion, a flow of barometric winds,  
a mini cyclone lifted everything, all our swags,

kevin laughed when a swag was lifted, until he found out that it was his  
swag,  
my father is underneath the old mattress with his mother, and seven  
other brothers and sisters,  
she prayed for all her children and covered all the mirrors,  
my father is with his father and brothers, out in the great grey winter  
storms,  
holding pieces of rubber hose that had been chopped up for them  
like a python,  
my grandfather grasping the big knife, *'hold on tight or you'll get your  
fucken arses fried,'*  
as they all ducked down along the fenceline, holding onto their hats,  
lightning striking like rain,  
it killed five hundred head of cattle out on the cato and ten thousand  
sheep,  
striking the ground was easy for this kind of weather,  
two aboriginal kids got blown away from the edge of the darling river,  
lightning killed one and the other was unconscious for two days,  
dad said, *'it was similar to rose street, when I went up to the hardware shop to  
get a globe  
for the toilet light and one of you kids switched the power on as I was fitting it,  
I lit up like a blue flame, but I had rubber thongs on,'*





