

Stephen Oliver / FOUR POEMS

FROM THE STILL WATCHES  
(Nos: II, VIII, IX, XI)

II

The seeing wears away the seer:  
twelve years further on Voyager 2 putts  
out through the pin-ball solar  
system, past Neptune and beyond the  
reach of time. Another day in  
the round and the cliché of uneventful  
incident has not yet arrived.  
The balloon that is so majestic on  
the plump air tumbles as heavy  
as a plumb-bob onto the countryside,  
trailing its fifty seconds of life  
huddled to impact. The cattle  
scattered, the sky did not change but  
released names into the wispy  
afternoon. Then all is as it was  
before the tragic flight, except  
the calm that betokens fear.  
And clouds rich as coalmines gathered  
from open-cast horizons are  
transported in carriages of wind  
down the chutes of mountainsides, over  
the belts of grainfield to boost  
the corporate climates, and to market  
each end of the world gyrally.

A blotting paper sky, the soft  
tear of thunder, then lightning. Who  
would demand of the wise a word  
to steer by? Nostradamus throws his  
hands in the air after the event:  
'mark well my words, I told you so'.  
Backward we look upon his bag  
of tricks, and with each new calamity  
a surreal rabbit lifts before your eyes.  
Ribbed streets! Pneumatic heartbeat!  
Prophecy is the Art of Boredom  
for one who cannot stand his own company  
from one moment to the next.  
He pulls the hat trick, feigns the  
future, argues the task of his breath  
wearily on its way. Some ravel  
dreams to catscradles in whose  
uninhabited solitude, slowly as a yawn,  
wish to pull forth the Super Strings.  
Call it a living this space  
between meetings. Those encirclements  
that bind us together temporally.

## VIII

Surgical strike of the Stars at  
the Persian Gulf. Romance o the World!  
How deadly our longing for peace  
on this earth round as an Ideal.  
Delicately, we remember WW2 bombers  
romanced in archival film-footage like  
forks tossed across a transformer dark sky.  
David Niven steps lightly under the  
arched stone bridge, he brushes  
the dust of a crushed building from  
fingertips by the flares of a London  
sky. "Childhood is the last-chance gulch  
for happiness", he says. Havel  
plays the pied-piper astride his multi-  
coloured cavalcade. A wave of the  
hand old fashioned as anger, and he goes  
home to the Democratic Mountain,  
civilly. Salman Rushdie rides the magic  
carpet quicker than Qantas. "The world  
is surreal", he cries, "tis no more  
than a game of hide-and seek",  
and whizzes past into the future.  
Lange gleefully corks the evil jinnee of  
Baghdad, then flies onto the greenembrace  
of Aoteora with the freed twelve.

Where once the melancholy bombs  
from heaven fell to glut a village, 1000  
grey cranes have returned to the Mekong  
Delta in the month of pure light.  
One herd of elephants also returned to  
the tropical jungle where before  
was none. A pure green is that light  
and not the green of crouching camouflage.  
I bend to my past, for there is  
a corner of the sky forever my childhood:  
Rupert Brooke frolics through the  
soft Edwardian light with Virginia, and  
dreams of fish-heaven. Bad William  
thumps the shit out of poor Aunty Ethel.  
Every poem is the last will &  
testament of the soul, and every lover  
that breaks from lover a crime unto  
passion. Romance of the World!.

## IX

Sun shines metallic off Footscray  
and out across Westgate bridge. Silver &  
green office blocks rise from a  
dun plain. Superman, bearing a stash of  
old money darts over the dockside  
and the hidden sea, home to Melbourne.  
The thought of you adds weight  
to new memory — sad as lamplight on rain  
sodden guttering. Sadder still is the  
Romantic lapsed to obscenity,  
the swine tides that clog the spirit.  
Again, I drive my centre to the eye  
of your hurricane. Remember how  
the senses wrangled, anger like a vicious  
exorcism of betrayals not worded?  
To run is to hide is to freely admit the  
hidden hurt. Volscian woman, we flung our  
fire at each other heavy as fists.  
The old man sits in the park feeding  
pigeons; like his memories, they are  
grey-blue and flutter about him.  
My memory of you from any perspective falls  
along the flatness of this earth.  
No lamp lit up our consciousness,  
only the blade figured the light, Psyche.



'The funeral of the sea'  
sings the Italian documentary. The  
world's rotting oil-fleet blanks  
out the Mediterranean from the French  
coast to the Bay of Naples. Six  
hundred burning black candles turn crude  
the Arab night and Red Adare pots  
another well. Oil Magnates!  
Corporate Cowboys! Have you built your  
little ship of death, O have you?  
And there in the deep the Great Underwater  
Colonialist, Jacques Cousteau, laments  
the dark night of the sea, his  
eyes are the colour of basalt.  
Today we have part-time cloud & the  
hours work at it cruel as barbed wire drawn  
across the face of the moon.  
What then is this other? It is  
the shadow personality, 'evil comes from  
the power of evil'. It is the third  
presence. O Romance of the World.

## XI

An extended mobile of galaxies.  
A prided installation. The dark, invisible  
matter of a riot in L.A. Three thousand  
buildings ripple out flame in the  
city of Lost Angels. And then an open sky,  
a banquet of beads after fire hoses  
roll out the light on any upright  
surface. Beverly Hills is alive with the  
sound of security locks. The CNN  
anchor-team is too well dressed for  
the maddening flames, in the sear, ongoing  
segment of a news flash. In the break,  
gathered the rain as pure as static,  
unseen, but imagined whitely and curfew-wide.  
Along the crippled streets in the blood  
blare of sirens, night arrived under  
the guise of the National Guard.  
Heat rises from the grid of these side-walks  
and the spirits of the Indian, afraid  
enough of death to die, whoop it  
up round the big campfires. I wake,  
uncomfortable in the lurk of a dream, and  
my breath, draws up hope like an  
anchor, lifts my thoughts into the day where  
I follow. Let us go (You & I) into  
the glow, hand in hand with Virtual Reality  
and idly make up war-games. Let us pray  
that a supreme silence will be down-loaded  
at last. Moonrise, and a luminant coal

sifts through the western grate of the world.  
In cornfields elsewhere, so remembered  
though not so high as an elephant's eye,  
images pressed round as a hot-plate  
suggest some mystery or mid-night vigil.  
This is what we wish, to stamp threat onto  
the inexplicable, seeking out totems  
and to hold the dance of the primitive sacred:  
this city, too, let it stand as Icon.