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Andrew Taylor

Poems

Inhabitants of Darkness (*For Tamara*)

It's after dark, the birds quiet
the dusk procession of bats
complete, day's clear outlines
smudged and erased, that's when
they come out, those nocturnal
inhabitants of our mind.
Some are ominous, or surprise us
like the grating crash of a car
hitting the little bridge at Wooton
by Woodstock, or have the pure
richness of our first waking
to a currawong. Inhabitants
of darkness, most are gentle,
familiar, and in their element
we can know them clearly. They are
our memories, our past, those long
discussions of the world's wrongs
the lit candles of a birthday, someone
who put an arm around us
whose smile warmed a dreary day
or patiently put right
our many mistakes. They are
our life, keeping us company
our friends, though some have died
but always there. With love
and care they will never desert us,
with them we will never be alone.

An Evening in the Day

Soon it'll be time to cook dinner
evening the neighbour's door thumps
between relief and fatigue none of the
birdseed I sprinkled on the balcony
has been chirped away and the wind
that was forecast for this afternoon

but came mid-morning still
hurtles the trees around and proclaims
Indian Summer is over and about time too
but no rain no no rain is coming to loosen
the water restrictions and turn the park
green so that kids punting footballs
get grass stained knees – soon
evening will sprawl into night
in front of tv and later bed where strange
unaccountable situations confront us
with insoluble problems until
an early whistle of currawongs signals
that day is creeping up through the trees
to chase whatever troubled us in the dark
back to its den and more than likely
it won't re-emerge to puzzle us again.

Almost a City

A city is too hard to hold in words –
where we met, where I would run
each morning, where we explored
the market and walked the dog,
where we worked and all the frustrations
that swarmed like peak hour traffic
on the nearby road. Or can a city
be its streets and shops, architecture,
planning, goods and services,
public transport, and all those people
living and dying within it? No, a city
is what happens, like the weather
or the moods of the Southern Ocean
when a storm hovers, or like a tree
becoming itself when a swarm of birds
visits and deserts it. A city is all of this
and none. Can we assemble one
from fragments, glimpses, fractions
of moods, echoes, a teasing shuffle
of flickering memories? If so, is a city
where we live, or does it live in us? Only
when we leave it does it seem to acquire
an illusory completeness, like a dream
unfinished, but done for the day.

Walking Home in the Rain

Walking home in the rain
was something we hadn't planned.
The concert was hot, the music's
crescendo of tempo and temperature
bore us on its waves
of musical summer as far as
the bus stop. That's where the rain
took over. Gentle rain
at first, a beguiling nocturne
as we stepped from the bus
but for you, grown up in a city
it was an ominous prelude
and you were right. For a country boy
like me, rain was what I walked through
rode my bike through, worked in
and generally welcomed. But you
took off like a flight of gulls,
your city instincts alert. It's only rain
I called after you, remembering days
on my uncle's farm, rain coming down
like notes from heaven on the iron roof
and grateful pasture, magpies
dotted like staves on that primitive
clothesline, and his unexpected
library of classical records, a harmony
of water and music. So tonight
my sodden hair and dripping shoulders
sparkled under the streetlights, decades
of city living washed away, until
the surprise resolution - you coming out
with the umbrella we should have taken
to the concert, unneeded now
and how we laughed at it.

Andrew Taylor is the author of nineteen collections of poetry, including *Collected Poems* (Salt UK, 2004), *The Unhaunting* (Salt UK, 2009), *Impossible Preludes* (Margaret River Press, 2016), *Coogee Plus* (Baden Press, 2021 with artwork by his son Travis Taylor) and *Shore Lines* (Pitt Street Poetry, 2023). In 1986 he was the Asia-Pacific winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. He has since won or been shortlisted for numerous national awards, and read his poetry widely in Australia, USA, Canada, Europe and Asia. Other work includes *Reading Australian Poetry* (University of Queensland Press, 1987), the libretti for two operas and translations from German and Italian. His 1997 AM was awarded for services to literature.
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