

Sydney in Shadows

The light is thin, jaundiced from the smog
The breeze is laden chugging in from the Gap
Sweeping under the Bridge, down the Parramatta
Running off into bays, inlets, the ferry stop
Where silhouetted figures fish
Outlines of lone figures burn black on red sky

Off the harbour the first shadows of the night to fall
Creep around the sides of concrete structures
Scale the cold tin drainpipe of an older building
Barely a cough from the bum on the corner
Nor the rattle of paper squeezed tighter about the neck
It is a quiet time by all intents

All animation suspended here now
Behind narrow porches, below rippled tin roofs
Which last felt the plunk of heavy raindrops
Two months ago, or three

Behind the dull lace curtains
The windows of so many lodgings
Laid end to end like plastic houses in a game
Up and down the hills like a march

There they sit, or eat, but rarely wonder
Thought blocked out by sirens shrieking past
A prisonhouse it was, and is
If you can't tend a garden, hang out some feeders
Cultivate the exotic
For a little bloody change

All doors worn in the same places
Unwelcome visitors have come full of purpose
Their knuckles tracking oil in a spot
A million times the same key in the lock
A million times more

Such the city as dusk sweeps it still
Fishing line rolled in pockets
Birds of like feather together in their haunts
The hotels light up, chinkle with coins
Arms bent and pulled
Later, the telly, or sweaty dreams
On a dusty bed against the wall

Half eaten meals in tins
The mold in various mutations
An amassed heap of degradation
She'll be right, we say; bad luck
The sum of our responses
When we think we got it licked

Finally deflead the mutt, god bless him
Mailing in the payment on time, this time

Zola knew the city
How it gathers together one groaning inhalation
Drains dry each crevice and crack

What an unforgiving bitch the city
With all its daylight beauty
With all its wonders of the world.

BETSY BERRY