

Urban Myths: 210 Poems

John Tranter has published twenty collections of verse and is the editor, with Philip Mead, of the *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry*, the standard text in its field. He has lived at various times in Melbourne, Singapore, Brisbane, and London. He now lives in Sydney where he is a company director and the editor of the free Internet magazine *Jacket* at jacketmagazine.com

Other books by John Tranter

Poetry and Fiction

Parallax
Red Movie
The Blast Area
The Alphabet Murders
Crying in Early Infancy: 100 Sonnets
Dazed in the Ladies Lounge
Selected Poems (1982)
Under Berlin
The Floor of Heaven
At The Florida
Gasoline Kisses
Different Hands (fiction)
Late Night Radio
Blackout
Ultra
Heart Print
The Floor of Heaven
Borrowed Voices
Studio Moon
Trio

Anthologies and compilations

The New Australian Poetry
The Tin Wash Dish (poetry)
The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry (co-editor)
Martin Johnston: Selected Poems and Prose

Notes to accompany John Tranter's poems can be found at
johntranter.com

Urban Myths: 210 Poems

JOHN TRANTER



CAMBRIDGE

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge PDO CB1 5JX United Kingdom
PO Box 202, Applecross, Western Australia 6153

All rights reserved

© John Tranter, 2006

The right of John Tranter to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Salt Publishing.

First published 2006

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9.5/13

This book is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN-13: 978 1 84471 252 6 paperback
ISBN-10: 1 84471 252 4 paperback

TB

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Contents

FROM <i>BORROWED VOICES</i> 2002	1
After Hölderlin	3
FROM <i>PARALLAX</i> 1970	5
The Moment of Waking	7
The City, the Tree	8
The Visit	9
Kabul	10
Rescue	11
Whitey	12
The Plane	13
The Non-commercial Traveller	14
Mary Jane	15
Machine	16
Paint	17
FROM <i>RED MOVIE AND OTHER POEMS</i> 1972	19
Balance	21
Bestiary	22
Ward Five	23
On the Track of the Attainable	24
Red Movie	25
FROM <i>THE BLAST AREA</i> 1974	41
The Guadalcanal Motel	43
Poem Ending with a Line by Rimbaud	44
Compromise	45
FROM <i>THE ALPHABET MURDERS</i> 1976	47
The Alphabet Murders	49

FROM <i>CRYING IN EARLY INFANCY: 100 SONNETS</i> 1977	71
Starlight	73
The Bus	74
The Chicago Manual of Style	75
Art	76
Artefact	77
The Moated Grange	78
Ballistics	79
I Know a Man Who Lives in the Dark	80
The Doll	81
The Spy	82
Position: Poet	83
The Painting of the Whole Sky	84
The Blues	85
1968	86
By the Pool	87
At the Laundromat	88
FROM <i>DAZED IN THE LADIES LOUNGE</i> 1979	89
Ode to Col Joye	91
The Un-American Women	97
The Revolutionaries	98
Leavis at The London Hotel	99
Sartre at Surfers' Paradise	100
Foucault at The Forest Lodge Hotel	101
Enzensberger at 'Exiles' Bookshop	102
The Wind	103
The Germ	104
The Great Artist Reconsiders the Homeric Simile	105
FROM <i>SELECTED POEMS</i> 1982	107
A Jackeroo in Kensington	109

FROM <i>UNDER BERLIN</i> 1988	111
Backyard	113
Country Veranda	114
North Light	116
Widower	117
Debbie & Co.	118
Voodoo	120
Fine Arts	122
The Creature from the Black Lagoon	123
High School Confidential	124
Stratocruiser	125
Laminex	126
Lufthansa	127
On Looking into the American Anthology	128
Shadow Detail	130
Parallel Lines	131
Having Completed My Fortieth Year	134
Boarding School	137
Papyrus	138
After the Dance	139
Haberdashery	140
Poolside	141
At The Newcastle Hotel	142
Affairs of the Heart	143
Lullaby	144
Dirty Weekend	145
La Pulqueria	146
FROM <i>THE FLOOR OF HEAVEN</i> 1992	147
Breathless	149

FROM <i>AT THE FLORIDA</i> 1993	173
Journey	175
At The Florida	177
God on a Bicycle	179
Dark Harvest	180
Ariadne on Lesbos	184
Days in the Capital	187
A Marriage	188
Falling	189
Anyone Home?	191
The Romans	195
Storm over Sydney	196
Opus Dei	197
North Woods	202
Con's Café	205
At Naxos	206
Two Views of Lake Placid	207
Snap	208
Old Europe	209
Box Contaminant	210
A Plume of Ash	211
Chicken Shack	212
Cable Chimp	213
Bells Under Water	214
Aurora	215
FROM <i>DIFFERENT HANDS</i> 1998	217
Neuromancing Miss Stein	219
The Howling Twins	226
FROM <i>GASOLINE KISSES</i> 1997	233
The Duck Abandons Hollywood	235

FROM <i>BLACKOUT</i> 2000	237
Blackout	239
FROM <i>ULTRA</i> 2001	245
Lavender Ink	247
Black Leather	248
Gallery	250
Halogen	252
Locket	254
Miss Proust	256
My Story	258
Off Radar	260
On the Road	262
Package Tour	264
Per Ardua ad Astra	266
South Farm	268
Under the Trees	270
FROM <i>BORROWED VOICES</i> 2002	273
After Laforgue	275
Brussels	276
Address to the Reader	278
After Rilke	279
Invitation to America	282
On La Cienega	284
Festival	286
Night	287
Harry's Bar	288
What the Cyclops Said	289
Where the Boys Are	290
Notes from the Late Tang	291

FROM <i>STUDIO MOON</i> 2003	293
Moonshine Sonata	295
The Twilight Guest	296
Paid Meridian	298
The Green Buick	300
Trastevere	301
Radium	305
In Praise of Sandstone	307
Chinese Poem, after Mark Ford	310
Christopher Brennan	311
Epitaphs	313
See Rover Reach	315
Grover Leach	317
Elegy i.m. M.J.	319
The Beach	321
Five Modern Myths	330
Three Poems about Kenneth Koch	331
Black Sugar	333
The New Season's Patterns	334
Like Advertising	335
Rimbaud in Sydney	336
The Waiting Room	337
Amulet	338
The Seasons—Spring	339
The Seasons—Summer	340
The Seasons—Autumn	341
The Seasons—Winter	342
UNCOLLECTED POEMS 1985-2000	343
Small Animal Poem	345
The White Hole Paradox	346
Two Haikus	347

Two Short Poems, after Li Po	348
Two Poems for Mr Stevens	349
What Mortal End	350
Her Shy Banjo	352
Fin de Siècle	354
NEW POEMS: THE MALLEY VARIATIONS	355
An American in Paris	357
Benzedrine	358
The Master of the Black Stones	359
Flying High	361
Pussy Willow	363
Smaller Women	365
Transatlantic	366
Under Tuscan Skies	368
Year Dot	371
The Urn of Loneliness	373
NEW POEMS: EUROPE	375
At the Tomb of Napoleon	377
Bats	378
Care and Feeding of a Small Poem	379
Manikin de Vin	380
On a Noted Vista	381
A Poet in the Reading Room	382
Stage Door	383
Thistles	384
Whisper	385
NEW POEMS: SPEECH TO TEXT	387
Anguish	389
Bottom of the Harbour	390
Deluge	391

Departure	392
Horticulture	393
Lives	394
Marinara	395
Metro	396
Movements	397
Parade	398
Pronto	399
Royalties	400
Scenes	401
Shames	402
Sorehead	403
Story	404
Subcontinent Nocturne	405
Villas	406
NEW POEMS: AT THE MOVIES	407
Shadow of a Doubt	409
North by Northwest	410
Dark Passage	411
Girl in Water	413
Black and White	415
FROM <i>SELECTED POEMS</i> 1982	417
The Popular Mysteries	419
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	420
NOTES: at johntranter.com	420

From *Borrowed Voices* 2002

After Hölderlin

When I was a young man, a drink
often rescued me from the factory floor
or the office routine. I dreamed
in the mottled shade in many a beer garden
among a kindness of bees and breezes,
my lunch hour lengthening.

As the flowers plucked and set in the little bottle
on the table still seem to hanker for the sun,
nodding in the slightest draft, so I
longed for a library loose with rare volumes
or a movie theatre's satisfying gloom
where a little moon followed the usherette
up and down the blue carpeted stairs.

You characters caught up in your emotions
on the screen, how I wish you could know
how much I loved you; how I longed
to comfort the distraught heroine
or share a beer with the lonely hero.

I knew your anxieties, trapped
in a story that wouldn't let you live;
I felt for you when you were thrown from the car
again and again; when the pilot
thought he was lost and alone,
I was speaking the language of the stars
above his tiny plane,

murmuring in the sleepy garden, growing up
among the complicated stories.
These dreams were my teachers
and I learned the language of love
among the light and shadow
in the arms of the gods.

From *Parallax* 1970

The Moment of Waking

She remarks how the style of a whole age
disappears into your gaze, at the moment
of waking. How sad you are
with your red shirt, your features
reminiscent of marble, your fabulous
boy-girl face like a sheet of mist
floating above a lake.

Someone hands me a ticket,
in Berlin a hunchback
is printing something hideous;
my passport is bruised with dark blue
and lilac inks. Morning again,
another room batters me awake—
you will be haunting the mirror like silver—

now the nights punish me with dreams
of a harbour in Italy—you are there
hung in the sky on broken wings
as you always have been, dancing,
preparing to wound me with your
distant and terrible eyes.

The City, the Tree

1

The city allows the trees a little space
at the edges of the road that angles
somewhere out to the airport
and the open sky, which is also permitted
to burn its flaring shadow on the tar.

The trees wave and clatter,
warning us of something, the city
is always busy, and when at rest
is better left alone.

2

This is the response the tree has
to the city: the film of lime
the skein of birds-feet, morning
polishing the blue windows of the yacht club
where the tree reflects itself
in a thousand images of green.

The Visit

The children stoned us, the bony girl
fell down bleeding at the mouth
frightened for her camera's sake;
later we drank beer in the courtyard
of the smelly afternoon, talking of Rijeka.

At the city's edge we found a monument
split down the middle; the sunlight,
preparing for the moment of anguish
laid out a stroke of warning on the rock.

The shabby soldiers wheeled in the street
or loomed out of helicopters, fondling guns.
Their movements are elegant and simple;
a sundial for a face, and memories
of Birmingham and postcards of the sea.

At the final wharf the children were playing
and we gave money to the blind man at the gate.

Kabul

From the broken, moving window
you see them alone in the desert afternoon
mad and burnt in a chorus of camels
walking somewhere invisible.

They have buried a city in the mountain.
A river like a soggy drain, they wash their feet
thinking of Tashkent gleaming out of Russia
across a plain of ice, the clack of a rifle bolt,
four thousand British corpses in the pass.
They dream their legacy of light
whatever the season.