

Frank Kellaway

ROYAL PARK, MELBOURNE, OUTSIDE THE ZOO

1

On asphalt playgrounds
school is fought.
Like sparrows children flock.
Between rounds,
saved by the bell, they're taught
to watch the clock.

The clown covered in chalk
paces his cage
as jungle minutes crawl,
escapes in talk.
Wisdom's the smell of sage
beyond the wall.

Once more the tolling saves;
they clatter out
under the moreton-bays
into the park.

Boys and girls skip and chant
till dust flies and they pant
hopping as light as birds,
hair flying and blown words,
buttons lost, twisted shirts,
knotted ribbons, crumpled skirts.

Young boys wander away,
the instinctive clutchers
who need to hold in play
lives trembling between their paws,
mouse, frog or half-fledged thrush,
the wondering touchers,
hands innocent as dingo jaws.

Young girls break up in pairs
and saunter through
savage dominions,
the nymphet Ledas
catching their dreams at unawares,
under pines towards the Zoo,
eager for pinions
of swans or eagles.

2

There are stone outcrops and a shallow pond
in one east corner in a native garden
where strange men meet and gleefully propound
the immanence of doom at Armageddon.

Two office girls who come here after work
shepherd a Pekin Duck on raffia lead.
Beyond, the beefy men with greyhounds walk;
the dollars in their eyes couple and breed.

A boy with a goat, a pigtail and bare feet,
with plaited leather headband and patched jeans,
plays to his nanny on a treble flute
and as she grazes rolls her nectarines.

Across a feudal red-brick wall
I hear the prisoner Gibbons' human call.

3

The sky heaves;
colour is splashed on the wind by kites,
dragons and formal birds;
each one behaves
differently, delights
like a flame, like a bat, like a swallow, like a puppet,
or box or a diamond, lettered
with strange words,
till the gusts rip it
and the grass is littered
with coloured paper and plastic among the leaves.

Patterns reform;
the girl in the pink satin skirt,
the negro runner in green,
the soccer's scattering swarm,
curla-da-mo big skite,
man with a goat, karate battling air, goose-girls
all move against the park-scape,
trace time where their feet have been,
disturbing the gulls,
the children at skip.
Until we move ourselves the backdrop's firm.

Then another flux,
more counterpoint,
the buildings at the edge a scarp,
shelter for human flocks,
till our rhythms slacken, are spent
and in God's unchanging eye
time's paths form a warp and woof
like a rug thrown over the park-scape
or a net thrown across the sky.