

Top End Storms

1. *On the Floodplain*

Slick of rainbow
like oil on a blackboard;
funereal sky
lids the baking marsh.

In the booming black belly
the Kunapipi serpent thrashes,
crackles a forked tongue down
to favourite caves and valleys.

Nothing greener
than the once-stormed land trembling moistly
under a fresh storm's bluster.

A vista of termite mounds,
like draped Madonnas on an abandoned earth.

This storm was a growler, threatening from its lair,
then a stalker, sneaking
a thunderclub over the tree-line

now a long flashing blitzkrieg
torching a broad strip of green-fire

driving the fated lovers to their caves.
The greening trees darkly perfect
in strange light beneath a horizon's bruise:
and six black cockatoos keening.

2. *On the Escarpment*

The draft swirls up with eucalyptus smell,
heated by rocks where the ants dance
too quick for the eye.

The late-day warmth is strange and hard
like an embrace from Earth itself.

- A sheer view of clouds and monsoonal plain
that could pull from your lungs
the hooting whistle of a kite.
To watch such power from such height
is millionaire stuff in the cities.
Our perched cathedral-barn of a cave came free
with the bones and paint of millennial occupants,
and the ochred hand of a child,
long since grown warrior or mother.

The rain's barrage moves in, gets our range:
frogs crank up; drops hiss
on rocks still hot to touch.
We watch the monsoon's first plumbines drop
and the months begin
of the lightning's miles-in-a-millisecond.

Bouncing down sandstone strata,
that pseudo-solid, water,
takes false-solid shapes, persistent, ephemeral,
as of molten glass, fused and blown;
its loose avalanche stumbles
down a rock-valley worn to curves
of this afternoon's currents
and those since the last Ice Age,
as the rock that water made
water now slowly disassembles.

Sparklets of sun through softening rain;
the wreck of a storm staggers
away from the sunset
blazing and howling into the East.

3. *February Storms*

It's the green Wet
- warm spit between down-drubs.
Nowhere else can you laugh
so much water off your back.

Yam vines
half-shot from tubers, now begin
to put substance back. The year
is floral, confident. The kestrel cries
that half the Wet is gone.

The paperbark blooms now
between too much and too little water;
its white brushes smelling of honey and meat
enthrall the flies.
Your noon siesta floats
from unbearable sweat and lassitude
to cool passionate thunder
- a swift rise of yeasting cloud-cells;
cold grit in the eye as the gust-front swirls,
shrouds - vanishes before the rain.

That first sharp spray - what else but spit, or seed?
And the cool that follows, the end of some broil
between sky and earth
- birds the urgent messengers
of its start and end,
the downpour its fertile settlement,
as the valley clears, obscures, half-clears
like a lens pulled in and out of focus.

Blissful too, the cool evenings after rain
in which perhaps you've showered.