

Rob Walker

Horses of childhood

1. Horses of childhood.

In my childhood suburb of Richmond, Adelaide, there were horses, still. Early morning jinkers in backstreets. Men in hats who dreamed of cleaning up one night at the Wayville trots. And work vehicles. Cowley's bread cart, chocolate brown with gold flowing cursive and pin striping. Parr the rabbit-o. The grocer who might give you a ride or an Arnott's biscuit from a cubic tin. The milky delivered in the early hours. Leave out an empty billy on the front doorstep at night, next morning it was full of milk with an inch of yellowy cream risen to the top.

2. The baker's horse

The baker came in daylight, dancing arm-in-arm with the chunky wicker basket. The road was sealed by now but without gutters. Some days the old horse had a nosebag full of chaff. When she didn't, she would wait out the front cropping grass at the base of the wooden telegraph pole near our driveway, plopping steaming turds the size of tennis balls, the colour of Keen's mustard. Blinkers, leather harness and horse sweat all mingling in a musty smell. I liked the way she flicked flies with her tail, or shivered the light on her sleek coat if the tail didn't work. At a whistle, the horse, cart and all, would amble on to the next house and a fresh clump of grass, only ever advancing by one house. Like shit, progress happens. The horse was replaced by a shiny white Holden ute. I was never sure why. It didn't need a nosebag, I guess. But the baker never did train the ute to go on to the next house.

3. The milkie's horse

In the boiling river of convulsion the cars graze,
browse. Rumbling in their throats,
fart monoxide,
slow to a pace. The herd parts and coalesces to
veer around the foreign obstacle corpuscles in

a major urban arterial route.
I am riding the Malvern Star to high
school along the busy Marion Road in summer,
a milk cart stationary lashed to a
dead horse
the flies already finding the carcass
still swaddled with leather & shiny harness.
The milkman distressed
temperatures rising

the milk
the body
drivers' blood as he detaches the
cart.

The last horse.

Its significance lost
on cars urgently delivering their contents to
factories and offices
as tempers and a cartload of milk
gradually come to the boil

About the author: Rob Walker is a poet, educator in Performing Arts around Adelaide, South Australia, and teacher English to Junior and Senior High students and adults in Japan. Rob has co-edited a poetry anthology and produced six poetry books, including *tropeland* (Five Islands Press, 2015) and *Original Clichés* (Ginninderra Press, 2016). His poetry has appeared online and in journals and anthologies in the UK and US, including *The Cortland Review*, *Illya's Honey* and *Red River Review*, and Australia, including *Best Australian Poems*, *Australian Poetry*, *Verity La*, *foam:e*, *Quadrant*, *Rabbit Journal*, *Divan*, *Mascara*, *21D*, *Unusual Work* and on ABC Radio National. Rob currently divides his time between grandchildren, a small farm in the Adelaide Hills, travelling and writing.