

Poetry Series

**Keith Shorrocks Johnson**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2020

**Publisher:**

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

## Keith Shorrocks Johnson(9th June 1944)

I am an Economist and Public Policy Analyst by profession who has worked in over 25 countries during a 40-year career. In 1991, I settled in Wellington, New Zealand, having lived and worked in the Philippines for the previous seven years. Nowadays I am largely a house-husband and the principal carer for 2 small sons. As I am semi-retired from policy work, I write extensively in my spare time.

# &quot;All Shall Be Well - And All Manner Of Things Shall Be Well.

I pray my rosary in feeling, touch, sight -

Three properties of God's revelation -

The sensations of Life, Love and Light

Come to hand, come to mind in meditation.

In life is marvelous homeliness

In love is gentle courtesy

And in light is endless naturehood.

These properties are within one goodness

To which I hold fast wisely and mightily:

Night is the cause of pain and our distress

And light stands against it discreetly - needfully

In life is wonderful vitality

In love is gracious redemption

And in light essential clarity.

Our faith is the dawning of endless day

In sweet accord as our blindness is lifted  
And by that light we see the sovereign way  
By which our unity with God is gifted.

In life are all things created one  
In love there is no separation  
And in light we see the source.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# 12 Hours

by Alexander Blok [a bespoke 'translation' for my friend Olga Kolokolova]

When you are trapped  
or driven down by people, cares or longing:  
when the casket lid seems to close -  
all that you want is to be able to sleep.

The city is deserted  
And desperate and sick you need to go home -  
your eyelashes are heavy with frost -  
Stop for a moment -  
listen to the silence of the night  
that sound is strange -  
separate and apart from the noise of daytime.

Glance with fresh eyes at the snowy streets,  
the smoke of a fire,  
as night waits quietly for the morning above the whitened garden -  
and the sky is the cover of an open book -  
you will find the soul is ready for a story from your childhood.  
And in this incomparable moment  
when the frost patterns the glass of the lamp but chills the blood -  
love will flare up into gratitude and blessings for others.

You realize then that life is more than simply taking your fill -  
that the world itself is inherently beautiful.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# 20th January 2017

Too old to cruise in bars  
Or wait for a booty-call,  
I am past clever hopes  
That flirting in dives  
Is other than dishonesty  
Or that obsessing  
In poetic pretense  
About the darkening  
Of our public discourse  
Will serve a sound purpose:  
I only note the half truths.

If scholarship can explain  
The myths and trauma  
That undermine sanity  
And drive a polity to cruelty  
Linking 'being your own priest'  
To the sham and shame  
Of Theresienstadt,  
I have to ask: Who is to blame  
That America, so much used  
As it is to success and luxury,  
Is so blind to separation?

Thucydides warned  
Against democracy  
Being subverted  
By poets and orators  
But he was unexposed  
To the trite rubbish  
Of twittering and trolling  
And the formation of tribes  
That promote discrimination  
Spreading hatred and division  
Making light of others' suffering.

At the centre of things  
Where money talks  
There are silences

As the price of dissent  
Is factored in to stocks:  
If taxes are lowered  
And regulations laid aside  
There will be profits,  
So that integrity  
Becomes an option  
For mendacious henchmen.

Estranged from quiet conviviality  
Out for a good time, up for it,  
Getting the rush, posing the self,  
Posting a squeak of presence,  
Oblivious to the thinning crowd  
In a garish, decaying fairground,  
This is how things fall apart -  
The pussy-footing at the dismantling  
Of the reciprocities that kept us safe -  
Vermin foraging the crumbs of decency  
That could lead the lost home.

But it is true that love is dangerous  
And that we all crave adoration  
Aspiring to centre-stage folies de deux:  
It seems that Nijnsky wrote  
About Diaghilev:  
&quot;I loved him sincerely and,  
When he told me that  
The love of women was a terrible thing,  
I believed him'.  
This is then the task, to hope for love  
But set aside distinction and perfection.

In the darkness that is gathering  
Ethics have become footnotes  
And those who care for the future  
Intone &quot;I will be true to myself,  
But let me rest before the test&quot;  
And those in authority ignore  
The welfare of the weak:  
&quot;Cursed are the meek  
For they shall inherit a deficit

Of understanding and respect  
And retain not even the little they have&quot;.

And Auden later repudiated  
The voice in which he folded  
The romantic lie that  
We must all love one another or die  
Because he sensed the reality  
That we do exist alone, filed away  
In suburbs and skyscrapers  
Trying to find our voice  
But unable to push away the gag  
Stuffed down our throats  
By a calculating culture.

For sure, there is stupor enough:  
We don't love each other  
Well or even at all for the most part,  
And raising a glass of rye  
In irony and a nod to empathy  
Is a poor substitute for  
Seeing others as we would  
Want to be seen, or shaking  
Off the dust of negation  
And the confusions of lust  
To extend a helping hand.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## 27 Days

On Friday 24th September 1943  
My father wrote a letter  
To his brother in which  
He described how my mother  
Had joined him during the previous weekend  
At Silecroft in Cumbria  
As he took a few hours leave from  
RAF Millom where he was  
Training on Avro Ansons  
To join a Lancaster Bomber Squadron  
That would take the war home to Berlin.

I was born on 9th June 1944  
And the babyMed Calculator  
Puts my conception date as  
Around Friday 17th September 1943,  
With sex likely no more  
Than a week earlier at the most  
So I think we can pretty much agree  
That it was the Friday, and incidentally  
In the following June I was also  
Born on a Friday - 'with far to go'.

So here's the sad part  
He was killed 14th October 1943.  
This means an overlap  
Of 27 days which is hardly a blink.  
Just now my third and fourth sons  
Who are eleven and twelve years-old  
Have come in for cuds in their jimjams  
Having interrupted my musings  
Lucky me, lucky them  
But it's good to remember those 27 days  
And let the four of us share looks and hugs.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Bond For Summer Versed In Bonuses

[Another Poem for Clive James]

These I will celebrate:

The searching bursts of crocuses

Daffodils that spring to sunny hours

In promise that the primrose flowers

Maia's gerbils and the garden's squirrel

An impish acrobat and thief named Cyril

The migrant birds the welcome ground receives

And those who lingered winter long in clefts and eaves

A bond for summer versed in bonuses.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Brief Heads-Up On That Maori Fella J.C.

I saw your mate again today J.K.  
He was on the quay near the TSB arena  
And we had a brief chat - he's looking well -  
Hair in dreads with a lost front tooth.  
He tells me he's working for J.T. Crouch  
The foundation and construction outfit  
On replacing the wharf-side piling  
That was totalled by the last earthquake.  
He still looks more than good for a few beers.

I told him that you had written a poem about him  
And that like as not I would write another  
To put you two back in touch.  
It seems that he's got his life back together  
With a new woman who has a couple of kids  
And apart from the odd fracas  
In the Zoo Bar in Newtown, things are looking up.  
As for the twelve disciples  
The call-girl met an old fella who set her up with a shop  
In the arcade off the Left Bank in Cuba Street  
But the housewife who forgot the Pill  
Is working her arse off providing cheap-thrills  
For pick-ups somewhere behind Courtenay Place.  
He's lost touch with the queen and the alky-priest  
And most of the others, apart from one who  
Just got elected to Parliament under Labour.

That'll be a bloody miracle:  
I'll sing along with that one!

Behind him the harbour was still glorious  
It was kind of crisp and bright and luminous  
And as the conversation trailed  
He shrugged his broken-tooth killer smile.  
I had meant to ask him about persecution  
And redemption and revelation  
And shock-treatment and the end of the world  
And the mile-deep civilised dystopia  
Where the flickering light in the void

Is being snuffed out by mountainous darkness  
But the option was closed by his 'Nice One - See You Mate'.  
He went back to his white van and climbed in  
Saying to his offsider: 'I tell them to keep it simple  
Just one day at a time. I will never be lost.  
E kore au e ngaro he kakono i ruia  
Mai I rangiatea - for I am a seed sown in heaven'.

But he says to tell J.K from J.C: 'Neh mind eh bro?  
Turn and face the sun  
And let your shadow fall behind you:  
E huri to aroaro ki te ra tukuna to ataarangi ki muri I koe.  
E iti noa ana, na te aroha:  
Although it is small - it is given with love'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Brief Visit To Mellor

Expecting a call from distant ancestors  
I had checked in at the Millstone Hotel  
In Mellor on a warm autumn evening.  
After sitting in the snug nursing a beer  
And wolfing down a Lancashire Hotpot  
I wandered out to the churchyard.

There sure enough was a Shorrocks grave  
And in the morning I drove to Shorrocks Hey  
Stopped by the gate and watched the cows.  
When he fled Salford to escape a debt or a girl  
My grandfather, who was a bit of a lad,  
Ditched the family name for anonymity  
But his male-line chromosomes betrayed him  
And I tracked down old deeds to Pendle Hill.

My father, who was killed before I was born  
Had died a hero flying in Bomber Command  
And I willed him to be with me now -  
The two of us beguiled by history  
Taking our journeys with false papers  
Come home to clear our names.

I wanted us to smell the air of old haunts  
Be stung by the nettles, eat the blackberries  
Feel the stones of the old cottages  
But taking a last look at the village  
Someone made that call and I saw him  
A tall blond youth so very like my own eldest son

I had seen that same boy in Jerusalem  
Among a detachment of Israeli conscripts  
The others dark and unfamiliar, he blond  
And as he looked towards me I owned him.  
That makes three sons of killing age.  
And now I hear the ram bleat and a still small voice.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Cheshire Lad

Young Mike Dutton

Blew his head off with a 12-bore shotgun  
At Moat Bank Grange - late at night -  
After a Young Farmers' Dance in Tarporley.

His parents heard an argument  
In the yard below their bedroom window  
After he had been delivered home  
To the farm - worse for wear.

Everybody said that he went off his rocker  
After he had had a skin-full  
And then fought and lost a fight  
With John Ashley over a girl - Janice Vickers.

At first, he wouldn't get out of the car  
And his friends had to shove him out  
But then he went to the tack room  
Broke open the gun and loaded a couple.

'Don't be such a silly bugger Mike  
Point the gun down or put it down.  
It dunna matter that much' said his friend  
From the backseat, 'plenty more fish in the sea'.

But there was more to it than that.  
His parents had off-loaded the farm for a small fortune  
With the land sold to the Kinseys across the twenty acre  
And the buildings planned for conversion to houses.

And they had just bought a spanking-new 4-bedroom  
Detached in Little Budworth with a conservatory,  
Intending to live high and fancy on the proceeds,  
With Mrs D getting the Volvo she had always wanted.

Which for Mike meant leaving Moat Bank with its  
Old-beamed farmhouse, round-windowed lofts,  
Its fields, and the brook and its willows  
And becoming a Farm Labourer.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Dedication For The White Seat

Orangi Kaupapa is cut into three strings.  
The shortest – from Glenmore Avenue –  
Is a 'No Exit'.

The second is a perilous ride down  
From a junction on Northland Road  
'One Way' only.

The third is a stretch of real road  
That rises towards Telegraph Hill  
And the path through the pine trees.

I have conjectured that the name  
Means 'Steps to the Stars'  
Or 'An Audience with the Sky God'.

I may well be wrong.  
Another interpretation is  
Native Potato Gardens.

But the three snippets  
Pretty well sum up  
Much of life and its ups and downs.

'Theirs the bickering lives,  
Rough husbands, cotton aprons, draggled wives,  
Children brief beanstalk flowers...'

'If I move down, I strike the starlight pitch  
Of houses lapping in the molten drink  
Of moon beams in their gutters run to loss'.

'Meat and drink is the moon: but if I wait  
Till dawn unveils the hills, I feast my eyes  
On tossing gorse and broom... and the windy skies'.

Iris, the girl who lived at 92 Northland Road  
And who became 'Robin Hyde',  
Lived a thing or two, learnt a thing or two.

How desperately sad to see her pictured  
On the steps of her caravan 'Little China'  
In a bleak November in England in 1938.

She stands mid-steps, half-turning  
Wearing a shapeless and hopelessly small  
Quilted jacket closed with a large safety pin.

Outfitted by the Winter District Relief,  
Her gaze is far-sighted in respite of the next attack,  
Pain within and pain withal.

I know that feeling Iris:  
'Drawls the blue cart by the quarry:  
The waggoner's words melt into gloom'.

Would that I could have brought you home:  
'Where the hedgehogs run in the grass, with no more sound  
Than will scare the sleeping skylarks, half awake them'.

So that you, back on the white seat half a mile from the top,  
'Could rest for a moment, lean over a cup of mist,  
And the wrinkling harbour water curdled in moonlight.'

[For Iris Wilkinson / 'Robin Hyde': NZ Poet 1906 - 1939]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Good Yarn

'Life is like a tangled ball of wool  
That begins with nothing and ends with nothing':  
Be sure then that these threads  
Are knitted into the headscarf and socks of infinity  
With humility, humanity and good deeds  
And if you can unravel at times  
To entertain a kitten, do so.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Hymn For Veritas

Do not go gently into this dark age,  
Of loss of justice, decency and right:  
Write - ignite to kindle virtuous rage.

Though rogues testify a path to bondage  
Their words die at the dawning of the light:  
Detest, protest, contest their language.

That the good are scarce is an old message  
And until they act, right gives way to might,  
As falsehoods swagger on the twilit stage.

Hold out for heroes, for their advantage  
Come the night's end and the morning's sight,  
As rights are freed that lies took hostage.

Then those who wrest the best from damage  
Can sense the kind old sun grow warm and bright  
And verity itself glow fierce with homage.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Load Of Nothing

This old wheel of time  
This old wheel of suffering  
Keeps on turning  
The is-ness and the my-ness.

Outside the many forms  
The multitudinous things  
That make ex-is-tence  
As the rubber hits the road.

Inside the many feelings  
The cacophony of thoughts  
That make ins-is-tence  
As the squeaky wheel grates the axle.

This old log of wood  
This old bag of skin  
An empty noggin  
Carted off to kingdom come?

It is not near  
It is not far  
Neither broad nor narrow  
The road unfolds as it may.

Take comfort  
This is the way it should be  
At the pivot of things  
Joy has spoken - a load of nothing.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A New Scene For Hamlet: Explaining Gertrude

ACT\* SCENE \*\*The Queen's closet.

QUEEN MARGARET is alone brushing her hair - enter Hamlet

QUEEN GERTRUDE

How would you steal into this tower  
At so late an hour - am I your lover?  
I am not your garlanded Ophelia  
Fresh with the blooms and flowers  
Of youth and untested beauty  
But your mother come to autumn  
And the fall of that which budded  
Once when life itself was young  
Hard now with jewels not petals.

HAMLET

Mother I am beset with thought itself,  
With doubts, with jealousy and fear,  
Oppressed by darkness unrelieved -  
Were we ever friends, I might confide.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Enough, are you a small boy again  
That needs must use my apron strings  
To tag along and stem your tears?

HAMLET

What is it with us lady that so disturbs  
Our conversations and intercourse?  
How is it that our love is so uneven?  
Did you not want me as a son?  
Did you not love my father?  
Tell me truly what the matters are.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Sweet boy, you touch upon unruly truths  
That are much better left unsaid.

HAMLET

What, would you make my maddening worse  
When I for want of understanding run  
To every touchstone of conjecture?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

This I will tell you - once I loved your father  
When I was sweet and young and knew no better  
But he grew proud in all his powers  
And took his majesty as right  
Then taking me so forcibly  
In neglect and habit and disdain  
That I became no better than the maids.  
Then no longer sweet, I saw his orders  
And his postures as unjust, unnatural  
Mere assumptions of superiority  
And I no worse or sometimes better  
In the understanding and conduct of the world.

HAMLET

What of me, was I conceived in love  
Or in unwelcome force?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

I know not - I have no memory of that  
For when we couple, lust brings  
Force and love to bear in several parts  
And none remembers which the most.

Now go I beseech you - my liege awaits.  
I must guild the royal bed tonight  
And take my part in serving smaller majesty  
More tractable, more sweet and better loving.

HAMLET

Is it not cruel to talk of best and least  
In being bedded by two brothers  
And chide the grieving son of one  
That his supplanter has the vantage?

GERTRUDE

Silly boy - can you be sure of which is which?  
Do you not look like your uncle

Have you not his tractable nature  
His pensive looks, his fancies  
His easy bending to conspiracies?

-

Stay - put away that fiery look -  
Those doubts which mar your beauty:  
You indeed are your father's son.

HAMLET

You use me as a plaything still -  
And mock when you should care  
A string which holds me close  
And then let's go and shuts me out -  
Cup and ball in endless back and to  
It ricochets my mind with me the fool.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

And like the brothers do you seek the cup  
That you might out-sip the two of them  
And dally with the taste of faded rose  
To sweeten wine from generations past?

HAMLET

And you twice married, me betrothed  
This is too base - and I your only son!

QUEEN GERTRUDE

You have touched and seen the very core of me  
When as a baby you sought the light and air  
Then you were mine alone within me  
Before confinement became separation  
And whatever man had had his way  
His touch was long since gone from thence.

Can you encompass what that act means  
So consequential and full of lust for life  
And how little the ecstasy of men compares?

HAMLET

And does this giving of life extend to living

Have not men to stand apart to play their roles?  
Destiny demands that those best suited  
Take the greater part in bringing acts  
To resolution - which motherhood itself gainsays.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Could you but listen to yourself  
You might learn to see the world.

HAMLET

Tell me then in my darkness and distress  
Putting aside the thrust and parry of your whimsy  
Did you - do you ever love me for myself?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Fool - I loved you more than life itself!  
Oft I would creep to your cradle  
To kiss your curls and hear you breathe  
You were my life - I trembled at your smile.  
And when you grew to oldest boyhood  
I would still creep to your room  
To watch you sleep and tuck your covers.

HAMLET

Aye - and in your cups touch my hair  
And spread your fingers across my chest  
As I feigned sleep in feared deception  
And once when giddy with wine  
You took my mouth in yours and drank deep  
Until my father came and took you back.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Whether it was so or not I cannot now recall  
I only know that you were once mine  
And that my love if tainted was born pure.

You talk of destiny and final stages:  
No affair of life or play was ever cast  
Where ends and means were crystal clear  
And motives purged of lies and subtleties  
Or errant subterfuge and wishful thinking.  
Put aside this Little O that still deceives

And take such comfort as half-truth conceives.

Be off with you, I cannot mend your life  
Stand back from resolution and revenge  
Learn to live with broken dreams  
And unfulfillment as we women must  
Our flesh will live when anger turns to dust.

HAMLET

Good night my lady - never lost for words  
And never once is honour mentioned.  
Sweet dreams become you when the bed goes quiet

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Personal Change Experience

I just found an album  
Of Photo Memories  
Compiled by my wife  
Around 2005  
And in it an essay  
That she prepared as  
An assignment for her  
Masters' in Public Policy:  
A 'Retrospective Account  
Of a Personal Change Experience'.

She wrote:

'My pregnancy was planned.  
My partner and I  
Had been together  
For only a few months.  
With hindsight it was probably  
An impulsive and risky decision  
To try for a baby at that early stage  
But it felt good and was very romantic.  
We were in love,  
In the early days of a love affair  
When the world is seen through  
Rose-tinted glasses.  
We were happy and excited  
At the prospect of having  
A child together.  
I have a vivid memory of that night,  
After the positive pregnancy test,  
When we walked hand in hand  
Down Oriental Parade.  
It was one of the happiest moments of my life.  
I think this made a difference psychologically,  
In the way I felt emotionally  
Both during and after the change unfolded.  
That is, I believe I adjusted more easily  
To my new role as a mum  
Because it was something I both desired and planned,

And was associated with a joyful period of my life.  
Burns (1993, p.37)has noted that  
Voluntary change is easier to adjust to.'

[Burns, R., (1993)Managing people in Changing Times  
St Leonards, N.S.W., Allen and Unwin.]

I have never read anything more beautiful  
Than my wife's words.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A Prehistoric Presence: Absent Abel N.

Sitting awhile in Civic Square  
I missed you there.

I was watching the pigeons and the gulls  
Hob-knobbing or squawky strutting  
Waiting for scraps from wraps and squabbling  
A bobbing beggar crew following  
Heartless yellow eyed brigands.

Two birds jostling in that space  
But humankind the only race.

Forty thousand years ago you watched  
Barrel-chested and wide-nosed  
Sniffing us puny newcomers  
Listening to the keening sounds,  
That drifted from strange kin.

There wasn't room enough for two  
We schemed and made an end of you.

Our myths about you are unflattering  
That you were unchattered trolls  
With quizzical protruding brows  
Sitting around napping rough tools  
So dim-witted you built nothing.

Now we have the square alone  
No rivals since you've gone.

Truth is we just don't know  
About your songs and dreams  
And what at times you may have seen  
Your sense of right, your sense of love  
Wonders at the stars light-stretched above.

And we are left to fight each other  
With hands we bloodied on a distant brother.



# A Sonnet For A Dark Lady

They will hunt you down and hurt you dearest  
'Starlet-cum-harlot', 'angry dark lady',  
'A diva who fights about who wore it best'  
The butt of calculated fallacy.

Rose Red baited by hounds to each new low  
The noble prince left to watch the curs bay:  
If you were Snow White, no bile would flow  
And lap-dog poppets would just drool away.

The spittle gutter press awash with spite  
Has drenched your honest heart with hate  
And you so young, so true, so very bright  
Must now slough off this tarnished state.

But mark my princess that these words should prove  
That there are many who would salve your wounds with love.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Addle-Yedded

He could see below him in his mind's eye  
A fine sow: 'Inna hoo a belter? ' and a litter  
Of twelve six-week old weaners ready for market  
'Inna they grand lad' - he asked smiling?  
And I was happy to agree that these spectral porkers  
Were, as they said, 'a picture on the breed'.

Years later when some friends visited me  
And I found myself telling this story -  
With the proviso that if and when addle-yeddedness  
Began to permeate my noggin  
I would want to also inhabit once again  
The farmland and dialect of my youth  
Fetching a slop of thirds to the pigsty trough  
At which townie observers would happily concur  
That my pigs were reet pommers or bobby-dazzlers.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# A'Liver Bird

For Cilla Black [1943 - 2015]

## A'LIVER BIRD

Why yes we all knew Cilla -  
Why did we love her so?  
No Judy held a candle up to her!  
And Mister, if you've missed  
Darlin' Cilla off your list,  
You're not half the man I thought you were!

Now fate has taken her away,  
On a bitter Baltic day  
How can Liverpool be what it was before?  
She's gone an wrecked me head in  
With a lorra laffs and kiddin  
But she'll never walk down Scottie Road no more!

So serve up half of bitter  
But never bitter be,  
It only gives you wrinkles on your brow!  
She has been, as they say,  
Quite a belter in her day,  
Though we're devoed in our be vies now!

Oh, I'm gutted, down and grey  
That fate has taken her away,  
With the pops that most of us adore.  
You won't see hot pants fashion  
Or a hint of next week's washin  
And she'll never walk down Scottie Road no more!

Things'll never be the same as they once were  
All the sconners and the fellas loved her -  
She lived and kept the golden rule.  
And so my darlin scouser  
Now we have to live without yer  
Salt tears flow chocker through the Pool.



# All Good - Beeston Castle 2013

Eons of flight-path inching set aside,  
Back to earth that bush and nettles hide,  
Bounding up the hill, we who came so far  
Unfold the plain to glimpse towards the farm  
And seek the tree where nanna's ash was laid.

Below stand Beeston Castle's broken walls,  
With tat and ice creams in the shop beneath  
As jest and jostling dust away the galls  
And rollicking up, there's young mischief.

Fifty summers now the scene divide  
As sunlight basks away the evening star -  
With balls to throw and kick, and picnic plied -  
We set to side the bales that maul and mar.

Hawthorn, oaks and sward tops standing wide -  
Seasons come, the scythes of harvest bide

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# All The News Is Bad

The serpent fell out of the tree - stone dead  
Making one last pronouncement to the pair  
Before it bit the dust in paradise  
'You're on your own now - orphans from Nature'.

'The World was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:  
They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,  
From Eden took their solitary way';

And so they bid farewell to happy climes  
And temperate sunlit clear and healthy morns  
Stepping over the very body of good and evil  
Glozed by their own proem to perpetual torment.

And all that ensued was endless futile bickering:  
That they in mutual accusation spent  
The fruitless hours, but never self-condemning,  
And of their fatuous prattle there was no ceasing.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# America - You Have Fucked Up!

America, you have fucked up:  
We gave you a Drumpf -  
Now you don't know where you are  
But hell, it's not Weimar!  
Your inner lives are numb  
Scant and then some -  
And your children's unkindly fate,  
Under lies, theft and populism  
Bequeaths them ignorance and hate  
Instead of tolerance and idealism.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# An Abandoned Farmhouse Garden In South Wairarapa

FOR ANNIE GRANT

She was a heavy, red and freckled lassie  
Shipped from Greenock as a serving maid  
But women were few in the colony  
And Jack stumped up with her passage paid.

He was older, with money, but she was strong  
And she loved the work in making a farm:  
This was a place where she might belong  
Weary at dusk with a bairn on her arm.

So they passed, the aching treasured years  
As the orchard in golden fullness bore  
A bounty of apples, peaches and pears  
Sweet and tart to the homestead kitchen door.

But seasons came when the fruit just fell  
And who was the gardener none could tell.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# An 'onstanding' Man

Wittgenstein was tormented  
From being born obscenely rich  
And precociously intelligent  
As well as sexually ambivalent

Inter alia (there was a lot  
Of inter alia in his life) :

Chastising himself, he atoned  
By becoming a hospital orderly  
Though he advised the patients  
Not to take the medication prescribed

And he was a very poor schoolteacher  
Who pulled one girl's ear so hard it bled  
And boxed the head of a little dunce  
Who later died of hemophilia.

But he won numerous mentions  
For bravery fighting in the First War  
And forsook all the wealth he inherited  
Showing indifference to honours and fame

And waving a red-hot poker at Karl Popper  
He demanded an example of a moral rule  
To which his Austrian compatriot replied:  
'Not to threaten visiting lecturers with pokers.'

But he had a lot to say about language  
And the way it shapes thought  
And creates an edge between what is known  
And what is better left beyond that edge.

'The limits of my language stand for the limits of my world:  
An entire mythology is stored within our language  
About what one cannot speak, one must remain silent  
But ordinary language is all right'.

And I very much appreciate how

He wanted to be known at the last  
Not as outstanding but as 'onstanding' -  
That is with his feet now firmly on the ground.

ein anständiger Mensch: a decent man  
eine anständige Frau: a decent woman  
also 'proper' or perhaps 'real'

ein ausständiger Mensch: a sturdy man  
eine ausständige Frau: a resigned woman  
also 'pending' or perhaps 'outstanding'?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# 'And All My Soul Is A Delight'

The pint's trace lace-stained rings

Are company for me:

We watch the amber as it sings

Of Ireland proud and free.

At last she whispers to the night

Her name - from long ago:

'And all my soul is a delight'

That leaves the empty glass aglow.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# And What Of Families For Some Of Us?

And what of families for some of us:

I am the remnant of a father

who died before I was born:

There was a fair man

Who had tried to parachute -

He lived for a few minutes.

I was told by my mother

That she drank a bottle of gin

With nutmeg

And had a hot bath to ease me away:

'You were meant to be born', she said.

Come my infant bath time, she would say:

'Just because you have a little tassel

It doesn't mean you can rule the world';

It was never what I wanted -

Sons are the anchor of a mother's life.

And when I was a teenager

She came home

After a session of gin and tonics

Muzzling my half-sleep with a French Kiss:

I can still taste the lipstick.

In terror of my failures,

I waited in utter unredeemed dread

For my Final Year results. She said:

&quot;If you had worked harder

You would have got a First&quot;.

I asked her to read

'I'm OK - You're OK',

And she wrote some post-it notes

That were there when she returned the book.

One said: 'Not everyone gets damaged -

The strong survive'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Angela Merkel's Poem for her Lost Russian Lover - ?????????? ?? ?????????? - Contempt Not Jealousy

What's life like now with your hostess?  
Simpler? A cash in for the rouble  
As the Silk Road sell-out progresses?  
Does the memory of me trouble?

Like pine nuts and fragrant plums  
Or ersatz amber and jade traded across Eurasia  
You'll be paltry together - sold for small sums  
Tokens not love knots in Siberia.

What's life like with a very ordinary  
Materialist? Now that you've dethroned  
Europe - renounced the visionary  
And set aside the values you once owned?

What's your life like now with Cathay  
No more riding bears only buses!  
What price do you pay  
For endless triviality - the losses?

I'm through with your turns and twists  
Enough! I'll rent a place in Ukraine!  
What's it like with a pseudo-communist  
Harlot, my tiger-hunting bird brain?

More suitable and palatable -  
Not noodles again - don't complain...  
What's it like with a Chinese Doll  
Dumplings and soy sauce a strain?

How's life with a money grubber  
Without culture or higher aspiration  
Is it to your liking?

Do you miss the stars in the gutter  
Facedown without civilization -  
Humming to drown the mice in your mind?

How do you live with cheap stuff:  
Is the novelty market rising?  
How is it kissing plastic and bumf?

Are you bored she's so mercenary?  
Has her leaden lack of ideas  
Started to offend?

Are you sad or mad? Tears?  
Are your black sea crimes returning  
To curse you when you could have been our friend?

[ '?????? ??????' ]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Another Song For Pattie Boyd

Something in the way you move so softly  
Something in the glow that follows you  
Lights a touch to end explosively  
To blast apart what still divides us two.

There's something in your smile that hints you know  
A foolish felon seeks to lift your heart  
Someone who'd do time to steal the show  
With charges laid and readying to start.

No treasures are desired more avidly  
Thought of the prize has made me shake inside  
Look at how your charms still shine so brightly  
Love blows my mind to throw the safe doors wide.

Nothing taken need go to waste in shame  
The beauty of the crime absolves all blame.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Anzac Chums And Their Mums – The Possum

In Oz the possum grinds on thorn and gum  
Far too stretched to visit mum -  
Things are hard outback of Bourke  
And there's no time for anything but work.

But Kiwi possums like to visit ma  
With flowers for her crystal jar -  
They'll even take a shopping bag of buds  
With some greens and beans and spuds.

In Oz the possum is protected  
As indeed might be expected -  
Beset by fires and drought and prickles  
And parched out creeks that slim to trickles.

But Kiwi possums are heaven sent  
To slurp and scoff to heart's content -  
When they dine they have the best  
And not surprisingly are deemed a pest.

In Oz a treasure - in NZ an imported glitch  
There are mixed opinions either side the Ditch -  
Mum's the word on making possums able  
To visit home with veggies for the table.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Apprenticeship

Quiet apprentice to what I survey,

I ready myself - bladed sun shining -

To craft a gradely well-contented day,

In line with its heavenly designing.

Motes of dust dance in the workshop window

As I strip back the covers to my task,

Taking stock of what the new day will show -

Of what must be discarded or made-fast -

And what poor rough lines need bettering,

If I am to become a true craftsman.

On I work, with form in fastness growing,

My touch grown old and still so much to learn,

Shaping my love of life, making my peace,

My facsimile of the masterpiece.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Ariel's Farewell To Prospero

My master, old magician, co-conspirator  
The time has come for you to set me free  
To break your staff and drown your book:  
Your charms and spells are overthrown.

I would weep Sir, were I human  
Seeing an old man like you in tears -  
Your fabric of inheritance reduced to  
Thawing snow-bound cottage thatch.

Come give me a smile that we may part well.  
The time for envisaging a better world  
That you and I might bring to substance  
Is now past - those dreams dissolved.

And now that all has come to end for you,  
Set me free of what bonded us together -  
The repulsive bag of skin that embodied us  
The cleft pine become a rotted log of wood.

Trust not to be rounded by a little sleep:  
Rather the body will lie corrupted at the last  
A fathom of dark earth drawn above  
Or drowned by the five-fold weight of tides.

You, who once enslaved me, bound tight  
To cradled depths and vaulted heights,  
And rings of fires and raging clouds,  
Of which I have no fears or limitations.

But there is no loss - if you will now accept  
The self must die to give the spirit life.  
Born again to light, I'll play upon the senses,  
And always answer to the word's best measure.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# As Easy Ways Grew Few

Pull aside the curtain! The moon rises  
Above the garden - this is the present.  
Wait awhile, are you sure of these surmises?  
Look again, the woodland gathers absently.

These are the shadows that the moonlight throws:  
On lovely woods so dark and deeply true  
That tell of what we lose as knowledge grows,  
And pathways missed, as easy ways grew few.

That other world of childhood calls us still:  
Broken pure delight - can it be mended?  
And second starts once lost to lack of will  
Bring deep regrets - are these now transcended?

The forest deepens and its depths grow cold  
And little can be changed by those grown old.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Astridsaga - A Fragment

It happened that the fight was lost  
And she and her retinue took flight  
Ferrying by night across the bay  
To the island of the guarding light

Where in the small comfort  
Of a deserted, half-ruined fort  
Those who remained loyal  
Made ready for their encirclement.

And as morning dawned, sails appeared  
Seeking the promise of final vengeance  
And she, taking counsel with her defenders,  
Agreed it best to leave to avoid disgrace

Boarding a skiff brought full-sailed  
To the wave-beaten broken walls  
Of an ancient quay in shadow -  
Breaking out into the crimson dawn.

And when those who loved her  
Were overwhelmed and put to slaughter  
Her enemies found her gone  
With only her last pitiable treasures

Left for ransack and despoiling -  
Though a servant boy, a beloved slave  
Sought to save his life the while  
By betraying the manner of her escape.

Then the winds fell quiet and the skiff  
Became becalmed. At first sighted  
And then hunted down by long ships,  
The sea-hounds of their wronged lord,

Bearing down with their oarsmen  
Chanting of her treachery and oath-breaking:  
Of her poisoning of the cellar meads  
At the treaty gathering for her betrothal.

She the long-limbed, wilful beauty,  
Enchanter of the warder troops  
Sent by her father to accompany her,  
Unwilling to bend to the needs

Of dealings and the apportionment of lands,  
She who took the gifts and dowry  
And divided spoils among the conspirators  
Promising the sacred ring to the boldest on her behalf.

Brought at last to the fastness keep  
Of her dishonourable suitor and his father,  
Her followers slaughtered or enslaved,  
War now afoot across the wide lands,

She refused to kneel before the throne  
And was cast down with violence  
Summarily judged the instigator of evil  
A harpy who had raised the flames of hatred.

At which the old king, at his son's bequest  
Asked whether there was anything to be said  
And she in reply promised a song so wistful  
And yet so wise it might save her life.

'Sing then to those who you would kill  
Those who may still die in battle at your behest'  
Said the king: 'Let us hear the siren song  
For you are surely now within our power'.

At which she rose upright to answer boldly:  
'Kinsmen and Foemen alike, I am no chattel  
To be bought or sold, gifted or pledged,  
To settle feuds or mark out or borders

And my song is only the song of freedom -  
I was not the cause of your bloody skirmishes,  
Your enmities and intransigence existed  
Before I was bright-arrayed and brought in offering'.

Though my song condemns me, I save myself

For life is of little worth if lived beholden.

I dreamt and wondered on a distant land  
While mystic witches cast a twilight spell  
With oaths of runes and carven bones at hand  
In deep reflection at the fateful well

From which the tidings from the depths unfold  
A curse that any future life must fail  
When those betraying honour see it sold  
And stain of gold is left to tell the tale.

There are much better mortal gifts to gain  
There is a prize my sacred self holds strong  
A treasure that will grace an inner realm  
To which the best of me may yet belong.

The die is cast as I affirm my right -  
Safeguarding freedom in the fading light'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# At Quilter's Bookshop Having Coffee

With maturity comes freedom?  
Rubbish.  
With an absence of choice  
Have I ceased to be a man?

Reading Antony Burgess on morality  
In the New Yorker,  
I wrestled with predestination -  
Nowt so queer as a clockwork orange.

As far as I could tell, things you think are OK -  
Action makes it predestined.

I squeezed a glance at the twenty-or-so blonde  
Bending over a second-hand book,  
Wellington all the way - black and grey -  
But great legs, dark tights.  
Pity the haunches are hidden under a shift.

And then back to Burgess -  
Maybe skins are choice -  
It's just peeling that's wrong.

A very late middle-aged man having a coffee  
Looking hopefully conspicuous -  
Fruit for thought.

The girl barista is also personable,  
As well as making a great trim flat white.

'Girl, I'm goin to make you sweat', the song has it.  
Not in my case, I don't have options -  
They are just lookers.

Time was when the blush would bloom above the breasts  
And heads would roll back -  
Now sin is passing me by.  
Good has been imposed upon me.

I never had to contend with mind control -  
All the girls knew what I was thinking -  
Some tossed their curls, some bit lips - some smiled.  
Most just practiced being admired - and were dismissive.

But in the round  
Sad-to-say, I have lost free will -  
Now destined to an absence of choice  
By unreciprocated zest.

An orange that just ticks.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# At The Arena's Edge

[For Anna Politkovskaya on the Tenth Anniversary of her Murder]

The creepy clown lives between laughter and the uncanny valley  
Dodging side-swinging ladders and drowning in buckets of confetti  
Chasing his car in elongated boots with a dislodged steering wheel:  
But if he gets too near to a little girl sitting at the ring-side  
She will blanch and grab her mother's arm for protection.

Beyond the charades and the farces and the buffoonery  
Those who are close see how the ring-masters are working  
To woo the crowd with high wire thrills and cowed tigers -  
Fleecing and filching the takings, orchestrating the Big Top.  
Then they send in the clowns: isn't it rich, don't you despair?

Who will square up and protect the innocent from deceit  
By the harlequin suits and greasy visages of the Media Circus  
Peddling propaganda, distortion, spin, misspeaking and the Big Lie?  
Reach out to those like Anna, who in an increasingly Post-Truth world,  
Fully discern the chasm which divides safety from terror - and stand firm.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# At The Eleventh Hour

Over at last, that most bitter harvest task  
The gathering of the cut down by the sack -  
The fields quietened from the bringing back  
Of canvas slings, the stumbling to the track.

And those who were cut down at the last  
Received the same token as those cut first  
All being brought to judgment as they must  
Worthy of their hire and the vintner's trust.

At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day  
The labourers ceased their bloodstain harvest  
Wanting only rest, indifferent to pay  
Ending the carrying to the wine press:

That those who picked and chose the skins of men  
Might take their pay in life and try to live again.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# At The Final Bake-Off

I would like to be well thought of  
To be remembered with a smile:  
Leaving cherry stone memories  
And a bake-mix spoon to be licked.

I would like to be one of a kind  
To be thought of as unusual  
Like turmeric and honey ice cream  
Or citrus or truffle infused olive oil.

I would like to be thought of as warm -  
Not so hot perhaps as when young -  
More like eat-round-the-edges chowder  
Or a cup of tea that just hits the spot.

Not that good taste has been my thing-  
But I would like to leave a good taste -  
To be finger-licking good at the last  
So that you my friend might ask for more.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# At The Tennis Club Car Park

I was parked up at the tennis club  
Waiting for the coaching session to end.

A car backed in a few spaces down  
And I saw that it was little Sally -  
Rory's mum in her SUV

Shyly retiring, petite, exquisite.

She didn't notice me waiting.

Then Sophie, who had been there some time,  
Walked over to Sally's open car window  
And bent down to kiss the hairline above Sally's ear

So very tenderly - with oodles of awe and caring.

I had not expected such beauty there  
My heart stood still.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Autumn 1975

I have parked the car near the gate  
And a short expanse of pasture  
Has to be crossed before we enter  
The woodland - the 'wood' of my boyhood.

We are up from London for the weekend  
And I show you the farm from the vantage  
Of the muddy roadside - there across  
The valley on the bank above the willows.

But we turn from the view of the farm  
And tramp across the muddy fields  
To the spinney where I follow the brook  
To the point where I had cut off a meander.

The stream had ground out a deep curve  
And as a boy of nice adjustments  
I had trudged across from the farm  
And short-cut the flow with a spade.

And then I said that I must make love to you:  
Unbuckling your jeans, kissing you first  
I am sure but acting with a remote urgency  
That was hardly appropriate, sparingly kind.

But you indulged my insistent ceremony  
And let me bring things together there  
Breaking and recasting ancient spells  
That brought the stream to grade.

And hugging lovingly later, we found the bridge  
Where we could cast some sticks downstream  
And see them race away with the current  
Or eddied endlessly ... or snagged to stillness.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Awaiting Andromeda

Everlasting darkness unforgiving  
Denies that there are stars that we see through:  
We only see the faces of the living  
And those of whom the briefest loss is true.

The stars we see are not yet deathly red  
For almost all are close and shine plain sight,  
In forms and clusters that the ancients read  
So what we see is touched by sparks of light.

The Way will turn its vast eternal wheel  
As eons pass and star lights fail and dim  
And we in stardust through our substance feel  
Andromeda drawn broken to the rim.

Will we like her be rescued from the void  
When the obliating dragon is destroyed?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Bad Angel

Tell me again how you romanced despair  
And how this little angel took your side -  
As you left plainer comfort standing there  
Her tears no match for flashy foolish pride?

And how you broke an ordinary heart  
To flirt with glamour, novelty and fame  
But found deceit had ripped your life apart  
And left you with a temptress lost to shame.

And how this spirit turned from friend to fiend  
With curt demands and endless expectation  
Until she broke down what you had dreamed  
And left you lost in desolation -

And then grew mute towards the bitter end  
Bringing life to quiet desperation.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Banyan Tree Swim

## TOTAL IMMERSION

A friend recently linked me to  
The Facebook photo-album that he had posted  
Extolling the merits of the Banyan Tree Hotel in Macau  
As the absolute last word in luxury  
And I quote from the promo:

Watch the glamorous lights of Cotai City  
as you bathe in your own sanctuary  
A luxurious bedroom, expansive living area  
complete with spacious relaxation pool,  
unparalleled views of Cotai City or Hengqin Island,  
a custom wooden bathtub complementing  
an opulently furnished bathroom  
breathe glamour into this enclave of serenity.  
Spanning 100 square metres and lavishly appointed  
with every quality trapping modern living has to offer,  
the Cotai Pool Suite comes with an enticing king-sized bed  
to tempt you into easy slumber.

This washed me back to 1966  
When the Great Helmsman Chairman Mao at 72  
Joined 5,000 other swimmers  
For the 11th Wuhan Cross-Yangtze Swim  
With the help of six life-guards  
And his Cultural Work Troupe  
Of young women  
He stayed in the water for 65 minutes  
Floating downstream for ten miles  
Surrounded by giant placards  
Requesting fate to grant him  
A further 10,000 years of life  
To create Great Order  
After striking and smashing the Black Gang  
By fomenting a Great Disorder -  
For when there is Great Disorder  
Conditions are excellent -  
Under Heaven, the people are the sea

That the revolutionary swims in.

Mao hated Confucius  
As he was far too pragmatic and unassuming.  
Indeed, Confucius was chided in the I Ching  
For his commonsense and compassion  
After he asked a disciple  
To aid a man who was being swept  
Through the Lüliang Gorge  
On the grounds that the swimmer might  
Be endangering his life -  
But the man made the shore singing  
And berated his would-be rescuer  
For lacking the assurance  
To be at one with profit and danger  
And follow the Tao of the Water.  
But Confucius who liked to swim  
With his friends was a modest fellow  
Who thought that wealth and prestige  
Were like clouds that passed away.

And I thought that I should write something  
On behalf of the Banyan bathers:

'Laid back we wallow  
Against the marble tiles  
Our ample derrieres  
Keeping us bobbing...  
There are no perils here  
Like the flowing tides  
Of the Lüliang Gorge;  
Although the water is too deep  
For me to sit  
Still.  
All my life  
I wanted to be in the swim  
Though going against the current  
Took my breath away..  
Now at last I can indulge myself  
Safely  
As I immerse immodestly'.



# Beauty's Moon-Mad Spell

Did you not discern that your beauty revealed  
In deep-black curls, dark eyes and perfect form  
Glimpses from an idyllic alien world  
Where the maddened moon gives slip the storm?

Did you not understand that male reaction  
Is shallow in such heady matters  
As men must reject too much perfection  
Fearing sorcery from the sacred huntress?

Did you sense hope run-down and killed by grace?  
That you had been cursed as a moon-lover:  
Set to roam the winds in lonely chase  
As stricken hearts broke out and ran for cover -

That none would linger in the dawn's new light  
So skies could clear and warm the chastened night.

[for the English Novelist and Writer Rosamond Lehmann 1901 - 1990]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Bed Bug Metamorphosis

I wake again from a recurrent nightmare.  
I have been subsumed in a consulting assignment  
For which I may or may not have been contracted  
Within a labyrinthine bureaucracy somewhere  
Abroad, in a very foreign country that despises me.

There has been a problem establishing the contract,  
With arguments with officials over the terms of reference -  
Days and days have passed in meaningless waiting  
Punctuated by occasional hearings and meetings  
To assess the validity of my claims for payment and release.

I feel that progress has been made as my dream nears end  
And that the papers that I have submitted with my claims  
Have at last been given due consideration - and that my work  
Has been given some recognition and sign off by my keepers -  
Such that an airline booking for tomorrow may be finalized.

And then I wake up and my immediate anxiety subsides  
As I see the pale green curtains of my bedroom  
And feel the quilt and pillow into which I have burrowed.  
I am no doubt a fortunate insect or type of insidious vermin  
That is still recognizable - only part into transformation  
From the useful to the useless - to the burden.

We have a lot in common you and I Gregor Samsa.  
We started off with the noble aim of independence  
And took pride in being the family breadwinner  
But things and people break down and become nuisances.

But for the moment I only relive the possibility of despair  
In my nightmares - the quiet terror of redundancy,  
The irrelevance in cash terms of a former productive unit,  
The unraveling horror of impending dependency and frailty,  
The inevitable and final separation from normal homecoming.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Best Befriended

And still there will be those who believe,  
Like bridesmaids awaiting their friend,  
Anticipating the possibility of her happiness,  
That they live this moment for her good fortune.

Please God, that such nobility of purpose  
Be rewarded in the marriage of freedom and country,  
That those who wait so expectantly may be delivered  
From tribulation, wrath, danger, and necessity.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Between Wednesday And Sunday Baths In The 1950s

WHAT WAS POSSIBLE?

Swish grime in wrinkle and navel

With a soaped warm flannel

And a sodden towel -

Be an angel.

Wash down as far as Possible

Wash up as far as Possible

And if at all Possible

Wash Possible.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Beyond Courageous Life Must Burn [mallory And Irvine]

As old men talk of scarce remembered youth  
Of beauty's distant mysteries faded  
With piquancy that's half imagined  
Where nothing mars or seems uncouth  
And only finest art can shape the truth  
Conjuring boys to life no joys withheld.

Refrain:

Cover with the sky the stars' embrace  
Snow tip Sacred Mother Sagarmatha  
Man breaker, fate shaker, life breath taker  
Dream as shadows light across your face  
And wake to deeds that leave immortal trace  
Per ardua ad astra.

When still cubs as snow lions romped and chased  
Among the icy peaks and cols and caves  
One played among the ships that chance the waves  
The other through the fields and laneways raced  
In sports and games both loss and winning tasted  
So country sets the path that glory paves.

Meek like the tiger set to bound and spring  
They lived to test their skills and make their way  
Where mountains beckoned for prey and play  
To take up the chase where the wind horns sing  
And matching peril set aside death's sting  
With peaks made quarry o'er the hunting day.

Inscrutable the dragon wise and sly  
Shingle clad snow-dusted cold and sleeping  
Shakes its rocky scales with scree-shards reaping  
Waking, uncoiling, snarling at the sky  
Recoiling back from those whose footsteps try  
To wrest away the secret she is keeping.

Fierce and outrageous like the phoenix  
Beyond courageous, life must burn  
Vanquish none but ourselves is what they yearn  
As ambition stokes its desperate tricks  
So ever upward embers seal their tracks  
And there is no way back when none can turn

In fellowship and practised skill sets sound  
By heaven's stars, it seemed an easy leap  
To cleft within the steps and pipes so steep,  
Where fathom line could never touch the ground,  
And brace up arms against the slips that downed,  
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,

Set to test and try to life's cliff's edge  
Strong to the harm in heedless danger sped  
Chancing all but fellowship's linked tread  
Picks and crampons hammer and wedge  
Risk taking all at scarp and ice and ledge  
Two men to glory born though mortal bred.

There they stood, ranged across the sheer-sides, set  
My lasting view of them a living frame  
For one more picture! Into clouds of fame  
I saw them move and lost them then. And yet  
Dauntless to task and way beyond regret,  
Two climbers to the towering summit came.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Bitch-Black Light

Doubtless poetry is not a luxury:  
It is a testing quality of night  
That illuminates reality  
Rock hard, true grit, tough love, glint bright.

Felt and born in the nameless and formless  
Intimacy of birth dreamt from chaos,  
It speaks of the dark matter of Erebus  
Which permeates each lonely universe

And holds the possibility of redress  
For abuses, with the redemption of fear:  
A bitch-black, ancient and timeless  
Powerful, female, forbidden, queer

Light - whispering of possibility,  
Dawning acceptance in its scrutiny.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Black Square Icon

God decided to create the world  
To divest himself of it forever  
Ceasing thought to become free  
Unhindered by form and likeness  
Retreating in perfection  
To emptiness and endless timelessness

But as what matters is conserved  
He passed the manifest universe  
Down to mankind and his son  
With its beginnings and its endings  
And with the world came the word  
The last inkling of enlightenment.

Though in love and pity of this creation  
And the weight of suffering that ensued  
The son offered mediation with death  
That mankind should also free itself  
But in its overreach of thought and pride  
It came to own and rule primordial chaos.

Crushed by the insubstantial as we are  
In the Black Square the echo remains  
Of what is both divine and divested  
And of the perfection of initial creativity  
Offering a covenant of shape and substance  
By which our understanding can be reconciled.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Blessing - Gift Of God

The rains come without asking:

Each year, they portend a harvest

When the generous clouds break.

They will bring joy and prosperity

When what is growing is ready

And the grain has come to term.

But there will be times of storms

When the crops are beaten down -

And our wealth is in what we learn.

For what is given can be taken away:

And what we share in love is everything -

Both the feast and the understanding.

Then let us devote our love-laden hearts

To the sacrifice and the remembrance

That the darkest clouds will be redeemed.



# Blue Remembrance

Housman was born in Bromsgrove 13 miles from Birmingham  
And Tolkien grew up at Sarehole between Billesley and Spark Hill  
Some 4 miles from the city centre.

Turning away from the forging and fettling, they looked west  
To the memory assembled spires and farms  
Of Shropshire and the distant Welsh Mountains.

There under sun shimmer and roiling clouds  
Were mythic plough boys summoned by bugles  
And hobbits awaiting a rat-a-tat-tat.

And now Peter Jackson, who was born in Pukerua Bay  
Has scoped a partly polystyrene, partly animated  
Hopefully-soon-forgotten substitute here in New Zealand.

After all, talking about places, Janet Frame warns:

'I do not remember these things  
-           they remember me.'

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Blutmai - Another Conversation With Auden

'That girl of nineteen who was shot in the knees  
And thrown down the concrete stairs in Berlin  
Whose fate raised a righteous anger  
That pleased you in its excitement -  
What happened to her, I'm asking you now? '

'Her death was a necessary condition  
For the subsequent seasons', you answer.  
'Are you not aware, looking back to her death,  
That nothing has changed, barricades erected  
Shootings in the streets, organized fear? '

'That being so perfunctorily incited  
And then weeping, mouth helpless and ugly,  
Are inevitable conditions in coming to terms  
With political passion, violence and betrayal  
In the shifting seasons of lovers and writers? '

'Another girl has been shot and thrown down:  
This time in Baghdad, Santiago, Hong Kong  
Cochabamba ... Charlottesville ... Birstall ...  
As recent particulars come to mind.  
You didn't expect the last of these did you? '

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Boris Johnson Coming Good?

Eton blond-mop toff why did you abuse  
The helpful spending that was yours to give?  
Unprofitable wanker, why misuse  
Great wads of cash but not let others live?

In expending roubles for yourself alone  
Your rubbing up becomes deception  
And how when nature calls you to be done  
Can spaffing walls gainsay delusion?

Dastard austerity! Why did you spend  
Upon the rich that bounty's legacy?  
Nature seeks no recompense but will lend  
And being kind, she lends generously:

There is no legacy in Onan's Luck  
Except the truth that you don't give a f\*\*k.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Brigands Of The Ocean Voids: Toroa - The Mollymawks And Southern Royal Albatross Of Foveaux Strait

Out from Oban on a fishing charter  
Bound for a rocky islet in the whale-way  
We are suddenly tracked and mobbed  
By pitiless hard-eyed white-skull-cap marauders  
Strait-troopers of the Sub-antarctic Empire:  
A formation of Mollymawk albatross  
From the deep spaces under the Southern Cross.  
Death star interlopers from the roaring forties  
Bound to intercept rogue vessels for the empire  
Hunting down harbour break-outs and forays  
In the name of Blue Cod carcasses and tidbits.

After the catch is hosed and the landlines stowed  
The malevolent cloned conscripts of the sea-wastes  
Gather to their piracy - and the plunder they exact.  
In the lee of the harbour buoy, the gutting commences  
And the squad squabbles for heads and rib-cages  
In wave-breaking dives into the bloodied jetsom  
Knowing no other restraint or discipline than is imposed  
By their commander, the sole Southern Royal Albatross  
The first order leader of the distant-rover cohort  
Who rules by fear of force and steely-eyed supremacy  
These brigands of the ocean voids and island galaxies.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Broken Hearted

Persephone - between light and darkness -  
Swallowed to the underworld by Hades  
Or defiled by her serpent overlord Zeus -  
Was left the doubting mother of Zagreus

The beautiful boy child of the gods.

When the Titans consumed the loathed child  
Only the beating sputtering heart remained  
But the imprint of those barbarous, wild  
Ancient flesh-eating savages was retained

And the heart became the embryo of life -  
A bloody remnant culturing mankind  
Rescued and implanted in the divine:  
Barbarity and purity come to term with strife.

From that birth and death, came good and evil  
Its heartbreak left to reconcile the devil.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Bronwen Of The Thirteen Ships

Then thirteen ships came from Ireland to Wales

A splendid fleet, bearing an Irish King,

Noble in their rigging and billowed sails,

Their shields upturned with peaceful meaning.

This sea-king Moir came ashore seeking Bran

The Blessed King of Wales who welcomed him

And asked him what brought them to Albion

And its precious holy land of Cymry.

'Most revered King, Gentle Giant,

I come to seek the hand of your sister

Whose beauty and chastity are renowned,

And that you may bond another brother'.

Then Bran took aside his sister Bronwen

And asked if she would take this adventurer

Who had chanced the wide grey sea unbeknown,

For island fellowship and love of her.

But she too soon the captive of this fleet  
Accepted the warrior's white gold ring,  
Losing her gentle heart beyond retreat,  
Gifted in love to Moir the pirate king.

But seldom do the peaceful bring horses -  
And Evnissen, Bronwen's broken sibling,  
Saw treachery there, and he was jealous,  
Wanting her but hating the saintly king.

Then this would-be incestuous betrayer  
Skinned the mouth of each horse to their jaws  
Showing no mercy in his hatred there  
Blinding the best in fury for his cause.

Then Moir, heartbroken, cast aside his bride,  
Angry to the bone at this vile mischance,  
And vowing war he readied for the tide  
Set to repay dishonour with vengeance.

When word of this came to Bran the Blessed

He was distraught that he should be betrayed,  
That his beloved sister should be mocked,  
His rule of peace and justice thus destroyed.

And Bran the holy king sought atonement  
That Moir should forgive this dreadful slight,  
Aside its perpetrator's punishment,  
Pledging his own claim to heavenly right -

Offering a sound horse for those maimed  
A staff of silver as tall as a man  
Fine plates of gold, and a cauldron, long famed,  
That will restore the bodies of the slain.

Then all swore peace as the gods might behove  
And Bronwen set aside her tears of loss  
For tears of joy and vows of endless love  
In token that these ills would fade and pass.

And after feasting the lovers took ship

Coming at last to Ireland and Moir's keep  
With Bronwen soon loved for her fellowship,  
And her beauty, and her playing of the harp.

But some of the Irish could not forget  
Their losses and their humiliation  
And Bronwen became hated and disgraced  
Her life demanded in reparation.

Then Moir not wishing to put her to worse,  
Made Bronwen the court cook's scullion  
Bidding the butcher, as his killing curse,  
To smack her ear with his cleaving iron.

But Bronwen who was pure as first-light snow  
Charmed the castle birds which heard her sing  
And taught a starling to speak so it could show  
Bran a letter she had pinned to its wing.

Then Bran his gentleness and love despaired,  
Conspired to conquer Ireland and heel Moir -

And a mighty armed fleet he best prepared  
That thus the nations came to bitter war.

Of which so much is sung by the minstrels  
Who tell of endless triumph and defeat -  
And how the Irish opened a thousand hells  
Feeding the sacred cauldron with their dead -

And how Ecnissen staunched the warrior flow  
By breaking apart the massive grail's bands  
But died in agony as he came to know  
The fullest fury one's own hell commands -

And how Bronwen died of a broken heart:  
All hope for peace dying with her son Gwern,  
Whose life unified what was torn apart,  
The boy immolated by Ecnissen -

And how they severed the head of King Bran  
Burying it at the white mound in London,  
To warn of civil strife and be the guardian

Of every peace the just might swear upon.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Bunyip's Blues - The Koala

Whiskery chin and whiskery chops  
Snoozing in the broad tree tops  
Dreamy eyes and whiskery ears  
They sleep away the furry years.

A nose that's hard to see around  
And legs that bandy on the ground.  
Perplexed and up a gum tree,  
You can often just their bum see.

Now Uncle Wattleberry's a fine example  
Whose sideburns sprouted more than ample.  
So much his house among the trees  
Even whiskered in the breeze.

His nephew Bunyip though was not impressed  
And thought his uncle over-dressed -  
And with their space by hairiness pervaded  
Young Bluegum shaved and fur-pomadad.

He took to dining on the trunk below  
But listless gummed his soup with woe  
As lizards borrowed or much worse stole  
His cough-drop pottage from the bowl.

Said Bunyip:

"Whiskers alone are bad enough  
Attached to faces coarse and rough  
But how much greater their offence is  
When stuck on Uncles' countenances."

His uncle thus replied:

"Shaving may add an air that's somewhat brisker  
For dignity, commend me to the whisker  
As noble thoughts the inward being grace  
So noble whiskers dignify the face."

Now this lingo sparked a blue and Bunyip lost his rag  
So much, he did a bunk and upped and humped his swag.  
And if you want to know the outcome of his walkabout intentions  
Consult 'The Magic Pudding' [Albert], on his stew and jam indentions.

Quotations from: 'The Magic Pudding - the Adventures of Bunyip Bluegum' by  
Norman Lindsay (1918)

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Burutu

Across the seven seas bedecked with rust  
Roistering home in ballast or in freight  
With bunker coal to blush each stormy gust  
The steamship yearns to meet its own and mate

Iron from the mine and under the hammer  
Beaten and bolted, plates rivetted tight  
Engine room furnace, pistons in clamour  
The foghorn pimps for hookers tonight.

Back from Benin and a U-Boat encounter  
Botched and patched in Freetown the while  
She is limping in fog, swell and downpour,  
Her middle-watch totting each Lime Street mile.

A deadly kiss, the dirty deal is done  
She finds her match and the seabed's won.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Buttercups And Daisies

In mid-year when the grass was thin  
The buttercups would gild the fields  
But when the hay was gathered in  
Daisy-dust each swathe revealed.

Then we would take a golden tare  
And test it to a tide-mark neck  
To see if yellow glinted there  
In a like or not like butter check.

And we would pinch the daisies' stems  
To link up chains in garland strands  
And deck our necks with tiny gems  
With sap and pollen on our hands.

Now buttercup and daisy treasure  
The book of time reserves forever.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# By Hook Or By Cook? The Saltwater Crocodile

The week before mid-winter's day  
Young Nick's judgement went astray -  
Spying aloft for cape and bay  
He snoozed too long and missed the way.

Though Captain Cook just came to look  
In sounding he was much mistook -  
He failed to fathom every nook  
And on a reef was badly stuck.

Of the gents he had onboard  
Old Joe Banks was awfully bored -  
And Herr Spöring as they yawed  
Simply yawned and slept and snored.

But Chas Green the official astronomer  
Feared for his chronometer -  
He endeavoured to keep himself together  
Scared the barque meet stormy weather.

[At this point it would be best explained  
The watch was one that Kendall made  
On which longitude was accurately displayed -  
Tho' Harrison the inventor went unpaid.]

Then "Time has come" said Dan Solander  
"To plug the holes in this colander -  
Or immersion soon will end her  
And to D. Jones's locker send her".

The ship was hauled and fothered next -  
With oakum, wool and horse poo best -  
And thence became the Yimithirr's guest  
For caulking and a well-earned rest.

At this point Herman grunted and awoke  
Clearing his throat before he spoke -  
'Das great green log ich nichts gejoke  
Hast eyes that vink and threaten volk'

At this, the Saltie ran a hundred metre  
A sprint that scarce had been much fleeter -  
And having shattered Charlies' box  
Chugger-lugged the King of Clocks.

Thought he: my time has surely come  
For fancy movements have begun -  
But slowly as the cog-wheels spun  
His hiatus soon was throbbing some.

Crickety-crockity-crickety-crook  
The crocker, who was feeling yuck -  
All horologic then forsook  
Accosting famous RN Captain Cook.

Now Jim was taciturn and rarely smiled  
And watched his arms were well-retired  
[as to their attachment he aspired]  
So he tipped the wink to Hicks - who fired.

The beast retreated to his den  
But marines were ready at the count of ten -  
And volleyed and sundered -  
The crock stopped - never to go again.

The surgeon faced with these abuses  
Took time to sop the innards' oozes -  
A clock is what he then produces -  
Sound - but stained with gastric juices.

Now time and tide are never late  
And chronometers ne'er should wait -  
Oh crocodiles just bide the while  
And mind your etiquette and dining style.

Don't gobble till the day is done  
With sixty seconds' distance run -  
Just smile and watch the fun  
Or one untimely spring may jump the gun.



# Canterbury Male

Unresolved mystery remains  
About the stiff that no one claims  
Of a late middle-age white male  
Found with a glass decanter,  
A wedding dress catalogue  
Addressed to Mandy Martin,  
A small battered suitcase,  
An oyster card from Walthamstow,  
And a copy of Dr Lake's magnum opus  
'Clinical Theology: A Theological and  
Psychological Basis to Clinical Pastoral Care':  
Which, in the author's words, advises  
Those engaged in the caring professions  
Dealing with the disturbed, troubled and mentally ill on:  
&quot;our inability to suffer the painful silences,  
the anxious involvements,  
and the reverberation of buried negativities  
and helplessness within ourselves&quot;

In his findings, the coroner  
advised that this &quot;was an incredibly unusual case'  
of a person living at the edge of existence&quot;, with the  
Post mortem recording cirrhosis  
Possibly attributable to starvation.  
Inquiries across Europe had drawn a blank  
And poverty and loneliness set aside  
There were only absences in explanation  
Like the fact that the man had lost all his teeth -  
The body having been found by a walker,  
Who initially mistook it for a pile of rubbish,  
In a neglected litter strewn hawthorn and briar patch  
Near the junction of the A20 and the A28 -  
The latter being the old Wincheap Way  
Where pilgrims caught a first glimpse of the Minster  
Took off their shoes and tugged on their hair shirts.  
The Coroner ended by thanking the Kent Police  
Commenting that &quot;we could not have done more&quot;.



# Cat And Gown

I reached 71 years old this morning  
And my wife gave me a new dressing gown  
While the boys gave me a book about cats  
With the latter all being survivors  
Of the Christchurch Earthquake  
And as I drank my tea in my big green chair  
My wife and I discussed spun cotton or terry towelling  
And how you couldn't buy for love or money  
The kind of dressing gown that I liked  
And the conversation drifted to my mother  
On the 9th of June 1944  
And how she had not really wanted another child,  
In any event with my father, and that  
After his death with the RAF in October 1943  
She was left to pick up the pieces alone  
Except for a 7 year old daughter and a newborn baby  
And I explained again that my father's terry towelling  
Dressing gown which had been handed down  
To my stepfather, but which he never used,  
Hung behind the bathroom door at the farm  
And how I used to pick at the cotton  
Trying to understand  
And I could see my wife bite her bottom lip.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Cat Fight

The cats are having a fight  
With Scruffy caterwauling  
And Fang chasing her.

Bloody hell  
They have been together  
Now for knocking on 7 years

Chosen from the same hamper  
On Kitten Adoption Day  
At the Cats' Protection League

Twelve-week old kittens spread  
From five litters of strays  
Between the hampers

We got a got a bog standard  
English Black and White  
And a National Health Tabby

They have been together  
Now for a lifetime and  
Never faced hunger or need

It seems that commotion  
Is a mammalian thing  
That is in the genes

Jesus, maybe we should  
Be less hard on ourselves  
About being such a washout.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Caws, Nurses And Muses

Yesterday we sort of rescued an old man  
Who had crossed The Parade at Wakefield Park  
Stumbled and cracked his head so hard on the pavement  
That the paramedic could see his skull –  
He didn't bleed much – the old man that is –  
And immediately upped and set off for home  
Almost horizontal from the shoulders  
Like one of the Anthropophagi  
Homing on sheer instinct back to Dee Street  
Face covered in rivulets of blood  
Followed by my wife who is a nurse  
And a kind young woman from the Ministry of Social Development  
And me turning with the boys in the car until we lost them  
Only to catch up with them outside the old man's town house  
Eventually, so that we were able to drive off and bring back  
The ambulance when it got lost.  
It seems that he is an 87 year old engineer  
Whose wife is in care as she has dementia  
And that he walks up to see her every day -  
Desperately trying to push away attention  
And the possibility of any kind of care for himself  
That might rob him of his independence.

And the night before I had been to the theatre  
And seen a one-woman show about Sylvia Plath  
So that I have spent a day or so reading around  
Sylvia, Assia, Olwyn, Carol, Frieda, Nicholas, Shura and Ted  
About dreadful behaviour like Sylvia mocking her sister-in-law  
Olwyn as a Barren Woman - 'blank-faced and mum as a nurse' -  
And killing herself the day before a home-help was due to start  
And Assia sending Sylvia's friend the gas bill and then sleeping in Sylvia's bed  
And making sure that the childcare au pair had a day off before  
She gassed herself and four-year old Shura  
Felo-de-sey - auto-da-fey – hey ho.

And Hughes, a hard, brilliant, canny apeth, who saw himself as a bold  
Emotionally charged Satyr drawing blood with ravaged captive nymphs  
To whom he gave orders about getting up in the morning  
And not going back to bed for a snooze in the afternoon

And making sure that his house was kept in order with his shirts ironed  
But who was perhaps as much like a carrion crow caught  
Raking at the maggots and rotting meat and pelts of field voles  
And picking the eyes out of frost struck lambs.

Assia gave instructions that her body should lie in a quiet English churchyard  
But Ted put her ashes up the crematorium chimney  
Knowing she was Jewish and that her family had fled Germany -  
And he gave Olwyn the job of running the Plath literary estate.  
Somewhat ironic then that he spent his last 22 years  
With Carol who was a nurse and that the only survivor  
Of the original cast – Frieda - makes a thing of looking after sick crows.

'An honour! were not I thine only nurse,  
I would say thou hadst suck'd wisdom from thy teat'.

'A man, young lady! Lady - such a man  
As all the world - why, he's a man of wax'.

'O woe! O woeful, woeful, woeful day!  
Most lamentable day, most woeful day...'

'Honest good fellows, ah, put up, put up;  
For, well you know, this is a pitiful case'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Children Are The Orgasm Of The World?

Browsing Cherry Lazar's Instagram site, I saw that her most recent post was about decorating the design dilly-dildo that she had bought from the maestress of porcelain Adele Brydges (hand-made by a hand maiden?) . Cherry (aka Stephie Key) recommends doing this for yourself: 'I spent a fab morning that turned into a day. Now I have a primavera on a phallus and I have never been happier with my life choices'. And I thought of Hera Lindsay Bird and her inspirational stories. 'What's kinder than the glittered baseball cap of a stranger telling you what to strive for? ' Well how about putting some transfers on a vibrator and revving it up, living for the moment, reaching for the sky but remembering to breathe? Which then raises the question again as to whether children are the orgasm of the world - and if they are, where does this leave the lasagna, the hovercraft and helicopter, the sheep, and pasture rotation under modern farming practices? And whether orgasms get you up at three in the morning because there is a bogeyman behind the curtain or because blue ted has gone AWOL over the cot railings. Well if you are the dad and you haven't had sex for three weeks because the kid has created a time paradox in which lust is history, you might just want to think about a vibrating sheath that looks a bit like the rubber grip that you can finagle off a bike handlebar or the Next Generation guybrator, the 'Hot Octopus', which has been likened to a \$99 USB-rechargeable Darth Vader helmet - promoted as altogether trying to do something newly ambitious. Mind you, it might be best to slam dunk that one in the spare toilet - if you really can be bothered going down to the garage to fossick around under the camping gear at that time of the night - even if you are able to summon the thought of Cherry or Hera, or ideally both, naked on a distant and rocky outcrop.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Chimera

Every man who has a serviceable soul  
Is not whole but contains a chimera  
The twin girl child of his earliest youth  
Whose emotions live on enveloped.

[No doubt it is the same for woman  
With the polarities and negatives  
Reversed - the ambivalent Sappho singing  
Of the imperishable hero Achilles.]

But as manhood rises, the she-soul fades  
Trapped in the frame of masculinity  
Though she is never wholly transmuted  
Whispering as she does of lost divinity

Singing softly from the mind's shades  
Of the perils of mortality and eternity:  
A shadow of His mother, sister, lover  
Sotto voce - the silent S'ibalance of He.

Now we know of what the sirens sang  
When Ulysses, chained firmly to the mast  
Of his nameless ship heard the enchanted  
Sounds - straining for the dangerous coast.

And why Orpheus looked back in Hades  
Unable to return to life the nymph  
From whom he will never be parted:  
Paired victims of Elysium's serpent.

And why Hylas gazed deeply, knowingly  
At the naiads who drew him down to drown.  
And why Narcissus at the surface found  
Only hopeless longing in reflection.

Remember also Aphrodite and her revenge:  
Psyche's beauty sacrificed to a dark god  
Nightly awaiting the unseen lover  
Too trusting of sisters, too lacking faith.

All betrayals of the substance of Eros:  
The theft of the rib and not the fruit  
The ripping apart of male and female  
And the imperfections left in duality.

And this unfolding, this drawing down  
This enfolding of hidden opposites  
Of which dissension is the essence  
Bedevils our good-standing with the gods

Of which I have no answer - only this  
That we should engender harmony  
Between the shadow and the soul  
And share our secret selves in love.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Coffee With Martin And Peter

## INTIMACY IS SUICIDE FOR PHILOSOPHY

I spent another challenging cup of coffee  
At the Maranui, this morning, with Peter.

I had consulted Wikipedia on Heidegger  
But after a couple of turns, I still got lost.  
Someone should develop a philosophical  
SatNav that can overlay all particular entities  
And allow them to show up as entities in the first place.  
Hopefully it would have Satellite, Earth and Map Views.

Words like metaphysics, hermeneutics and ontology  
Make me apprehensive  
Much the same way that Gay references  
Make me uneasy or apprehensive,  
Or the threat of exams drove me to revise:  
The apprehension of possible humiliation.

As I explained, I come from farming stock  
And have a life-long atavistic concern about  
Being killed with a tyre lever or a Stillson spanner  
For using big words or being a brain box  
Or pondering too long on the nature of being  
Or kissing a bloke behind the bike shed or the silage pit.

I was interested though to learn that Heidi  
Liked poetry and that he thought that  
Stefan George was pretty cool  
And unintelligibly intelligible:  
'So I renounced and gladly see:  
Where word breaks off no thing may be'.

And even more impressed that Heidi  
Liked Gottfried Benn:  
'publicly labelled a swine by the Nazis,  
an imbecile by the Communists,  
an intellectual prostitute by the democrats,  
a renegade by the emigrants,  
and a pathological nihilist by the religious.'

But disappointed that he only sent Paul Celan  
A thank-you note for his commemoration  
Of their forest walk at Todtnauberg.  
Paul asked in the form of a poem:  
'Who wrote in the Visitors Book  
The line about a hope today  
For a thinker's word to register in the heart?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Cohen Returns To Hydra With Marianne

And if the lemons are bitter

Take them with a pinch of salt

For there will be a feast tonight

When we are come to shore.

It will be time for us to laugh again

And cry and laugh and come to terms.

So deeply lost - we had told ourselves

There was no new land, no new sea -

But then we came again to Piraeus.

Spume from the ferry dies

As she settles at the quay

Hugging close the better land

That harbours noble dreams -

The sea like poured wine -

The coast so advantageous,

Promontories and bays

Broken like the bread of heaven.

Stepping from ship to shore

I touch and take your hand

Confidently, companionably.

There is artistry in this journey,

Recovering our common ground.

Better leave the rest unsaid

For we have touched on Lethe here

And come to join the ancient dead.

...

'They had this place for each other at the very end. That is what words of love can do'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Cold Pastoral

Every time I pass out into the light going north from the Terrace Tunnel  
Gunning the car up to the 100k limit on the motorway  
I am haunted by the memory of the death of 18-year old Natalia Austin  
Whose body was flung headlong into the opposite lane:

'What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? '

Natalia fell in with adults who were drug-addicted and limitlessly irresponsible  
And was persuaded to ride pillion on a Harley Davidson  
Having been given a brief lesson on leaning with the bike  
By Dee McMahon's girlfriend Monique.

'For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! '

McMahon was nearly five times over the legal alcohol limit  
The equivalent of having drunk up to 42 standard drinks -  
The autopsy also found morphine and tramadol  
In what was left of McMahon's corpse.

'That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd'

Hitting 140k on the bend out of the Tunnel  
He smacked the bike several times against the concrete median strip  
Shedding metal in showers of sparks  
And ripping limbs away in showers of blood.

'Who are these coming to the sacrifice? '

'&quot;We're trying to go forward and cherish the memory of a beautiful girl  
Who had a bright future, and who was just too innocent and trusting -  
You let your little girl go and you hope she's going to be looked after by adults.  
She trusted them, and they've let her down miserably.&quot;

'What little town by river or seashore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn? '

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Come At Last To The Landscape Of My Dreams

A greater life, a little death in love:  
When I was young, I practiced wide excess  
And sought extremes to gain and then disprove  
The latitudes of folly in romance.

Why dispute so large a territory  
And leave behind such transient touchfalls?  
Why dream discovery from every  
Distant vista - new conquests and their spoils?

For in the wide expanses of my dreams  
I sought the perfect one to make me whole  
And lost my way in desolate extremes -  
The desert of an empty earth - my soul.

But now I've found and touched what's real and true  
The brave new world of deeper love with you.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Come Here!

Out drinking with a friend at the Hummingbird  
a little worse for wear I find myself

buying a third red wine for a beautiful young woman  
who is weaving herself around

her eyes distant somewhere between dreamy  
and stoned - trying to set on a shifting horizon...

drifting, she is trying to focus, to find something  
gladly accepting the offer to sit with us.

After awhile, though I am very much older  
she seems to take a shine to me and my repartee:

Me waxing lyrical in the magically relaxed  
mode that comes upon me when I'm charming women.

Dis-engagingly, I tell her that my friend  
and I are gay-bent but she just laughs - another of my corny jokes.

At the close, I offer to find and pay for a taxi  
but she insists on an earlier offer of a late-night coffee at my place.

I put her to bed gently and lovingly,  
her pretty, blonde curls dead to the world on my pillow.

Later, sleeping on the couch  
I am summoned by an as yet unfallen angel intent on rimming the abyss.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Come Into The Street And Walk There

Come into the street and walk there  
Think of the loved and those you lost  
Long for caring - longing to care  
Feel the pavement beneath your feet

As passers-by are lost to thought  
Scarcely glancing others' faces  
And in each step the fact is taught  
That little leaves but empty traces

Trusting forward - look sadly back  
Confide to time your broken heart  
Smile to yourself then quick the track  
That end be better than the start

We hope ourselves for endless love  
We tell each other gentle lies  
We dream that heaven shines above  
But truth is where the ending lies.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Comfort

The cat has whorled itself on the duvet  
Burying its head into its fluffy tail  
Losing its nose in a quiet smile  
And its body in a rhythmic sleep -  
In that sweet-spot antithesis beyond  
Fight and flight that constitutes comfort.

Last night you dressed in fantasy  
With high heels and a schoolgirl tartan  
Skirt and a pretty, white-lace shirt  
And a new pair of white knickers -  
Inside-out in error as the label disclosed -  
And now I fear no evil as it comforts me.

Blessed be the God of all comfort  
'Comfort, Yes comfort My People'  
[And cats] says the Lord - that we who have  
Patience and comfort might have hope -  
That those who mourn shall be comforted -  
And that those who comfort will dwell

In goodness and mercy in the House of the Lord forever.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Cornerstone

For Montrell Jackson - with Immense Respect

I was tired physically  
And emotionally:  
Disappointed by the reckless comment  
Hurting at heartlessness that wouldn't relent  
Disappointed by the hate we couldn't prevent  
Entrusting my heart in the prayers I sent.

I swear to God  
I loved this city  
Those who cared were much appreciated  
But I wondered that few in the city reciprocated  
Out of uniform I was a threat that colour created  
In my uniform my own people were alienated.

Look at my actions  
And how they speak  
I was guarding the streets to keep you free  
A gentle giant and protector that sure was me:  
Questioning my integrity, can't you see  
You'll tear us apart indefinitely, it's a tragedy.

This city must get better  
This city will get better:  
Love my baby son Mason with all your might  
Give him the hugs that are his birthright  
Get together and build a citadel of light  
Let him see his old man was right

That we go nowhere when we hate and fight.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Cows And The Carnavalesque

Perhaps it would have been different  
If I had started earlier in becoming a writer  
But then I couldn't.

My early life was a mess, a predicament  
Torn between horny-handed toil,  
Scholasticism and a paucity of acceptance and belonging.

And I chose survival rather than poetry,  
Seeing the way forward in being  
Adventurous, industrious and likably banal.

Ironic then that I find myself in New Zealand  
Where the characteristics that I chose  
Predominate -

But the top poets are markedly post-modern  
Being versed in improbable punctuation,  
Line slippages in their rondeaus, rondels and villanelles

& a marked preference for ampersands.

Such poetry we read is often a bricolage:

'characterized by eclecticism, digression, collage, pastiche,  
irony, the return of ornament and historical reference,

... magical realism

& the referencing of popular media embracing  
pop art, architectural deconstructivism,  
maximalism, and neo-romanticism'.

Or what our premier laureate terms the 'carnavalesque':

Where more often what's enjoyable  
is when a poem veers off,

carried along by a momentum that's not quite mine

towards a solution that neither I nor the poem's reader  
is anticipating in ways in which language

can be our conspirator in subverting the too predictable  
meeting of the sign with its meaning or referent,  
encouraging our scepticism of the over-confident  
Mot Juste.

That's all very well.

Those buggers never had to milk cows  
And then write essays about Keats.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Crossing To The Island Where The Blessed Belong

Drink too quick as though this drink's the last  
Drink up from what is past and taste regret  
Drink down through what is left and what has passed  
Drink deeper still - drink deeper to forget.

From dregs and froth the recollections pour  
In loss and bitterness their flavours found  
The thirsts of youth grown old and sour  
A glass most-empty or a potion downed.

But think of when the glass was bright and full  
A brimming bowl with zest and lust to rim,  
With warmth that love, delight and friendship mull  
Sweet draughts and quaffs that headiness makes trim.

With age the vintage grows too tart or strong -  
Blend it with freshness savoured by the young -  
And steer a middle course to best times wrong  
Crossing to the island where the blessed belong.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Crossties And Lines

[for Wilfred Owen, October 1918]

Shrewsbury, Hadnall, Yorton, Clive, Wem,  
Prees, Whitchurch, Wrenbury, Nantwich, Crewe

Backed against the oaks, the cattle gather  
Minding the din of the clattering train -  
Milking is late tonight as the farm lights flicker  
And loco smoke and steam meet soaking rain.

On the line, the gangers slack and chatter  
And twist a wad twixt palm and thumb  
As clanging trucks rough couplings batter  
And drive wheels rumble on to kingdom come.

'Wer'rup' the cowman calls - the black dog sets -  
The sullen charges bunt and frisk in show,  
Mocking the winter's edge, the day's regrets  
They trudge through sleet that threatens snow.

The foreman mutters and bites his lip  
'Hey up Will - shift back young mon -  
The ballast can slip and the rails can trip -  
Tamping is done 'til the tender's gone'.

But the boy is slow with his limping gait  
And what he hears is artillery fire  
Back from the Somme in a broken state  
He left the best of his wits at the wire.

Buttercup, rush, sedge, thistle and nettle  
The year's-end grassland thin between -  
Muddy hocks and hooves at gate halt settle  
Awaiting the latch to lift and keen.

But those who wager still in careless gift  
As the yawping steel grinds hard  
Won't stand in the cess as the bogies shift,  
And the wheel of fortune deals its card.

On the Western Marches lines are broken  
Iron has taken its mass and press to heart,  
And clag and blemish and blood give token  
Where switch and point new journeys start.

Bellinglise, Magny-la-Fosse, Riqueval,  
La Baraque, Ramicourt, Joncourt, Oors

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

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Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Cyber Nymphs

Contracted to our brief demanding view  
Youth and beauty pass in bright procession  
And in perfection is this world untrue  
As thumbnails click in scant obsession.

Fold of golden apricot and blush of peach  
A hint of downy light on spray-tanned skin  
Seemingly awakening to a touch  
As dawdled fingers to the left breast run.

Come-hither eyes which beckon bright but bored  
Feed the flames with self-substantial fuel  
And so abundance swells its own reward:  
None here can kiss but none it seems are cruel.

Where fairest creatures our desires increase  
Alone the webcam screens rehearse the lie  
That as the tender works towards release  
The image fades and leaves no memory.

Pity this world but still its glutton be  
Are there any you could love that now you see?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Dancing To An Old Tune

[With the Cheshire Young Farmers 1962]

And there I used to be, waiting  
In the kitchen close to the coal fire range  
Having put on my baggy hand-me-down  
Dinner jacket and black ribbon-seamed trousers  
And my creased dancing pumps  
Ready to brave the winter evening  
With my grandfather's white silk scarf

To join our neighbour's son  
For a trip in his old sports car  
To Tattenhall or Sandbach  
Or the Civic Hall, Nantwich.  
Then the air was oh so crisp -  
And the stars were so very bright  
Another perfect longed for night.

My God, could there be anything  
More exciting than getting out  
And away from the dark fields  
And having some pints of mild  
In The Lamb or the Wilbraham Arms  
And smoking Player's Navy Cut  
Or Craven A and standing there

In the urinal like a man already  
Shaking off the excess alcohol  
Next to the Durex dispenser  
And getting ready to gather up  
After some coarse comments  
To roam the streets together  
For a Young Farmers' Dance -

We would always arrive late  
And stand at the back of the room  
Like reluctant stock edging the pen.  
The pretty girls would already be dancing  
Their cards marked for the evening

But some of the plainer girls  
Or those in ill-fitting dresses

Cut from their mother's or sister's cloth  
Would look longingly for attention  
Framed by perms, smiling hesitantly  
So we would survey the scene  
And settle for a bottle of brown ale -  
Heaven enough to be with friends  
Have choices and side-step the Fox Trot.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Danseuse Sauvage

Surviving pogroms, sleeping on the street  
Was it such hardships, petite gamine noire,  
That taught the steps that put you on your feet  
Dancing a wild enticing repertoire?

Wary and weighing up powerful whites  
She smiled on indifference and ignorance:  
On those who gave eroticism plaudits  
And those who traded in vile abhorrence.

Brazen with buck-toothed cheeky elegance  
She danced from poverty to stardom  
In a wild ecstasy of excellence  
A demi-tour of suffering to wisdom.

So that when she returned to her people  
She brought rights to triumph over evil.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Daramoolen And The Dreamtime

[For the Ngunnawal people - traditional custodians of the Monaro Plains and the Canberra region]

## DARAMOOLEN AND THE DREAMTIME

Then there was no man  
Or even woman  
And the sky was clear  
Only the sun  
And beneath the sun  
Lay the snake.

So the snake slept  
For long  
Alone and inert  
Until it awoke  
Hungry and thirsty  
Ready.

Then the snake  
Made a woman  
From the moonlight  
And when she  
Had grown  
He drank from her.

After the snake had  
Tasted the blood  
The rain came  
And the land came to life  
With many creatures  
And the snake became a rainbow.

Then the woman said  
'Daramoolen  
Make me a man  
So that I can give birth'  
And the Rainbow Snake

Made a man  
And the woman was glad.

So people came to the world  
And children played.  
And as the children grew  
The mother told them:  
'With blood and rain  
The snake made you.'

But the man was curious  
And when the moon came  
He tasted the blood  
From the woman  
And cut himself  
So that he too could bleed.

Then the man  
Mixed her blood with his  
And the Rainbow snake  
Became very angry  
Saying: 'these children  
Are mine'.

Then the snake went along  
Far away  
And drought  
Covered the land  
So that the people  
Had no food and were afraid.

So the woman  
Sent her two eldest sons  
To find Daramoolen  
And they found him  
Coiled cold against a  
Great mountain.

And the boys said:  
'Our mother has sent us  
Open your mouth  
And give us hope

That blood can  
Bring the rain again'.

And Daramoolen  
Ate the boys  
And they were gone  
But he said to the woman:  
'Here is Jedinbilla -  
Where boys become men'.

And the snake made  
Murra bidgee mullangari  
[To keep the pathway  
To the ancestors alive]  
Saying: 'Now the boys  
Are colours on my skin

Ngunna yerrabi yanggu  
[So you are welcome  
To leave footprints on the land]  
Where your people  
Will see the rain again

And the man must dream'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Dark Lady

A light which left and gathered in the eaves  
Rough waking - weary slouching to unease  
A voice that chides that no one ever sees  
A flickering mirage of our best beliefs

Stale actions further frozen by degrees  
Terrors sown that trash the flowers and trees  
A choice of loss that every ill perceives  
A cult that flays a gash on devotees

A future that is worse than death foresees  
Repetitions which become decrees  
A mindless pain progressing mind's disease  
An outcast that may never ever please

A loss of mine and me beyond retrieve  
The image lets the empty mirror seize.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Dark Queen

I had not realized that you were so beautiful  
Raven-haired - with eyes of summer blue

Heartbreaker of the anguished  
Heart-stiller of the vanquished

Tell me - where are the lovers of the lostly past  
Enchanted, beguiled - passing to oblivion at last?

Heartbreaker of the anguished  
Heart-stiller of the vanquished

Tell me - where are the warriors once fiercely brave  
Mouldering, forgotten - cherished only by the lonely grave?

Heartbreaker of the anguished  
Heart-stiller of the vanquished

Do you the harvester of souls - through love and death  
Still deal in faithless kisses and each failing final breath?

[a chant for the Morrigan]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Days Use Me Gently

Days use me gently - sleep, love, solitude  
The tools of time's preparing - revealing  
Skills lovingly applied with exactitude  
Shaping the commonplace with meaning:

These craftsmen stretch out hours - measuring  
The width and spans of laths of latitude  
The height and depth of lengths of longitude  
The intersections and the severing.

Now they are slowing, resting - assessing  
The cuts made final - surfaces sanded finely -  
Sawdust and shavings tidied - and polishing  
Enough to bring to lustre finally

My object - holding future fortitude -  
Whose days of work receive my gratitude.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Death On The Long Bridge

'Bolt quick' - sweet soul whose life they would suppress:

You who knew no peace and very little love

Must take this chance for freedom's slight caress -

Must run ... and run ... and call to God above!

What men or ghouls are these? What deadening fright?

What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?

What hue and cry? What wild and desperate flight?

And you must run ... and run ... for freedom's sake.

Such truth is more than beauty needs to know

And in your death the flow of time runs slow.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Deidemia's Reproach To Pyrrha

When your mother brought you here to join us  
A bond was made as your eyes shone,  
Beauteous red-haired daughter of Peleus,  
My confidante and companion.

Boys glimpse visions of a she-male form  
As beauty brooks no edge or error  
So shores that shift become the norm:  
It was thus with you my Kerkysera.

From your mother the Nereid Thetis  
You were quicksilver like the autumn moon  
As gay and constant as the changing tides  
Jostling tender - caressing rough - in turn.

Each day we skipped from wharf to castle  
The carefree, careless girls of Skyros  
Till desire and doubt and blush gave battle  
Awaiting the feast of Dionysus.

Then was I the master of us, shy maid -  
Nub and nipple stretched against the cloth,  
Easing, seeking, touching as we played -  
Unafraid of any warrior's wrath.

Fickle sea nymph, tonguing salty skin taut,  
As arm to arm, chest to breast, cuddled close  
I stroked your thigh and your sweet pleasure sought,  
My finger tips alive as passion rose.

Roused to act you found yourself revealed  
Salving wounds in love's emotion  
Sheathing the sword to set aside my shield  
Finding peace in sweet commotion.

Was it anger then at this release  
That set you bound for war at Troy  
When that old trickster peddler Odysseus  
Plied his guile to girlhood love destroy?

But freckled fem, I needed no defense -  
It seems your shame a baser man concealed.  
There was no cause to take offence  
It matters not which skin, when skin's revealed

Your brittle pride will serve you well in strife  
Let warlike acts subdue your deep unease:  
And I will act the duteous little wife  
Though making love you dream of Patrocles.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Desistance Hunting

JUST SIT

The pursuit of happiness is alright  
And a fine delight for a chase  
But latterly I have found  
That happiness surprises me.

In my case persistence hunting  
Left me breathless and agonized  
As the bucks and harts would break  
Into the thickets and shadows.

But if I sit quietly like an ancient wizard  
Under a blossomed tree, it comes shyly  
At first, the chaste, unhindered unicorn  
And crowns my lap.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Desolate Dragon Raging Lion

Do you hear the dragon howl in the dead tree?  
Listen to the lion's roar within a dry skull?  
Is there joy after the death of awakening?  
A dragon will not bide stagnant water  
The still pond cannot contain the dragon's coils.  
The warmth of spring will still touch the tree  
Non-moving, non-living, non-attached.

At the water's edge, the ocean has dried up  
But the moon is unhindered by the waves.  
Mountain, ocean and sky forests lie inert  
In each tip, each fork of deadwood  
There is the sound of the dragon wailing.  
Nothing can be grasped or attained -  
In the dry broken branches there is only emptiness.

If the dragon moans, even then nothing may be realized  
When there is a lion roar in the skull, something may arise.  
The dragon plays joyfully and the lion watches -  
Roots and branches must return to the source  
The bark falls but the root-stock remains  
Does anybody hear?  
There is no one in the world who does not hear!

Deep nature is does not have it?  
No grudging, not clinging - joy without greed.  
Knowing when to kill and when to give life to thought  
Knowing when to comfort the dragon and calm the lion.  
A thousand, ten thousand melodies still reverberate  
The writing has grown faint and all sounds are one  
Text and score have been erased and come to silence.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Devoted To The Goddess

After all it is a drama  
Motherhood and family:  
Past, present and future  
Enchanted by divine magic -  
Love played as a game  
Participants often driven mad  
By promises and deceits  
With winners at a loss from  
Qualities and distinctions  
Impermanence and emptiness.  
She promises to be fair  
But at the end is self-serving.  
Hold on to her craft regardless  
Rise with the flood tide  
And drift back on the ebb.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Distant Music

I am of a stifled thought-tormented age  
and conjure the past for images of music.

If I cross the threshold and Lily takes my coat  
can I not overhear the piano playing -

And enter to see Miss Furlong folding away the music  
of a pretty waltz?

There is no truer truth obtainable than  
comes of music - at once welcome and now silent.

There is a woman standing in the shadow listening -  
she hears the melody but for me it is too distant

I hold up my hand to silence those departing -  
the image is of my wife - the notes are snow specks.

I exist that is for certain, but for how long -  
until the thought ceases or until I cease?

And leaving the picture of words that I have painted,  
the snow dissolving and dwindling in its descent,

We must take the passing carriage and brave the quivering chill  
as the flakes, silver and dark, fall obliquely against the lamplight.

My wife Gretta is lost to me - she has fallen asleep in tears -  
and the snow taps again at the window - all are becoming shades -

And I think of Lily, the caretaker's daughter - the Morkans' maid -  
bridling at my attention and the shilling present that the evening brought her.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Do Not Heed That Darkness

I once stood at the very brink of a singularity  
And felt its impending darkness draw down  
The light from my life inexorably -  
That I behaved badly and unreasonably  
I can never doubt but then I was at the brim  
And the poor girl with whom I half-lived  
Knew that things were amiss when the dogs came home alone -  
She struggled then to drag me back  
And later cleaned the steps of  
Bits and pieces brought in from the sea's edge.

As the stars wheeled and the surface began to close  
I somehow saw a fleck of light  
That had escaped the dark banal  
And I was buoyed to the pier's end  
Where I was found  
By my unfortunate companion  
Who I had not meant to so negate:  
Thence condemned as we both were -  
Exhausted at the safer shores of the commonplace -  
To stand apart to better contemplate  
In dreadful care that rimmed-jet intensity  
Where photons fade (complexity become invisible)  
And from which there is no ultimate escape.

As Socrates who was so much wiser than I observed  
We should not fear what we cannot know  
And his more noble death, face-shrouded  
In the Agora, with the bitter cup lipped,  
Gives testimony that true knowledge  
Is the recognition that there is nothing to know  
Except that one cannot discern in the darkness.  
So if at all my light and my speaking out offend you  
Simply remember that I once stepped back from obscurity  
- for the time being.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Drinking The Pubs Of Otley Dry

Back home the wives are waiting there  
Reading stories to the kids in bed  
As their menfolk joke across the square  
Being heroes at the bar instead.

Look left, look right, the pubs are bright,  
The dales are dark beyond,  
There is the call of youth tonight  
To which we must respond.

The Rose and Crown will give us sup  
And then the Horse and Farrier  
So pay the round and square the tab  
As we light-up the merrier.

On to the Horse and Bull both black  
Though Rose and Swan are white  
Across the market place and back  
Though skin-full girths stretch tight.

Let's taste the best of bitter treasure  
That Keighley brews and taps  
And take Tadcaster's measure  
As we roister round the traps.

"God Bless Guy Fawkes", a fiery gent  
He may have drunk here too  
The only honest man in parliament  
Who sadly failed to see it through.

"God save the Queen"; 'twas just but jest  
A loyal toast is better heard -  
And Yorkshiremen will stand the test  
In drinking deep to keep their word.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Dubious Gifts

SKINK

There's another half-dead skink on the carpet  
Hunted out of the Bush and delivered as a  
Contribution to the household groceries by the cats.  
It will be carefully collected in tissue and placed back in the flax.

I tell the boys to feed Scruff and Fang.  
'They've already got plenty of food Dad', they say.  
'That's not the point' I advise.  
'They are looking for attention - give them some Treats anyway'.

A wise woman learns that men are a lot like cats.  
They need to be given regular attention -  
Even if it is a bit of a nuisance and they lack nothing.  
They hang around for treats because it's habitual - craving.

And, as for the men, they'll then go off hunting.  
Memo to self: Bringing back \$5 tops and blouses,  
Pre-loved from the hanger rails of the op-shop,  
May just be a skanky behavioural response.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Dust

The heads of grain will shake and fall to ground  
When stacks and sheaves are torn apart to thresh  
And dust and empty bays are all that's found  
As bags and bales are cleared and floors made fresh

The rounds of dough will form and rise and stretch  
And those who sift the flour that's baked for bread  
Will trim the bowl and wipe the dusty bench  
While tools are cleansed for times that stretch ahead

But I concede that I am only dust  
Like golden lads and girls of olden days -  
Whose specks and flecks and motes in search of rest  
Were brought to muted and more silent stays -

When harvest's home and daily bread is spent  
The dust of words must witness for any who repent.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Each Quarter Day

[Love is only Love when Love can grow]

When young I fell in love four times a day.  
I was more careless then and desperate  
With little thought or heed of come what may  
When braving reticence to date and mate.

Often I saw a flash of eye that shone  
When cheeks' or necks' emblazoned blushes dimmed  
And schemed of pillow buddies deftly won  
And lobes and napes with kisses over-brimmed;

But as supposed eternal summers fade  
I chide myself that truth and wisdom show  
Deep seekers such as you are born not made  
And love is only love when love can grow.

And so each quarter day I stop to see  
Your kindness, laughs and hugs give life to me.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Early Morning At University House, Canberra

The brightness startles when the blinds are drawn  
And smacks across the window's sleepy brow  
As sunshine rages there against the lawn  
And dawning makes a last flamboyant bow.

My entrance to the court unmask delight:  
The choisya is so very pure and white  
Beset abuzz by jezebels and nymphs  
That hover nectar-yielding labyrinths.

The pool is quiet where carp will bide the day  
But then the birds alight - alert and keen:  
The cockatoo sips morning mist away,  
While come the tufted doves to coo and preen

And nesting mynas strut, weighing their searches,  
As the chorus rises and then takes song  
Amid the shrubs and the silver birches -  
So swoops and chortles then the kurrawong.

And so by heaven, I thank the wakened sun  
For this Canberra day that's just begun.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Ebb And Flow And Fierce Regret

PICASSO AND SYLVETTE

Nymphet how much I wanted you:  
To kiss the salt-line of your hair  
To comb my fingers through  
Your curls and linger there.

I lied that creativity is happiness.  
As I painted, I longed to touch  
Your skin, setting down the canvas -  
How much... so much ... ne touche!

And my art is not stronger than life  
How could it not betray your beauty?  
It being laid by brush and painting knife  
And you lustrous, innocent and day-dreamy?

Chaste sea-nymph, your other worldliness  
Protects you from the satyr and the centaur -  
Your land-grief and sea-loss-weariness  
Salving wrack and wave on yearning's shore.

No arousal it seems passed between us  
My heartless beauty torn from the sea.  
As you left to tippy-toe the beach on broken glass  
Between the tides, what did you think of me?

Ma jolie sirène au poney queue -  
My pretty pony-tail mermaid Sylvette  
Tell me, were my portraits true to you -  
In ebb and flow and fierce regret?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Embracing The Night

Laid out naked below the balcony  
Under probing ultra-violet light  
Singletons and couples sleep fitfully  
Eventually relaxing to the night.  
The dark sheets frame them in negative  
As they surface and then fall asleep  
Into that lost land where spectres dwell  
And those who loved and hoped may weep  
In private heaven or private hell  
Being brought as they are to sacrifice -

Flying or leaping in silence and slow time  
Stretched out in ecstasy or torment  
The sleepers move beyond care or claim,  
Immodest to sense and consciousness.  
Of what do they dream in those shadows now:  
Of fantasies or the past returned -  
Of things undone or discharged guiltily -  
Or of favours that may yet be gained -  
Caught in the flickering of a show  
Where recognition stirs uneasily?

And now in that deep unfathomable state  
They reach out to someone, anyone to touch -  
Or shrink from entanglement with their mate,  
Suddenly restive or cloyed at their clutch -  
Taking up flight across the firmament  
Reaching for the comfort of the cold stars:  
Like those who fled the hell of Pompeii  
And who forever sleep in testament  
Of the lesser power of light on stone,  
Though love there too defied that infamy.

Who are these brought now to the sacrifice?  
To what still altar, what mysterious priest,  
Lost in little death to open, honest skies,  
Do the pliant come to be oppressed?  
Dreams and nightmares vitrified that instant -  
Tissue turned to glass and shone to jet.

Who will rise again from the lipped tray,  
From the inert and becoming object,  
Brought back like Lazarus to the present  
Once more to the sunlight for a little stay.

And what of beauty and coming to truth?  
Is beauty truth, truth beauty at the last  
Brought finally to bay from mad pursuit  
When dreams are real, and life has passed?  
Form and surface in timeless endlessness  
Where states decay beyond oblivion  
And generations pass to death  
From shades of Arcady and Avalon.  
Will there be something left aside from less  
Where sleepy heads share Lethe's shallow breath?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Enid And Elyse: A Medieval Courtly Romance Retold

In olden days there lived a wife  
Whose noble husband courted strife  
He loved her little - just at night -  
This knightly treatment wasn't right.

He found her in the woodland wild  
And took her for a wayward child  
Making her his own for pity's sake  
While long regretting his mistake

Belittling her at every chance  
Their love was lacking in romance  
And when they came to Arthur's court  
He served her up in rags for sport.

But Queen Guinevere took pity  
And dressed her in her finery  
At which the husband fell for her  
And took his way without deter.

At last grown slothful in his lust  
He betrayed his knightly trust  
And the lads of the Round Table  
Questioned whether he was able

To sally forth on jousts or quests  
Or polish up his chainmail vests -  
And what is more said they made good  
On wifely wants of knightlyhood.

At which he rode away with umbrage  
Treating her as wayward baggage  
Although he took her nonetheless  
To keep the score on his contests.

He ordered her to ride ahead  
And keep her tongue inside her head:  
While he sought out each noble fight  
She found a camp and cooked at night

With trolls and bandits on the way  
She saw them first but could not say:  
Distracting them she made them blink  
And looking back gave knight-ward wink

But when the champion won the day  
He sent her forward down the way  
Driving chargers decked with booty  
No words of thanks in line of duty.

Til in the forest depths a maiden cried  
Beset by fire and to some faggots tied  
A morsel for a dragon roast or fried  
The fiery beasties' shawarma undenied.

Then Enid much beguiled the monstrous worm  
And calmed its embers with her nubile form -  
While Geraint freed the nymphet from the stake  
She shared her story with the horned snake.

At length she found her knight had upped and left  
Leaving her beset, bamboozled and bereft  
But then the dragon taken by her grief  
Gave her the gold that stuck between its teeth.

So, she took the stolen armour that she held  
And girded up with lance and sword in belt  
Giving eager chase to nymph and errant knight  
To teach him his behaviour wasn't right.

She came upon her hubby in a glen  
Enticing Elyse to a bowered den  
He had fancied her since way back when -  
He cut her bonds but tied them back again.

Then much in wrath our mounted maiden rode  
Resplendent in her anger, brave and bold  
And brought to joust Geraint the Oversold  
But he took flight and fled the combat cold.

And Elyse was overcome with gratitude

For this gentlest of stranger's hastilude  
That he should save her from calamity  
And never once assail her chastity.

'Young Sir, my love is yours as you desire  
I am a princess and my lands are yours  
Come live with me and be my noble squire  
And I will grant you what you may require'.

At which the champion laid her helm aside  
And tossed the curls she could no longer hide:  
'I am no knight young beauteous maid  
But just a woman that misfortune made'.

When Elyse saw such woe and courtly care  
She loved the girl who stood so sadly there:  
'It matters not my lover and my life  
You are my choice and I your loving wife'.

And then at last they came to rest at Camelot  
Where Queen Guinevere reserved them a spot  
At her table (which was like Arts' non-square) ,  
Where all were welcome to partake and share.

And they grew old in honour and renown  
With songs of courtly love that still resound  
For they had found their holy loving grail -  
That gentlest of knights and her beloved girl.

And last was heard of Enid's ex-Geraint  
He was the fearsome dragon's catamite -  
And labour as he might to slake its blood  
The slightest recognition was withstood.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Epitaph For The Zephyrometer

Where vampires with the zephyrs play  
Destructive winds their powers display -  
There living dead their splurges roil  
And lip the shore with wasted spoil -

Ere the kinetic needle takes a jolt  
That frays its ends with misspent bolt -  
So ends what Council kissed alive  
The zombie junk on Cobham Drive.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Everything On Earth

Everything on earth and in the sea dies.  
But man is more severely condemned:  
He knows about this death sentence,  
It was signed when he was born.

But, aware of the transience of life,  
He lives obliviously - contrary to everything -  
As if his life is forever  
And this world belongs to him.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Fair Trade?

At the Finland Station in Petrograd, April 1917  
Vladimir Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov  
Better known as Comrade Lenin  
Promised a Worldwide Socialist Revolution

With a permanent end to the class struggle,  
And a similar finale for liberal reform, arguing:  
We don't need a parliamentary republic.  
We don't need bourgeois democracy.

We don't need any government except  
A Soviet of worker, soldier and peasant deputies.

At Haparanda-Tornio on the Swedish-Finnish border  
The bemused guards had shunted the Sealed Train  
Into a siding along with the munitions, luxuries  
And refugee removals waiting for the onward locomotive -

This was a package friend that would ruin Russia.

...

At his 'Cottage' or Palace at Cape Idokopas, September 2016  
President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin  
A former Lieutenant Colonel in the KGB  
Promises social populism with a nationalist tinge

With a long-term plan to make Russia Great Again  
Through a seamless mix of cronyism and pretence  
In which state propaganda subverts justice and the media,  
And wealth is concentrated among those who collude

Arguing: Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible  
If we make information so dirty there is no longer any trust.

And in public opinion where borders increasingly count for little  
The guards are mainly amateurs armed only with flashlights  
So munitions and luxuries move endlessly down the track  
Though the refugees are forced to flee empty-handed -

If emulated friend, this is a package that will ruin the West.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Falling In Love Finally In Takaka

Coming down yet again into Takaka

I saw the pub where we took a small room

And made love after you had handily

Beaten a couple of the locals at pool.

I marvelled then at your confidence:

Trusting so deeply in my easy smile

Content already that this was it

The end of the road for two drifters.

Fish and chips and a jug or so of beer:

Things were simpler in the old days

A very ordinary blue Toyota Corolla

No house, no kids, just enough dollars.

You told me 'I don't talk that much

I don't have that much to say

But I really like you and think

That you are a good person'.

A pretty-rare girl - a man whisperer

Meeting my flighty charm with calm

Seeing so many good things ahead

Committed to us being ever together.

And for once, I listened to the silence

Sensing that acceptance was everything

And that there was little else worth saying

Picking up on quiet beauty being quite enough.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Fat With The Promise Of Lean Streaks

PERSONAL TRAINER

Late harvest saw us lifting bales to trailers  
And up from the trailers to shippon lofts  
Using a 2-pronged pitchfork or pikel  
Jabbed centre-bale and hefted up in one sweep.

At the glooming of a late summer's day  
The last loads would be brought in  
As a chill caught sweat and chaff  
With aches akimbo as the tractor backed up.

Dank bales leaved with Cheshire autumn  
From the flats along the Ankersplatt  
A fair jag on and one last tussle  
To put them overhead aired aloft.

&quot;Tha mun shape lad  
Dunna be like th'owd woman  
With a belly-full of butter milk  
An wimmy-wammy i'the bitlin.

There inna any way but reet.  
Tha mun stand reet lad -  
Jab an swing in one go  
Shifting as th'weight rises&quot;.

Big men and me a youth of sixteen  
Jokes and hard judgments -  
But they are long gone  
Mown down by salty home-cured bacon -  
Fat with the promise of lean streaks.

.....

□

Late in life I have come back to the gym  
And succumbed to the debonaire charm  
Of my personal trainer Maria  
Who comes from Wroclaw or `vrotswaf.

She has devised a program to improve me  
And I stand looking at myself in the mirror  
Holding a weighted ball out-stretched  
Balancing on a BoSu and bending low.

I try to think of new things to say or ask  
About Poland to reduce the pain -  
But then she has me bridging  
And holding for 10 more - she can't count.

&quot;That's very good&quot;  
She says unconvincingly:  
&quot;Lift your tummy up  
And squeeze your glutes.

Take a break if you are dizzy -  
Next time bring a water bottle.  
Now for your favourite  
The lunges, leading leg straight at first&quot;.

Beautiful people in pink and black lycra  
Pounding music and purposeful endeavour  
And I am still here  
Ready for a chick-pea and kinwa salad at the Maranui -  
Fat with the promise of lean streaks.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Feel The Pulse Of Life

The arc of character's a simple myth  
The arrow of time will find no target -  
No bow is drawn that brings a point to life  
The story will fall short - forget regret.

The waves that ripple to the waiting shore  
Will play at making runnels in the sand  
But tides erase them to what went before  
Re-scribing palimpsests that know no end.

Nature is indifferent to age or youth  
And beauty's parallel is constant change  
Time's industry erodes each laid down truth:  
Its endless task to shift and rearrange.

Watch each moment then and every breath  
And feel the pulse of life - neglecting death.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Final Sovereignty

Final Sovereignty

SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD

Now a second testing adolescence  
Beckons with its trials and pitfalls  
Of rage and loss and acquiescence  
As alertness ebbs and presence fails.

Seventy now - immaturity ahead -  
I look to my elders for consolation  
On how ten or twenty years are shed  
Purposefully to dissolution.

Across the threshold of obsolescence  
I pay court in admiration  
To those who deny decay deference  
And live on with quiet determination

Their indignities suffered and withstood,  
In sovereignty the end makes good.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Final Training Flight

What happened once has yet to end,  
Since the cards were put down,  
And the evening cocoa drained,  
Around the stove at the Sergeants Mess.

Turn in lads. Tomorrow is another day.  
Another training run across to Ireland  
And back across the steel-grey sea  
To Cumberland, coasting home to Millom.

Touch Douglas on Man, on to Slieve Donard  
Across the steel-grey sea and its mists  
Up to sight Belfast and back to St Bees  
Ahead Scafell and down to Black Combe.

Vince, you are the pilot it seems from orders -  
It's lucky you played baseball for Buffalo  
This is a home run with four bases  
So let fly a homer and slide home the Anson.

Rene, you'll be navigator - we'll try the new compass.  
You are only twenty but you're smart  
I had to laugh after your mother Nolia wrote:  
'Unfrozen by the Mounties in Chapleau'.

Joe they have you as the back up pilot.  
Maybe we could wing some extra juice  
To buzz Michael and the two Marys  
Over Clutha's saintly Celtic Soccer Country.

Tom you'll be there as the radio crackles.  
Dumb bastards, they have nothing to say  
And when 'eh up' you turn on the tyke-talk  
Let's hope they too come from the Dales.

As for me, I'm Sunny Jay, Bob's your Uncle -  
A thirty-three year old who helped  
With the cadets and watched his sixth form  
Join the RAF and had to follow.

The Anson is second nature now -  
We flew them from Oudtshoorn  
Up the railway to Bulawayo:  
&quot;I like flying and flying likes me&quot;;

A commission delayed - expect no less  
As the Avro Lancasters hatch and queue  
At Broughton, off the factory lines,  
Just down from the graveyard at Blacon.

Fire Dragons feeding on men and boys,  
Ready for the Terror Anschlag  
To bathe Siegfried in blood  
In the straff and flak over Berlin.

One more and another flight tomorrow  
Across the broken steel-grey sea  
To test a new compass with some runs -  
And temper sons staked for the dragons.

I'm a teacher, the thinker, the pipe-smoker -  
The Londoner who has to take  
The Blitz 'nach hause' but keep the boys safe -  
A soft spot under the dragon's wing.

As I turn in tonight, I watch the stars  
And think of my wife who was here  
Three short weeks ago in Silecroft -  
Black Combe walks, beer at the Miner's Arms.

We have no son - only a daughter at home,  
Who shelters snuggled with Meg and her cigs,  
As the streets of Loughton shake and flicker  
From the raids of the beasts' distant kin.

Dear God, keep them safe this night  
And at the rising of the sun  
Engrave our hopes in what's foreshadowed  
As we trace across the steel-grey sea.



# Finding Common Ground

In my second year  
At St Catharine's College  
I had rooms in Sherlock Court  
On the second floor  
Of an old shop  
With a window onto  
Trumpington Street.

It was desperate cold  
As the block was  
Under renovation  
And the furnishings were  
Very shabby and dusty.

But I used to chat  
With my bedder  
Mrs Reynolds about  
This and that.

One time she told me:  
'I got a grandchild now  
But my daughter's having  
The devil's own time  
As he's a blare baby  
That won't sleep'.

I told her that  
Where I came from  
In rural Cheshire  
We would have said:  
'As he's a blart babby'.

She used to complain and mither  
As she dusted and I used  
To complain and munger as I swotted...  
But she put it all in perspective  
By saying with some determination:

'It's all work innit eh? '

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Flag Fen

That there are witches who foretell and riddles enough  
Is not in question - but death-kissed lips mouth silence  
Even as truths and enigmas clasp and bind -  
The inextricable will not yield to spasms and spurs  
All headway idle with a felled and break-neck steed.

Then as the oracle echoed and the shrine ran quiet  
I pressed forward with a script - a shard - a token  
There is no ordeal now that would be too unkind  
For I have lived a lifetime knowing nothing or less  
Suffering all and being alone and at the gates  
To the waters' under world realms and here  
In that marshland of old where swords are cast  
Beckoning betimes in rising from the peat-stained flood  
To arm the surface, vouchsafe me one meeting  
To let me greet my lost father face-to-face.

Point out the causeway, follow the ancient track  
Where, as the flames enveloped and the water rose  
I sought him and would have borne him shoulder high  
Amid the staves and spears of our perfidious kinsmen  
In the thick of fighting for those that we both love:  
Would that I had saved him and that he was at my back  
The cloak for my wanderings and howling tempests  
A man still young and fair - my brother or my son in fealty  
He it was who half-prayed or half-ordered me to life

To live this sentence and make good these sentences  
Wherefore must the gods and times be piteous  
That my father died knowing not he had a son  
And that this son still seeks him to shoulder him  
Carrying him free from the dark pools and the burning  
Holding close the blade that has risen from the depths  
Once beckoning to our kin and held aloft among the ruins  
Foretelling scions, lineage and heritage survives.

At my dread and hands the priestess ceased to tremor  
Silence itself the prophesy and charm foregone  
So I began in tears: 'No ordeal can now dismay me

For I have seen the fire sweep quay and standing  
And know now that all are lost, the place consumed  
Our enemies taking all they cannot end for good.  
And I must turn and leave the young paternal king  
Set him down gently in marshes' reddened skies  
For the raiders have broken the stock from the fold  
Women from their refuge and fear from the beleaguered  
The thatch kindled and knives become the hunter'.

There is no manner in which I can retrace my steps  
This going back is an undertaking beyond my strength  
Holding the future, I cannot prevail against the past  
There is a woman driven out and mute who bears me  
And I must own the promise as she becomes a slave.

As the fenland darkens to the misted setting sun  
Few remain of my company and there we gather  
Risen from the hides where once we snared fowl  
Watching the burnt piers and causeways flare and fall  
To turn through the ring of dark water for the forest  
Away from the weapon, token and silver depths  
The garlanded maids bound for solstice sacrifice.

Still love and honour are my eternal covenant  
That I could have stayed the hands of our tormentors  
Or stemmed your wounds and never set you down.

For you I have grown strong, there is a band now  
Of rebel warriors, captives, exiles at my command  
Moving by rising moonlight on rafts of reeds and adzed oaks  
Our skills honed by taking game and snaring wild fowl  
And there the water village, its dogs and pigs making to sleep  
Its women at the cooking pot, singing lullabies to infants  
The children laughing as the old men net their fish.  
Beneath the water are the sacred steels, the gifted gold  
The sacrifice of metal and the bound both beautiful and base  
So I cup my hands and rinse my eyes from holy springs  
And catch reflection where I see you bend and smile:  
We are at home now and all is well in lapping broads  
That settle such straight levels linking every shore.

Balked of the raid's burning, rapine and revenge

I gently turn and slip you free beneath the mere.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Flowers, Flames And Shadows

From shafts and leaves of purple-bronze  
Scarlet-gold the lilies flower and flame  
Taking stock from grounds of spoil and stones  
To blazon beauty's spells to praise your name.

Young sister to the heavenly graces  
Rich with nature's gifts of excellence  
Your smile all ill-will soon erases  
And speaks of sweet and kind insistence

That the living lily triumphs over weeds  
And puts to rest decay's indignity  
With wisdom, bravery and wholesome deeds  
That quicken life with power and industry:

And you the best that summer brings to bear  
Display the finest blooms from nature's care.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For A Friend Who Is Leaving

Parting is such sweet sorrow  
That in the days that follow  
I'll borrow love from our farewell  
To mellow griefs that mar tomorrow.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For A Politician Winning At Last

Each time you won selection's race,  
Welcomed home with sham disgrace,  
The rich and cold stood jeering by  
And taunted you with jest and lie.

Today, the road is open now  
As laurels sit upon your brow  
And those who love you hold you high  
To bring you homeward bye and bye.

Old lad, your time is coming fast  
The mockery is long since past  
As justice through the bullshit grows  
To flower brighter than the rose.

Eyes the tabloid rags once deceived  
Have seen the light on where you lead  
And hope has switched the jeers to cheers  
Of those who once would stop their ears.

You have seen neglect and scorn  
Like those whose lives are hard and worn  
Now the days are yours to harvest  
With those to come among the best.

So many wrongs to right it's true  
But reason gives us faith in you  
You stood apart despised and low  
But hardship saw you rise and grow.

And those who sneered are now refuted  
As round that balding, grizzled head  
The young, the brave and the excluded  
Acclaim untarnished hope instead.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## For America 2016

Are you downcast? Be brave, stop to listen  
To a young woman playing her guitar,  
Singing as the freeway car lights glisten  
Misted windows on the bus to Georgia

For rich and poor she has no preference  
This is a girl who loves the earth and sun  
And will not shift her gaze in deference.  
She is your poem and it has just begun:

She hates tyrants, she lives for others,  
Knows justice is always in jeopardy,  
Verses the hopes of children and mothers,  
Marks time for the stupid and crazy.

She respects hard work and intelligence  
Gives freely of her income and effort  
Treats all with patience and indulgence  
Believes only what life itself has taught.

Open and light-hearted, she earns her way  
She despises easy riches and wealth  
Disputes with none yet has her say,  
Values each season, rejoices in health.

Listen again as rain falls and signs pass  
Even at her worst, she aims for the best  
She knows defeat and storms can never last  
And riding home she settles back to rest.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## For An Old Love - Jill Clayburgh (1944 - 2010)

Hey Jill, I still love you gal – dance again!  
I used to joke about my ballet career  
And splitting my tights with the Junior Kirov,  
On my pas de deux debut in Omsk -

But we never met and my lifts are dodgy  
Though an entrechat might have easily disappeared  
Between your broken smile and mine,  
Entre chats with a coffee and bagel.

Few watch now as you swan Odette  
And, as a clod with encroaching klutz  
My dancing days are curtain-called  
By a sore spot on my right foot.

You were born in April, I in June  
Under Von Rundstedt's spell -  
And as the children of Operation Overlord  
I could have spun a line to be your Siegfried.

You could have swooned or swanned -  
Thighs caressed by the dark webs,  
Held in my arms or wings  
Quivering to the feathered glory.

Or then again, we could have walked and laughed  
And watched the ducks in Central Park  
And you could have sashayed your curls  
And tippy-toed a deux or quatre avec moi.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Antechinus The Satyriast Aussie Marsupial Mouse

What reckless mouse, his modesty betrayed,

Divests of all restraint in getting laid,

And gives up all in amorous pursuit

Forgetting destination for the route?

Tis he! But why that bleeding bosom gored,

Why dimly gleams the visionary sword?

Oh, ever beauteous, ever friendly! Tell,

Is it, in heaven, a crime to love too well -

To bear too tender, or too firm a heart,

To play the Satyr or fair Dildo's part?

Is there no constellation in the sky

For those who come and come until goodbye?

Stay Antipodean Antechinus,

Marsupial mouse libidinous,

Whose fiercest couplings last the twelve-hour day

And two-weeks' lust gives heaven hell to pay -

Must each unlucky buck be banged this way

That time and tide must have their final say:

&quot;Lo these were they, with souls that Eros steel'd,

And curs'd with parts unknowing how to yield.&quot;

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Clive James: 1939 - 2015...

## ASHES AND BLACK STUMPS

I liked your Maple poem Jamesie  
About you slowly karking in Cambridge -  
Sentimental savvy  
In part but the occasion gives it edge  
And its light reflects the Aussie adage

That we are a Rooster one day  
And next a bloody feather duster  
Bugger as they say  
When the whips crack at the last muster  
Hide as dry as a dead dingo's donga

But you are a hard case bastard  
And a battler who's best with a wry smile  
Always big hearted -  
Still pitching up a 'she's right' ocker style  
That makes us nod laconically the while.

S'truth mate I have to ask before you wane  
Why a bloody maple tree and not a gum  
And bricked backyards in English rain  
Rather than the bronze and ochre sun  
Receding ever west now day is done?

But home your flecks of ash and bone will warm  
Scattered to the tide on Sydney-side  
Where the mullet and the king-fish swarm  
To celebrate that you have died  
And end up battered dipped and fried.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Colin Mccahon [nz Painter: 1919 -1987]

Offending against  
Thy Divine Majesty

By thought, word and deed  
And the greatest of these is word.

Epaminondas is black  
Oyzmandias lies least  
And Parsimonious the priest.

I will spend forty days and forty nights  
In the desert, stubbing my toes on rocks

And the lamb will lie down with the lion  
And I will rail against the fig  
And return to cry out in the market place.

Old men dream dreams and wake without rest  
There is no health in them

And I will scrunch my black and dirty words  
Against the canvas edge on the dark hills.

Take no thought for the morrow  
In the beginning was the word  
And that day such deeds were done.

But thou oh God whose property  
Is always to have mercy  
Not weighing our merits  
But pardoning our offences.

If we have no words  
We have no God

Let me find the words.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Daigu Ryokan (1758-1831)

NEAR THE INN AT JOURNEY'S END

As the geese head home  
I cross the bridge into the village,  
Above on the hills are pines  
Below stand fields and orchards.  
Children chatter  
And the persimmons are ripe.

Having crossed the bridge,  
I am met by the hermit  
From the forest wastes  
Whose ragged robe and empty bowl  
Offend me -  
He is a little drunk it seems.

He asks: 'Has the bridge brought you  
To firm ground now? '  
'I saw you start to cross  
But my mind's eye slipped  
And the bridge was empty -  
On the path, there is no separation'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Debbie Reynolds [1932-2017]

## DREAM OF YOU

Chorus cake-busting in wide-eyed wonder  
A fresh-faced girl dancing to rain or shine:  
Hit the spot-light and the beam ignites her  
She's the kick of coffee, the blush of wine.

Lickety-split in gingham and ankle socks  
Bright as a button from a chintz band-box:  
Perky, quirky, sassy and full of vim  
She can shoot the rim off a dollar's spin.

From check-shirt tomboy and side-kick rider  
To Jill-in-the-Box housewife - plaything pet:  
Stetson and braids to apple-pie order,  
With winsome children, let's not forget!

Perfect pitch and timing... ringing true,  
A fantasy staged and prompted by men!  
But playboys and fame won't pay their due  
When the curtain falls, she's alone again.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## For England 2016

You were so beautiful my own country  
Your fields and fells the honest sun received  
And under open skies the air was free  
As all were equal and all bonds redeemed.

My place of birth you have grown sour and old  
Uplifting hate to heart with evil lies  
And now I find a touch that's coarse and cold  
With devilment in hard deceiving eyes.

No longer does the land I loved seem green:  
Three scores and ten to ashen grey have turned  
The sparkling summer's days that once were seen  
When truth glowed bright as lamps of justice burned.

For fear of which, I cannot leave unsaid  
My dread thy beauty's summer is forever dead.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Eric Shorrocks [1926 - 2014] - 'he Has Been A Joy'

In love with the farms and fells  
Out in all weathers with his dog,  
Snap tin of butties and cake,  
And a thermos flask of tea  
He rebuilt one and a half miles  
Of dry stone walls in the Lakes  
Blending faces, ties and chocks  
Hearting, binding and bonding.

If I, in love with the farms and fields  
Had done as much for the hedgerows  
Of my native county Cheshire,  
Badging cops, staking and laying hawthorn  
With my dog, some baggin and a brew,  
Then I could have been so well content  
But only words are left for stones or pleachers  
To heart and bind and bond and pen.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Fadwa Suleiman - Returning

LAUREL

by Fadwa Suleiman

I'm sitting alone in my room  
my clothes scattered around me,

and the suitcase that took to the road with me when I fled

I keep telling it about our return, soon  
When we go back, you'll carry my clothes that crossed the border inside you  
We'll pass through the cities, walk on their streets once more  
We'll write in the dust with our own ink  
and our ink to us will be essence of laurel.

POISON IVY

My response

It's not so easy Fadwa  
Picking up what remains from hatred

in bits and pieces beyond the lost familiar - after the homegoing

I was once promised the return of my treasures  
By a wronged and vindictive lover whose anger could not be contained  
And waited in the car as a friend picked up one of my old suitcases  
Revealing a frayed leather belt and some wire coat hangers  
threatening perpetual enmity - written in resin of poison ivy.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Frankie - The Australian National Library Mudlark

So well renowned among the janitors  
A small pert bobbing mudlark presence  
Struts and pecks - a library scavenger  
Reviewing books and reading's sustenance.

No sounds from her of hymns at heaven's gate -  
Just solemn quiet investigation  
Of Australia's literary state  
In Frankie's foyer interrogation.

Dainty in her bobbing quest for crumbs  
She trips so lightly through commemoration  
Ignoring pride to which mere man succumbs  
Oblivious to admiration -

And in this vast cathedral of learning  
Is she picking up the book-worm's turning?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Heather Heyer (1985-2017)

## THE DAY THEY DROVE THAT SWEET GIRL DOWN

Titus Caine is the name  
I was just eighteen when I was slain

In the winter of '64  
Knocking hard on Nashville's door.

Holding fast for my carbine's aim  
When Steedman's troop formed up again.

...

After his time with Robert E. Lee  
My brother came back to Tennessee

He raised me up and took the family farm  
Or what was left from the brigands' harm

There he sang of Dixie driven down  
And regrets that he let the whiskey drown.

...

But we were down and poor and white  
Long before the people owners' fight

This could have been a paradise of plenty  
A promised land of milk and honey:

It wasn't war that broke the honest heart  
But power and greed which tore the land apart

...

Where hate divides and privilege rides high  
And skin's the mark of those who live or die

Where twisted history condemns the young  
And news is fake or spun or simply wrong

Where the few but rich hold powerful sway  
And the many hold their say and then give way.

...

Those who lie and steal will gut the land  
And seize their moment with a bloodied hand:

But truth and love are there in black and white  
And they will bring the shadows into light

When justice burns a brighter, fiercer flame  
And sears each dreadful wrong with shame.

...

From where I lie, I see so clearly who is free  
And how the rich raised dupes to swindle me:

I'm not saying that any kind of rage is good  
And I would hate to be misunderstood

Take just what you need and leave the rest  
And when all's done don't take the very best:

...

Like the day they drove that sweet girl down  
The finest that Dixie's ever raised and grown:

The day they killed that sweet girl in the street  
Where liberty and decency and death would meet

While people sang that love and truth will set us free  
Walking hand in hand in peace and on to victory.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Ian Curtis [1956 - 1980]

BUCKLEY BOY

Caressing half-sounds  
Stumbling your stories  
Under star-snake glories  
Round the flickered embers

Did silence shake you  
And tear you apart  
As desperate loss  
Tracked endless plains?

Dying in your dreams  
When the cord tightens  
Did your execution  
Proceed as seemed it must?

How many atrocities  
Were buried in the sand  
And laid aside  
Then brought to hand?

Years without kindred  
Did you lose control  
Find communion dead  
And cease expression

Traversing the empty spaces  
In dark companion?  
Did you long for traces  
Of what was told?

In the waste and fever  
Did regret ride high  
Chaffing the leaver  
Chiding the loser why

So many roads were tried  
Through trackless wastes  
Where stream beds lied  
And haste led back?

Walking on the edge  
Of no escape  
Left on hillsides  
By your last mistake

When the dark broke in  
Was an icy flaw  
The token endpoint  
Holding a wider line?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## For James K. Baxter (1926 - 1972)

Poor Pass in Kilbirnie

There is still no Revolution, the drums are dusty  
And the once young bullfighter has grown sad-whiskered.  
Briefly escaped from the Rita Angus complex  
He wheels his steel-frame down Bay Road

Having survived from among the singers, the fighters  
And the so-called lovers - body now stiff as board,  
A face like weathered newsprint from the verge -  
He edges and side-steps to the Ruth Gotlieb library.

Let us admit that we were unimpressed from the start -  
That when the door shot open and he awoke us  
We were sleepy and angry and in need of a coffee,  
Never considering a corrida among our options

I further dispute that there was any call to consider God -  
And as I remember, death, sex and hope were off the program -  
With no chance of blood on the sawdust that or any wet Sunday  
There being no time for flashy and outlandish suits of light.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## For Jane Fonda At 80

When young you were as stunning as the dawn  
Red clouds threatening an impending storm  
Older you are as lovely as the dusk  
Quiet in twilight now the storm has passed.

Though darling buds fierce rain erases  
Rough winds will test but strengthen seasoned boughs  
And ruined choirs make perfect resting places  
As the sun's now waning power still shows.

No stranger to contempt, defeat and strife  
You little thought your day would last this long  
But the showers of summer brought new life:  
This the miracle that comes of staying strong

Time's bounty and its scars alike revealed  
That life itself comes finally to yield.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## For Janis Joplin - Eat Your Heart Out Baby

You go back there and find out who it is spreading stories I'm a dyke.  
and tell them that Janis says she's gotten it on  
with a couple of thousand cats in her life  
and a few hundred chicks and see  
what they can do with that.

'Our love', he said, 'shall be none other  
But chaste and true as is between  
A goodly sister and a brother  
From lust our bodies to keep clean.

And wheresoever my body be  
Both day and night, at every tide,  
My simple heart in chastity  
Shall evermore, lady with you abide'.

Oh, come on, come on, come on, come on  
Didn't I make you feel like you were the only man? Yeah  
An' didn't I give you nearly everything that a woman possibly can?  
Honey, you know I did  
And, and each time I tell myself that I, well I think I've had enough  
But I'm gonna, gonna show you baby, that a woman can be tough  
I want you to come on, come on, come on, come on and take it

Take another little piece of my heart now, baby  
Oh, oh, break it  
Break another little bit of my heart now, darling, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah  
Oh, oh, have a  
Have another little piece of my heart now, baby  
Well you know you got it, if it makes you feel good

Persephone - between light and darkness -  
Swallowed to the underworld by Hades  
Or defiled by her serpent overlord Zeus -  
Was left the doubting mother of Zagreus

The beautiful boy child of the gods.

When the Titans consumed the loathed child

Only the beating sputtering heart remained  
But the imprint of those barbarous, wild  
Ancient flesh-eating savages was retained

And the heart became the embryo of life -  
A bloody remnant culturing mankind  
Rescued and implanted in the divine:  
Barbarity and purity come to term with strife.

From that birth and death, came good and evil  
Its heartbreak left to reconcile the devil.

The Saracens went and left him lie  
With mortal wounds piteous to see;  
He called his page hastily  
And said, "My time is come to die.

"In my heart is so deep a wound  
That I must die none gainsay;  
But before I lie within the ground,  
On one thing of you I pray:

"Out of my body please cut my heart  
And wrap it in this token of her hair;  
And when thou dost from hence depart,  
Unto my lady thou do it bear.

You're out on the streets looking good  
And baby deep down in your heart I guess you know that it ain't right  
Never, never, never, never, never, never hear me when I cry at night  
Babe and I cry all the time  
But each time I tell myself that I, well I can't stand the pain  
But when you hold me in your arms, I'll sing it once again  
I'll say come on, come on, come on, come on and take it

Take another little piece of my heart now, baby  
Oh, oh, break it  
Break another little bit of my heart now, darling, yeah  
Oh, oh, have a  
Have another little piece of my heart now, baby  
Well you know you got it, child, if it makes you feel good  
I need you to come on, come on, come on, come on and take it

&quot;Promise me this without delay,  
To bear my lady this present;  
And tell her of my faithful chastity  
And the love that death would not relent.

...

The Lord of Faguell, hunting there  
Was in the forest with his men;  
And met the page who bore the heart with care;  
&quot;Page, &quot; he said, &quot;what news do you carry then?

In fear he told the story from the start  
Of how the knight was slain in combat,  
And how he had sent his lady his heart  
As a token that she could wonder at.

Then the lord returned to his castle  
And asked his cook to dress the meat  
As a spicy, dainty, well-served morsel  
That she should be heartbroken by deceit.

Take another little piece of my heart now, baby  
Oh, oh, break it  
Break another little bit of my heart now, darling, yeah  
Oh, oh, have a  
Have another little piece of my heart now, baby  
Well you know you got it, child, if it makes you feel good  
I need you to come on, come on, come on, come on and take it.

Oh, come on, come on, come on, come on

Didn't I make you feel like you were the only man? Yeah  
An' didn't I give you nearly everything that a woman possibly can?  
Honey, you know I did  
And, and each time I tell myself that I, well I think I've had enough  
But I'm gonna, gonna show you baby, that a woman can be tough  
I want you to come on, come on, come on, come on and take it.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Jo Cox [1974 - 2016]: Peacing People Together

## PEACING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Estimated female, what is your legacy  
What footprint will you leave?  
Inhumanity took your life  
Humanity saved your friend's life.

Devoted to a thing - to a cause - to the abstract  
Those who divide seek to conquer by default:  
Beguiled by propositions, power and aggrandisement  
They conspire to rip us apart with violence

We must create our own path, our own future  
And choose how we respond:  
Never presume anything about a stranger  
There will be no resolution until there are no strangers.

There is brilliance in humanity - to who we really are  
If we comfort each other and call out our names:  
She came through the darkness to tend my wounds  
He held my hand and I felt the life he gave me.

For those who were still alive, in that indescribable hell  
There was a soft oh so beautiful female voice  
That bid us to a greater unity and a stern commanding  
Male voice that said: 'There is a lot to do'.

But for some their purpose is fulfilled  
'I cannot get up, it hurts too much':  
I knew then that nothing would ever be the same  
That from that point I had a purpose.

And our words can make a difference:  
It's all we have in the darkness  
And people called together  
Learn through working together.

Be aware of our thoughts  
Know that words are powerful:

Making a Difference for Peace

We are a lot more than we give ourselves credit for.

Hold firm to renewed unity

Stop thinking about us and the opposed others:

Anger is a motivation for change

Peace is not a noun it is a verb.

Children need to be taught to make peace

By peacing things together:

It is something we must do

There is a common thread.

There are models of humanity that roam among us

And they called me to their ranks:

On a pilgrimage that saves us from bitterness

I take the path of unconditional acceptance.

In the prospect of our children's lives

I opt to believe in beauty and love:

Committed to the contributing journey:

Peacing together the worst and best.

NOTE

[I am heavily indebted to Dr Gill Hicks here for her words - a heroine who lives on to make a difference]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## For Kamala Harris

Dark mistress of the ancient amazons,  
Whose strength of heart is boundless, it is said -  
Her state of golden promise like the sun's  
Brings hope of joy and better days ahead

I have seen fair roses blossom red and white  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks -  
Rather the cup of gold blooms in delight  
With every remedy her justice seeks.

I love to hear her speak, for well I know  
That truth is still the world's most pleasant sound  
And with it deeds which simple virtues show  
That life with love and care will best abound.

Yet by heaven, I think such virtue rare  
As any key to life that rogues may share.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Keira Knightly

VENUS AMAZOS

Goad not endowment with that good Knightly  
Small wares still stand and tip their milky way;  
Cut the straps of 'A' cups clasped so lightly.

Women know such ends can chafe most rashly  
As the fabric's stretched from overlay  
And nightshirts drenched draw comments crassly.

Venus Amazos, buff the shoulder slightly  
Let loose your arrows on the streaking day  
Pierce deep with left-fledged rose-tips tiny.

Wild girl who fought and quivered mightily  
Discard the blouse and let detractors stay  
To view that torso decked so scantily.

Sad men, see now exposed so blindingly  
Mini-meteors touch the sky in play  
And burn convention incorruptibly.

So brazen Hippolyta go boldly  
Show us once more your martial front, I pray.  
Do not go clothed again slim beauty  
Stay topless breastplate warrior Keira K.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## For Lily Allen

I want to be rich but to sob poor me  
I'm clever but I want to play the clown  
The apple never falls far from the tree  
And I'll fill buckets from being down.

I don't know what's right or wrong, or so I say,  
Can't feel anything anymore that's true or real  
I know my life is shit, that there's hell to pay,  
Ecstasy is the way I need to feel.

I've come to the land of the free for all  
I have let loose, am lost, faithless, chainless  
Take me on a desk or against the wall  
It's all the same - feeling aimless, painless

Shameless - showing it all - famous for it  
No-fucking-fearless - you're my latest hit.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Luci Tapahonso

SHE-WHO-BRINGS-HAPPINESS

Tell me the One Good Thing about Today?  
It has been listening to Luci Tapahonso  
Reading her poetry and having her sign  
Her book 'Blue Horses Rush In'  
With the words 'Keith - In Beauty - Thank You'  
Hozhojii naanaa.

I had welcomed her coming into Te Papa  
With a granddaughter who was wearing Navajo leggings  
Whose decorative design portrayed their heritage  
[Feathers or sparks splayed in escutcheon]  
And led her through to The Marae  
Mana whenua

And I said to her as she signed her book:  
&quot;In these troubled times, we need to go back  
Not to history but to the Deep Past&quot;  
Meaning that I believe that myth and ceremony  
Will serve better than worldliness,  
As we are the stuff that dreams are made of

But I fancy that she, being a woman who weaves  
To pattern the past to the present  
Draping the land in precious fabrics  
Wrapping us in blankets of love and wisdom,  
Looks most to the future and her granddaughter  
She-Who-Brings-Happiness.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Maggie Gyllenhaal

No touch is predestined  
But if you have none to make you cry  
You have none to make you smile:  
Sometimes reaching out is everything.

You stand with your pants down  
Splayed against a wall  
In a prison cell  
Waiting for a cavity search.

A spotty-faced virgin boy  
Is offered your open blouse  
And the fondling of your breasts,  
There is a condom between your teeth.

Your friend is facing death  
As the guard wreaks his revenge  
And you say: 'I am here  
I am on the floor as you wanted'.

I am in awe of your art  
Of the way you manifest  
The imminence of touch  
And its foreboding.

I am drawn by that rawness,  
To feeling for you with words,  
Trying to touch your heart:  
Don't pull back, don't flinch.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For 'matariki' Our Right Whale Or Tohora

The Right Whale is a sporty swell  
Although he's vast in girth  
He's sixty feet from nose to tail  
And grows to ninety tons from only one at birth.

Cruising into harbour out to find a date,  
On the lam from icy Ross Sea deeps,  
He flips and flaps his tail to find a mate  
And serenades each lady ship with acrobatic leaps

With a six-foot Jolly Roger  
And half a ton of goolies  
He's got a lot to offer  
In the matter of yours' trulys

But he'll flounder for the good oil in the CBD tonight.  
As his Miss Right's not a bright lights clubber,  
With our Splash Club mermaids too slippery and slight  
To warm Antarctic blubber.

Expect no fireworks then for Tohora Matariki  
No sounding out of Maggie Mays by Moby Dick:  
For such whales-of-a-time are far too tricky  
And leviathans are all at sea in Wellington / Poneke.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Medhi Mousavi: ????? ????? ??? ?? ??? ????? ?? ????! !

HOLD FAST FOR PROMISES OF RIGHTS TO COME

Each morn a thousand sorrows brings the day  
More endless hours that silence dreams away  
So when the autumn shrinks the cankered bud  
No rose will flower to sunlight as it should.

Bare blocks and dusty floors the times allow  
No books of verses there beneath the bough  
No wilderness, no songs - just bitter bread  
And paradise betrayed with death its stead.

Etch the writing now upon the bloodied wall  
Where words are lost as censures' shadows fall  
Though those who seek to bolt the dreamer's door  
Have lost the way to what is good and pure.

Where less travelled roads to crossroads lead  
There signs to love and life will justice heed  
And for the miseries of this world, let some  
Hold fast for promises of rights to come.

Look to the rose unfold in better days  
In truths it pleasures with its bright displays  
For when the summer heals galls' blight with light  
Stainless treasures greet fair freedom's sight.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For My Young Farmer Friend John Watson Of Townfield Farm, Wettenhall

Gunning up the old TR2 down the Old Coach Road  
Through Delamere Forest after a party or dance  
You hit one hundred miles per hour - avoiding  
Rabbits, hedgehogs, stray deer, and blown boughs.

Slowing down nicely to Oulton Park Gates -  
Like Stirling Moss lining up Knicker Brook  
Where Blaster Bates had blown a stump  
And a village girl had lost her clouts in the scramble.

We lived and laughed on - the thrills of speed and survival  
Nothing like doing something daft when you're a lad  
And living to tell the tale - the smell of beer and gasoline  
Time to pull out the Player's Navy Cut and light up a smoke.

Fifty years on I called in at the farm, down the new driveway,  
And waited and chatted with his wife, who I hadn't met before,  
Until he came back from moving agisted youngstock at Eaton  
And we smiled those deep shy grins of country boys reunited.

Time to tell again the tale of the straight run and the ton up  
You were a bloody hero Watson - a right wild young gentleman!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Nigel The Gannet

Nigel wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats aloft the waves and billows,  
When all at once he saw a crowd,  
... A bevy of birds for bedfellows,  
Beside the cliff, above the seas,  
Stoned and plastered in the breeze.

Decked as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in straggling line  
Along the margins of the bay:  
Eighty or more saw he at a glance,  
Bobbing beaks in zonked out legless dance.

The waves below them broke; but they  
Out-did the sparkling spray's display:  
And any gannet guy would sure be gay,  
In such bird-brained, blockhead company:  
He strutted, preened—but rarely thought  
What dearth the show to him had brought.

But when at last he came to die  
Still lacking consummation  
It flashed upon his inward eye  
Cement had blocked persuasion  
And then his heart with sorrow filled  
For courtships that the concrete stilled.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Pocahontas

The little brown girl turns cartwheels naked  
Challenging the ruffian boys to dares:  
She is full of life, brave and unashamed  
Afraid of no one, immune to tears.

Over and over she tumbles, wrists taut,  
Rising and hand-standing from the ground  
Then falling - easy mastery in sport -  
Palms dirtied and dusted by her own land.

She wheels again upside-down, topsy-turvy:  
How can these pantalooned boys prosper here  
Their baggy drawers and stockings a mockery  
Of freedom, their shifty eyes dull with fear?

But savage dancer kicking up your heels,  
You were unaware how sullen progress steals.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Roger De Over-Cum-Navel In Cheshire

[Don't Bad Mouth Cheshire - We Started It All! ]

Do what you list, I will your thrall be seen  
To lust the eye at which the sun goes blind  
Though magistrates proscribe and then condemn  
In name with which 'look evil' may be rhymed.

Fair Milking Maid of cheesy mould  
Fresh from the vats and parlour  
Fat with the curds of kindness round  
Your belly button spurs my ardour.

For as the rennet clogs the cheese  
The fluff and lint will stuff and bind  
So setting then my bliss and ease  
In rolls as cloths unloose and then unwind.

And like a bird's nest be your button  
That it wobbles when I see you dance  
Yet that woe my dart may ere confound  
So such pretty dimple does me dalliance

Therewith you be so merry and so jocund,  
That at a revel when that I see it wink,  
I am an ointment unto thy wound,  
Whate'er the priests and clerks may think

For though I weep of tears a bucket  
When flab and folds in love abound  
I treasure so your knotted pocket  
And amorous become where fuzz is found

So I be-knavell'd Roger - thy true Cheshire swain -  
Still press my suit with threaded remnants -  
And oh that I attain that holy well again  
With your sweet floss my grail and penance

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Rumi (1207 - 1273) [ Jalal Ad-Din Muhammad Rumi ?????????? ????? ?????]

In the wake amid the agate sea  
Burst flecks then forms of foam  
And as they rise among the waves  
The whirling white is whipped  
And sprays and sheets of lace  
Take flight and stream the winds.

Look then at the mighty sea  
That moves by dawn and moon  
Its deep is bold and cold and green  
Yet seething frays its very edge -  
Watch then the twisting curlicues  
And see them part to shreds and fade.

We are out of kilter, poised then lost  
Bound as the wheel revolves  
Open to the heavens yet first blinded  
To the ocean's meaning and its play:  
Is it not time to awaken to the waves  
And the rolling breakers that enchant us?

Below the water, tide on tide still ebbs  
As veils of sheen are stripped away  
And we must give ourselves to ecstasy  
To sense what moves the greater depths  
And also shifts the glistened surfaces  
That wind and light now dance upon.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Steve Smith - The Aussie Cricket Captain

Somewhere the Good Old Aussie Battler  
Became the Smart-Arse Little Prince:

As up himself as a pipe pig at a stop-cock  
Or a rooted rat up a drain full of jam rags  
Or a trouser snake in a concrete jock-strap  
Or a one-eyed wombat in Aunt Ethel's corsets  
Or a pissed newt in a barrel of Bundaburg cane toads

Smithie:

Your head looks like a chewed mango  
Or your pet lamb's dildoad dock-sucker  
Or a totalled roo on a bull-bar in Menindee.  
If my dog had a face like yours  
I'd shave its balls and walk it backwards

Mate:

I hope your chooks turn into galahs and cream your budgie smugglers  
I hope your gran's moggie gets chugalugged by a carpet python  
I hope the red back in the dunny gets lucky for the night  
I hope your Uncle Norm gets bundled by a drag queen from Woolamaloo  
I hope your pet monkey slips its chain and rogers its hernia

But whatever you do, you Toe-Rag of a Foul-mouthed Sledging Bastard  
Don't stop playing cricket!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## For The Keats Family

Trudging the wind between Bed, Bath and Beyond  
And the Warehouse, I had a few kindly thoughts about Keats  
And Fanny Brawne and how they missed out on the joys  
Of setting up a home in a dream of empyrean domesticity.

Somehow - I'll see them right now - in measured retrospect:  
Young homemakers expecting a baby 'JK' on the way -  
Careful in spending Jake's limited stipend as a tutor in English Lit,  
Looking for a suitable vacuum cleaner and some table mats.

Now she was having to step aside from her policy analyst role in Women's Affairs  
Things would not be easy but 'they had each other' -  
They would remember these as the best days of their lives  
Far too full of excitement and momentum for lyric poetry.

Even though he had to make his way at the University  
And she, having turned the line blue, was absolutely in the pink.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For The New Zealand Poet Sam Hunt

Flamboyant in his oversized  
puff-sleeved white shirt  
part pirate, part dandy or fop  
slender legs in tight leathers,  
with a blond mop bouffant,  
he has somehow captured  
what we are and how we are:  
ordinary people contending  
with desolation and disappointment  
and the never-ending unease  
of mortality and the loss of love  
to a backdrop of beauty without pity.  
Rather than turn the bleak pages  
of time running short, running out  
better to listen to the breaker-song  
of the roiling ocean tracts  
forty or fifty below, a play

of shingle and spent waves

as he speaks his poetry

lilting, pounding and gritty

rolling to rest inshore

grounded with the saltiness

of far distant southern islands,

A storm passed or threatening.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For The Poet Meena Alexander - Dead At 67

So much of what we think is naff:

I am relieved to be still alive when Meena Alexander is dead  
I am not in solitary in the slammer like Paul Manafort  
Facing a decade of jail at 69 absent a pardon from a crook  
I was not involved in a cover-up for the loss of my baby  
Like the bearded guy in the Aussie TV series The Cry  
I am not addicted to anything - though porn is a possible  
It would be so special to feel desire again as a young lover  
Though finding some solace with a back-scratch is on the cards  
As I told my young son this morning driving him to the bus  
In the rain in my dressing gown and heavy shoes, no socks,  
If I'm run over by a bus and I'm not wearing any underwear  
And this is revealed to the operating surgeon there will be a scandal  
Or rather that is what my mother used to say - and she knew -  
Not from experience though - though I would guess that things  
Were tough in the Anderson Shelter and under rationing  
Thank heavens I don't have to cook tonight, they can get instant noodles  
Poetry sort of keeps me sane - it's thinking with a no-think purpose  
Might-have-been, No-more, Too-late, Farewell - pale, wan and loitering Dante  
Rossetti  
I had a look at your poetry Meena - mango trees, baobabs and macaque  
monkeys  
Being divided, being lost, being different - you and Dante and I should get  
Together for a chai and a chat.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Those Who Never Love And Then Repent

[For A.E. Housman (1859 - 1936) ]

Deliberately he chose the done and dusted  
Living in sepia tones with quiet reflection  
To dream of country lads, courage and regret:  
Recruiting them to war or worse intention  
To death on distant battlegrounds or gibbet  
Claiming loyalty or faithless lovers sent them.

Fearing the hard caress, the felled swathes,  
Sleep faux farmer's boy - what point to rise?  
No harvest comes to wintry empty bays  
The farm's deserted, nothing to rear or prize  
But stack-yard groundsel, chaff and shiftless days,  
Beneath the earth the quick-limed dry-stock lies:

For those who never love and then repent  
Sheave postcards from the land of lost content.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Wuhan ??

??????,????  
???????????????

???????,?????  
?????????????

???????,??????????  
??????????????????

The stones themselves are moaning, the clouds are weeping  
The winter rain brings a cascade of tears

The Yellow Crane Tower still stands but it is deserted  
The willow and cherry blossoms bloom to emptiness

And where is the promise of home in the fading light?  
The mist gathering along the river is becoming impenetrable

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# For Yulia - My Russian Personal Trainer

## THE CURSE OF FITNESS

With heavy anguish, hopeless straining -  
Standing still - she chides reproof.  
Oh, to be loosed from personal training!  
Oh, freedom, only not to move!

The body shame and fear is scourging -  
Lunges, planks and bridges tear the flesh.  
From pain dear God and her insistent urging,  
Spare me flinching from the sets refresh.

Is pity's wall alone unshaken?  
I pray to God, I cry in vain,  
More weary, by all hope forsaken;  
Recurrent squats segue pain again.

There is no respite ever given  
Enslaved by lifts, by weights reduced;  
I suffer tortured, hounded, driven  
Promised life though aching, stiff, contused.

[With acknowledgment to Russian Poet Dmitriy Merezhkovsky (1866–1941) ]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Fouling The Nest

Soft green English light over  
Fens and broads and reaches  
Where the reed warbler nests.

There are mayflies and midges  
Rising above nurturing waters  
Fringed by rushes and willows

And the cock warbler sings  
To his lifelong lover-partner  
As she makes a nest for their chicks.

Tranquil ... idyllic ... come to mind,  
As Sir David Attenborough intones  
Quintessential pastoral lyricism.

Except that there is a villain here  
Who robs our lovers of their part  
And lays a trail of trickery and deceit.

Similarly, it seems there are among us  
Gowks or cuckoos who are stealing  
Paradise with mimicry and subterfuge

Whose monstrous demands for more  
Run us ragged feeding gawping maws  
And their bloated demands and expectations

Pushing our own children out of the future  
Heaving sustainability and fairness over the edge  
So that they can take all and give nothing.

One could be forgiven for the conjecture  
That these parasites may be implanted aliens  
Who are cuckolding the world with counterfeits

To ensure that its environment morphs and warps  
To better sustain their kind with necessary toxicity -  
Such that those who feed them may face a wasteland.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Four O'clock Mouse

Come down to my office to check emails  
Having wakened from a dead-tired sleep  
And gathered myself in the quiet deep dark  
Of the something between mid-night and  
The early hours and made a cup of tea  
And settled to the heavy black and its streetlight stars

Minds-eye awakening, I'm startled by a small rapid shadow  
That flicks across the backdrop of the corridor behind  
And turn to see a mouse - brought in no doubt  
By the cats as a plaything - and now run down,  
Its clockwork sending it in circles hither and thither,  
A small lost heart beset by vast terrors.

So I rise and move carefully to the bathroom,  
Avoiding menacing a shadow where it crouches,  
Taking up a towel that I cast like a fisherman  
And then gather swiftly and tuck beneath my catch  
Bundling on my small disciple lest it burrow and slip  
Thankfully shaking it safely on to the balcony

My expectation is that it will start up and dart into the bushland  
But there is no movement, only the form of a mouse  
That lies dreadfully inert with its tiny limbs limp  
In the half-light through the shadows of my window  
And slowly I realize that I have witnessed the very last moment  
When a presence is lost in the boundless stillness.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Freedom In A Thin Black Line

FOR ASHRAF FAYADH: ?????? ?????? ??????.

Strange how a single black line can offend  
Much more than the lips it frames  
Nuzzle there the scent of freedom  
That outlasts a cry or a kiss  
Musky, whiskery – full of promise  
And if it gets up your nose

Take another sniff.

[On reading the Poem 'Frida Kahlo's Mustache' by the imprisoned Saudi Arabian poet Ashraf Fayadh]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Freedom Will Burn

'If you do not immediately singe

the whiskers of a slain leopard,

its spirit will pursue the hunter.

A popular Abyssinian belief.'

What then of the leopard enslaved?

Trained for the circus with hot irons,

Used as a wheelbarrow by the clown,

Freedom and honour mocked?

Be sure, appropriate retribution is inevitable:

The leopard's spirit will pursue the hunter

But more thoroughly torment the clown -

For freedom will burn more than whiskers.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Full Fathom

At sea, always you are sailing over graves  
And the eyes that were made pearls  
Watch a little of the wake as you pass above:  
Transitory, translucent, impoverished, familiar.

Peer down as best you can as you make way:  
You will see little, simply feel the call of the undertow,  
And at the depth's ending sense the weight of water  
That settles impartially on bone and coral.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Full Many A Glorious Morning Have I Felt

The roguish golden sun kisses the hills  
And lusted meadows feel the warming touch  
The gilded streams respond with sleepy smiles  
And protestations that won't count for much;

There is glory in the morning rising  
The over-glowing form ablaze with lust  
Entering the folds without retiring  
Mastering the mounts' half-dreaming trust;

This is the stuff of lazy holidays  
Crisp white sheets and sparkling Grecian isles  
Honeymoons and stolen getaways  
Hours lost in making love as timing stills.

And now aroused the sun brings fond to mind  
The all-triumphant splendours such unruly lovers find.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Gathered In - Beeston Castle 1956

Days of dust and hayseed set aside,  
For once a gradely jaunty family ride.  
Let's take a Sunday tootle in the car  
And leave awhile the drudging, aching farm,  
Where slog and maul are sanctified.

Ahead stand Beeston Castle's broken walls  
By Four-Lane-Ends and Bunbury Heath -  
Beyond the fields and oaks the evening falls,  
And trudging up, the plain is swath beneath.

Fifty summers now the scene divide  
As hindsight strains to glimpse that far -  
A family cut and kenched and tied -  
Grey and faint the snapshot evening star.

Ashes scattered, stubble standing wide -  
Seasons past, the scars of harvest hide

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Getting Laid By The Black Swan

As being feather-dusted seems inevitable  
Ruffle up for the next financial crisis -  
Being screwed by the unspeakable  
Rooted by cobbling, cheating and lies

Brute greed and its passionate intensity,  
The loss of probity without conviction,  
The re-treading of orifices with austerity,  
The upping of decency by dereliction.

A crash in the market, out of thin air  
Wall Street broken, blood in the streets  
Mammon abroad undead

Being so fucked up,

By a totally foreseeable web of deceits  
Like a girl mastered by metamorphosis  
It will be sold as a Black Swan affair.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Gilbert's Potoroo

Said Gilbert to the potoroo  
I hear you like to fungus chew  
Nibbling dainty toadstools too  
As well as scoffing mushroom stew  
Can I give my name to you?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Goddess Of Mercy

You were told 'the dark storm is closing in'  
But you were too bold, too adventurous,  
Rising far above where the air grew thin  
To where flight stalled and became treacherous.

I paint you holding a golden crocus  
So young, so fair - back down to earth again -  
Beloved of the shy fawns that share your trust  
Though the background cattle prepare for rain.

I had been unwell but you rescued me  
For you became the Goddess of Mercy  
Having stretched down the sky canopy  
For me to rise against adversity.

Heavenly girl your beauty lifted me  
And your saffron offering set me free.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# God's Fiefdom

WHALIAM

There is a YouTube Video  
Of an exploding Sperm Whale  
On a beach in the Faroe Islands.

A man slashes it with a mincing knife  
And once the diaphragm is pierced  
All the guts sort of woosh out!  
Strips and strings burst in a spray  
That stings the whaler with filth.

I showed my young son Theo  
And he told Hayden his teacher  
And all the class watched it -  
Over again - and laughed.

It put me in mind of William of Normandy  
Who died alone in agony when  
No one would trust him enough to help.

He had devastated and enslaved the North.  
One in four died from his ruthlessness.  
Deaths in battle were the best.  
Tens of thousands died as crops went unplanted  
Stock died, harvests burned and castles rose.

When he had finally expired  
The monks in Caen dallied  
For far too long and had to force  
The corpse into the kist.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Golden Billion

And still we plan our greater paradise  
Of more and more of everything - squabbling  
About who takes most and their persistence,  
While berating laggards in the scrabbling.

Most pathetic in the melee are those  
Whose instincts yearn for greater equity:  
Promoting welfare - ringing Eden close  
That all within may share its bounty.

Yet beyond the pale other billions wait  
Unaccounted, unwanted, eyeing it all  
For opportunities to share a better state -  
Swamped boat, truck crevice, breached wall.

So my liberal and my Third World friends  
Who and what is right when means meet ends?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Good Angel

And what of you Ms Discarded Comfort  
Can you forgive the jilting and distress?  
It is in your best nature to forget  
And act in trust again and not redress.

Can we restore love's lost simplicity  
And dream of what is true and never tires?  
Of both the comfort of eternity  
And cheerfulness of trek's-end campsite fires?

Let us meet for heaven's sake beside the lake  
And picnic there when we have walked awhile  
That I can beg of you that my mistake  
Be put aside - so you may pause and smile

And healing words of comfort then be said  
In thankfulness for love and daily bread.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Grounded Enlightenment

Set aside racing the run of day  
For the time the seconds chase  
Will never show a fairer face;  
Come close and let the stillness show  
Where we must put the world away  
To draw it closer as the silence grows:  
Let's tell unheard our deepest sorrows  
To the shadows that the sundial throws,  
For what goes forward and what is past  
Will never alter time or stay its haste:  
Then let what's left unsaid in quietness strengthen  
The amity that calmly sharing space will lengthen.

...

God's very own the West  
God's very own the East;  
As also the North and South  
Gathered in love and truth.

...

So let us study distinction and its absence:  
That there is no separation  
Of what is apart and what is in contact;  
That there is no form or formlessness  
As edges and envelopes are unsealed;  
That there is no resting or resolution  
As emptiness and decay are inevitable;  
That thusness is fleeting and yet perceptible  
With reality and illusion in mutual shadow;  
That life and its converse co-arise  
The sentient born of and returning to the insentient;  
That we may distinguish the qualities of people  
All special - but then there is nothing special;  
That when we are grounded in enlightenment  
And return to the world from the mountain,  
Or from the wilderness, it is in the natural order  
That we should equate compassion.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Grubby Grub

I love to cook two crispy snacks  
Of Aussie grub and Kiwi tucker,  
But the little crawlies both have knacks  
Of gumming up my cooker.

I seek them out of bush and tree,  
I send out east and west;  
But after they've been twigged and logged for me,  
I give them all a rest.

I let them rest from nine till three,  
For I am busy then,  
But scoff them down at dins and tea,  
When hunger strikes again.

But different folk have different strokes:  
I know a person small —  
She keeps a tub of crawling grubs,  
Who get no rest at all!

She dines on them in cakes and pies,  
And scarcely bats her eyes —  
A dozen Huhus, two of Witchettys,  
And seven scores of Whys!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Haikus For Womad

Tufted apes delight  
Romping creativity  
Doomsday set aside

Fucking the planet  
Forgotten in the music's  
Mindful reveling

Nothing but trash left  
And the joys of artistry  
To geology

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Hand On The Plough - Heart Lifting

[Celebrating the Russian Poet Nahum Korzhavin - a 'translation']

So we plough  
Furrow by furrow  
Year by year  
But we also need to soar.

Let's face it  
Sometimes, as he needs to eat,  
The poet ploughs on  
Just turning old ground

And sits down wearily  
Reaching the headland -  
But then the heart soars  
And he is himself again

As long as the flight of fancy lasts -  
Rising up but sinking down  
Year by year  
Back to ploughing furrow by furrow.

I am not a hunter of prizes  
My world is the stubble-field.  
If I am boring  
There is no shame

I think, hope, thirst to know, seek  
Sowing words with warmth and sunlight  
And when others plough  
I sometimes just stand and watch.

And then I recover my strength  
Forgetting my past failures  
And want to bring things to fruition  
Smoothing my lined brow.

Well - it is clear soaring is a must  
Let's fly... But still

Plough year by year  
Not neglecting the essentials.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Happy Feet - He Must Not Flote Upon His Watry Bier Unwept! The Emperor Penguin

We Asked The Waves, And Asked The Fellon Winds, What Hard Mishap Hath  
Doomed This Gentle Penguin?

In this Monody the Authors bewail a feathered Friend, unfortunately lost in his  
Passage from Campbell Island to Antarctica in the Southern Ocean,2011.

[by John Milton and Elaine Martin, with a bit of help from Keith Johnson]

Bitter constraint  
And sad occasion dear  
Compels me to disturb your season due  
For Happy Feet is dead  
Dead ere his prime

The wind blows hard,  
The temperatures plunge,  
The sky is dark,  
The waves rampage,  
I'm tossed.

My flippers are weak,  
And my energy's gone,  
I've struggled so far,  
And had nothing to eat,  
I'm lost.

I'm all alone  
In a foreign place,  
The sand's too dry,  
Stones have no taste,  
I'm beached.

Before I know it,  
I'm surrounded,  
Human's concern  
Here abounded,  
I'm blessed.

Weak and helpless,  
I don't enjoy it,  
The stares, the fuss,  
The skill, the focus,  
I must rest.

I'm going home,  
I heard them say,  
For me these people,  
go all the way,  
I'm stoked.

Bugger!  
Next, I'm on a ship  
Tossing in the briny  
What a bloody trip,  
I chucked.

Then the bastards  
Put me on a slip  
And poke a pole  
To make me slip,  
I'm arse over tip

Don't call me happy  
As I hit the tide  
Bloody hell it's cold  
Can I come back inside?  
I'm freezing

Alas, they've left  
And I'm alone  
Just endless surf  
No sand or stone,  
I'm all at sea

At 51 below  
So far to go  
And months to swim.  
Is that an undertow?

I'm gutted!

Look homeward Angel now  
And melt with ruth:  
And, O ye Dolphins'  
Waft the hapless youth.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Having A Quiet Rant About Things - In Conversation With Louis Macneice

Everyone now has a voice and the horse  
Brings up its bridle in its teeth -

But none can refuse the sugar of the mouthing off  
Or its harness  
Better a sweet taste today than coming to a better stall,

We live for words sown in the air or travestied in slogans  
Written on Facebook postings or Tweets of 280 characters or less

Our faces framed in selfies or posed with besties  
Momentary fame for the record  
Where instances linger indefinitely languishing

From familiarity

Subservient to a life that others nudge,  
Even more utterly lost and daft,

Observers and consumers of triviality  
Fancy lives - fancy that

While the many dine on fast food takeaways  
And the dispossessed sleep in doorways

And the food cartons, fish and chip papers and plastic wrappers drift in the gutter

And now the tempter whispers 'This is not slavery - this idleness and indifference  
is ours to keep,

It is no longer a matter of profit or loss - simply paying your way'

We are all degraded now - most of all those whose faces used to gaze up at the  
stars

Self-esteem is no longer an option - cream or whey  
Notions of freedom and freedom of choice are now moot or is that mute

Permeate free - less processing

And I argue for decency and truth and compassion  
Largely out of habit - a reflex action,

Knowing that should things even appear to right themselves  
The illusion of a fair order of things has passed

The elite no longer even concern themselves with honour  
And cynicism about ruling and the ruled predominate  
In a world where giving the many a chance  
Is a Big Wednesday Power Ball Draw

And concern about the standard of intellectual living seems utterly bizarre  
As does the fear that the highbrow will impose any kind of consensus  
On the 'ordinary people'

Or that there is a danger that if you give a chance to people to think or live  
The arts of thought or civilized living will suffer and become rougher  
And will not realize a general improvement in the Human Condition

Get real - everything is now preparing itself for amnesia  
Relapse then into sleep, to dreams perhaps and inaction

Or the nightmares that play of gangsters, sheikhs and charlatans  
Or of hucksters, jihadists and populist deceivers

Power playing for the love of making a killing  
Sitting on the greasy sofa waiting for the balls to drop  
Grabbing women by the pussy, straight up with prejudices  
Flat out with lies, fake news and half-truths

My concern about which is probably a matter of my private history  
To be expunged or rebirthed  
Or a personal pathology that stems from  
Genetic flaws, hormonal imbalances and my Myers-Briggs typology

And the will and fists of those who abjure the luxury of self-reflection  
Will inevitably triumph over the disorganized rabble of opposition  
Where purity of motive is always a matter of contention

Thinking it through, seeing it through, seeing through it all

It is no longer a matter of moral merit, of sincere earnestness

Assuming personal responsibility is a delusion - a fallacy

There is evil unleashed- it is both within and abroad

It is teaching us to dance to its tune

Orchestrating and choreographing time and luck.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Heart Stains Are Forever

Longing for landfall, the albatross  
Sought the twin sisters of the waves  
Mist of the Breaking Surf  
And Voice of the Breaking Surf.

So the young warrior Rautoroa  
Courtied Rehutai and Tangimoana  
Bringing gifts to their chieftain father,  
Hoping to take away a bride

But both of the girls fell in love  
With the bold and handsome youth  
So that neither would leave him  
Alone with the other.

Seeking to choose between them  
The young man asked for water  
And Tangimoana hurried to the stream  
To fill a gourd so that he could drink.

But Rehutai lingered, at last alone  
With the man she fallen in love with,  
Until he said again in anger:  
Woman fetch me water.

But Tangimoana on filling her gourd  
Muddied the stream so that  
When her sister came to its edge  
She had to wait for it to clear.

And on returning Rehutai found  
Her sister wearing the warrior's cloak  
With his raukura feather in her headband  
Signifying that they were betrothed.

At this the bereft girl rose with the mist  
Living thenceforth a desolate life  
On the hill of the lonely one,  
Ohine-mokemoke Rehutai.

## Rehutai's Lament

I toss like the waves  
Moaning with loss  
Turning restlessly  
Alone on my sleeping mat.

A young girl dreaming  
That he would choose and love me -  
But only starlight lingers  
Now night has overtaken day.

The dark stains of peat  
From the marshland  
Are washed by the stream  
But heart stains are forever

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Hearts Become Sharper

Hearts become sharper  
Through cut and thrust.  
If a heart has glimpsed hell  
It cuts quickly, deeply -  
Take great care  
With its knife edge.

I beg of you, let's not  
Leave love severed  
At hell's grindstone.  
Why is the heart keen  
To cut to the bone?  
Who is to blame?

I beg of you, pull back.  
In such a deadly duel  
There can be no winners.  
Hearts simply become sharper  
When they are ground down,  
Steeled by rage and fury.

[An attempted translation of a poem in Russian by Julia Drunina]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Helen Of Troy - Beauteous Bird

Variously born of swan or goose  
Fathered under downy feather  
You were saucy, flighty... loose  
When you and Paris got together

But how could Menelaus think you true  
However much you begged?  
Seems he was cooked when you  
Slipped off your top and lay there golden-egged.

So widely gorged on pâté de joie  
Was truth with beauty ever basted so?  
Can you answer for the Fall of Troy?  
Honk once for yes and twice for no!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Hide A Crook Ride

[For Prince Charles – on his resentment at Kiwi chipping about his riding skills]

See a Royal Charlie on a fine hoss  
Come a great cropper and get awfully cross  
With reins from his fingers and turf at his toes  
Munting the chukka wherever he goes.

See the Pom Charlie showing who's boss  
Pitch from a pony ass over toss  
With chips from his mallet he lands on his nose  
He shall be Chuckie wherever he goes.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# High Country Hymn

High the mountains rise in spur and summit  
Headed up to frozen tracts and recent snows  
Clear to the blistering ice-blue sky  
Ringing bluffs and cliffs and ragged flumes  
Hard country gullies topped to waterfalls  
Drop to native beech and sweet short pasture.

Into the easy country, the creeks are bound  
By rubble walls spilled from tussock heights  
Each fissure with its self-built stop-banks  
Breaking through to foothill flats and meadows  
And below the river laces braids with willows  
Stilled to lakeside once among the poplar stands.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Hillside Gems

Shapes and orientations curve and contort  
Coiled steel scribbles confirm wires will not tame  
But here a lucky seedling may come to grace

Absolute plane red ridgeback rough reeds  
Schist world and firmament - shot and carapace  
Iron forms bent and wrought by the careless river

Variously coloured dragonflies flit low across the lake  
While the weta takes its ancient outrageous stance  
And a bird alights on kelp that prospers far inland

Shire horses snuffle and throw their manes  
A slender female figure salutes the snow in play  
While wolves beset the sword-wielding warrior

And the man without a name sits quietly on the hill:  
Come some time and we will all become anonymous  
Though there is solace in the wind.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Holding On

I catch her words and see his fear  
As they pass in stolen conversation:

'I have been trying so hard  
To hold on to something.'

But how hold on?

Like the surfcaster to a line strike  
Reeling in the arm-wrenching catch  
Or the kingfish fighting for the sea?  
Like the would-be rescued girl at the outlet rip  
Slowly choking her desperate saviour  
Or the brave swimmer fighting for the shore?  
Or the pony cantering along the sands  
Holding a measured gait and steady course  
As its rider climbs and toe-grips its bare back?

If the touch becomes too taut  
Is there anything to hold on to?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Hong Kong Orchids

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## HONG KONG ORCHIDS

As the umbrellas are raised and we lift the sky  
The blossoms of the bauhinia or orchid tree  
Drift down softly on the bright yellow discs  
So that they become parasols patterned with flowers.

Let us be joyful together and invite the sun itself  
To gather the white five-petaled blooms  
Which fall so gently and so freely to the earth  
That better days may come as the rain clears.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Hope And The Black Swan

It seems you tried to kill the black swan  
That was defending the underworld river  
But that you drowned in death itself -  
Though your mother raked up  
Your dismembered rotting corpse  
Sewing you together and adding honey  
To bring you back to life.

Whatever!

Laid down mortal on a bed of lettuce  
Gored as you were by a boar  
Or shot as you were with a spear  
Cut from mistletoe  
Or an arrow cut from a tamarisk tree  
In far Cathay - fatal strength in beauty  
We have need of your return.

The demons have been set upon you  
As the sun falls to winter  
And the oak becomes bare:  
The perfect boy, the perfect son  
The once and future king  
Who may rise again in glory  
A full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice.

You who were put to death on a crosstree  
Of elder, cedar, olive or dogwood -  
Whence bloomed below the anemone  
The white lily, the daffodil, the rose.  
Your resurrection gave us hope -  
Now more than ever  
We have need of your return.

Regardless

That what I have outlined about the nature of hope  
Is highly improbable and no doubt  
Part of the human tendency

To seek simplistic aspirations  
For rare and redeeming events.  
That said, we have need of you -  
Stitching together regrowth and florescence  
And their inherent unexpected weaknesses  
In facing the black swan of oblivion.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Horsing Around In Chipping Norton

Ian Blair, Ian Blair, lend me your bay mare.  
All along Wapping gone ethics gone spare  
For I want for to go to Hacking'em Fair,  
With Glenn Mulcaire, Nev Thurlbeck, Greg Miskiw  
Stu Kuttner, Jim Weatherup, Ian Edmondson  
Andy Coulson, Flame Becky - all bareback an all  
Andy Coulson, Flame Becky - all bareback an all

And when shall I see again my bay mare?  
Chipping not Norton not - not that I care  
Of tapping or snapshot or entrapment so bare  
With Glenn Mulcaire, Nev Thurlbeck, Greg Miskiw  
Stu Kuttner, Jim Weatherup, Ian Edmondson  
Andy Coulson and Becky Brooks - braving a fall  
Andy Coulson and Becky Brooks - braving a fall

So they harnessed and bridled the old bay mare,  
Raisa the police horse, with scarcely a care  
And off they plotted to Hacking'em fair,  
With Glenn Mulcaire, Nev Thurlbeck, Greg Miskiw  
Stu Kuttner, Jim Weatherup, Ian Edmondson  
And Andy and Becky and Charlie - all having a ball  
And Andy and Becky and Charlie - all having a ball.

Then Friday came, and Saturday noon.  
All along down along reckoning soon  
But Ian's old Raisa hath not trotted home,  
With Glenn Mulcaire, Nev Thurlbeck, Greg Miskiw  
Stu Kuttner, Jim Weatherup, Ian Edmondson  
Andy Coulson and Mrs B - all too close to call  
Andy Coulson and Mrs B - all too close to call.

So the Commissioner got up to the top o' the hill  
And he seed his old mare down a-making her will,  
With Cameron astride in his cavalry twill  
With Glenn Mulcaire, Nev Thurlbeck, Greg Miskiw  
Stu Kuttner, Jim Weatherup, Ian Edmondson  
Andy Coulson and Rebekah - all riding so tall  
Andy Coulson and Rebekah - all riding so tall.

Poor Raisa the mare - she took sick and she died  
All along, down along when the hackers were tried.  
And Dave he sat down on a stone, and he cried  
With Glenn Mulcaire, Nev Thurlbeck, Greg Miskiw  
Stu Kuttner, Jim Weatherup, Ian Edmondson  
Andy Coulson and the Chestnut - four-faulting the wall  
Andy Coulson and the Chestnut - four-faulting the wall.

But this isn't the end o' this shocking affair.  
With Raisa and Becky dead-horsing it there  
Nor, though it be dread, of the horrid career  
Of Glenn Mulcaire, Nev Thurlbeck, Greg Miskiw  
Stu Kuttner, Jim Weatherup, Ian Edmondson  
Andy Coulson and the Witch - all casting a pall  
Andy Coulson and the Witch - all casting a pall.

When justice is sought in the cold morning light  
The voters will ask whether all this is right  
When Murdoch the trainer was kept out of sight,  
With Glenn Mulcaire, Nev Thurlbeck, Greg Miskiw  
Stu Kuttner, Jim Weatherup, Ian Edmondson  
Andy Coulson and Hot Bex- all hacking your call  
Andy Coulson and Hot Bex - all hacking your call.

And all the long night be heard skirling and groans.  
All along, down along, democracy moans  
From Raisa the police horse rattling her bones,  
With Glenn Mulcaire, Nev Thurlbeck, Greg Miskiw  
Stu Kuttner, Jim Weatherup, Ian Edmondson  
Andy Coulson and Game Becky - still chuckling an all  
Andy Coulson and Game Becky - still chuckling an all.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Hunt The Edge For What Is Yet Unsought

## MEDIA MURMUR

The mass is taken up in shoals and swarms  
Swept by unseen force or stigmergy,  
Trending on subtle cues and false alarms,  
Burgeoning with maelstrom energy.

In the void, meme-clouds seed and gather  
And movements stall and breakaway to spawn,  
In whirls spinning in the ether,  
Motions for prospective good or harm.

Ebbs and turns shape-shift collective mind  
Separation lost in perturbation -  
From flock to mob - now mawkish, now unkind -  
In wheeling, billowing murmuration.

But best to rise alone, apart in thought  
To hunt the edge for what is yet unsought.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Hylonome

Having too much time on my hands  
A small surfeit of disposable cash  
And an interest in what's hot and what's not  
I subscribed to the Paris Review  
Where I found a poem by Ange Mlinko.

It's called Barding and I had no ghost  
Of a clue what the title meant  
Or what the poem was about -  
Stepping back from 'the siren cresting  
With its unsettling charms'.

No doubt this is what real poetry  
IS all about - mind games for aesthetes  
Designed to wake you up stickily with a start -  
Like finding a bloody thoroughbred's head in your bed  
Donated by a playful but insistent gangster  
Who wants to put the hard word on you.

Anyhow all was not lost:  
Barding or barbing is the body armour  
Worn by the horses of late-medieval European knights  
And when she is talking about 'the brow  
Of a chamfron [als chaffron, champion, chamfron, chamfrein, champron, and shaffron]  
In a vitrine', she means the equine faceplate in a glass display case.

Thank god for Wikipedia for holding the bridle.  
This gave her options, yea or neigh, to sugar-lump us with words like  
Criniere, croupiere, flanchard, peytral, and caparisons  
And even mention the prior history of cataphracts exemplified by  
The Scythians, Sarmatians, Parthians, Achaemenids, Sakas, Armenians,  
Seleucids, Pergamenes, the Sassanids, the Romans, the Goths and the  
Byzantines.

Anyhow, once I had the bit between my teeth  
I got on to the Centauiromarchy - the Lapiths vs Centaurs  
Dust-up that started when the centaur Euryt(r) ion  
Tried to mount the Lapith bride Hippodomia at her wedding

After he got a bit worse for wear, and Hylonome, who was the only  
Female centaur at the feast, was so heart-broken

At the loss in the subsequent battle of her better half Cyllarus  
That she grazed on some yew branches and auto-equicided.  
Leaving Ovid to explore in his *Ars Amatoria* II  
Hybridity itself as it illustrates putting two and two together  
In "possible combinations of a number of conceptual opposites:  
Natura and cultus, human and animal, male and female, love and war  
And the contrasting values of lyric-elegiac and epic poetry".

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Ice Picks And Violets

While picks make good a fastening  
That binds and bonds and slows  
The violets in the mountains  
Will break through rocks and snows

The frosts are their condition  
The axe so sharp and hard  
While violets seek salvation  
In gentle beauty shared

God made the diamond violet  
To deck the mountain slopes  
Where only man is violent  
With spikes and blows to stake his hopes.

The staves and shafts will soon be gone  
When summits glimpse the winter's face  
But flowers will seed and linger on  
Which cleave and claim their birthright space.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## If You Were The O'o

If you were the last of your kind  
What song would you sing  
And who would you sing it for?

Would you sing a song of memory  
Or of regret or of past kindnesses  
From and to those that you loved?

And would there be unkind notes  
About your desolation and solitude  
Or a last blast singing against fate?

Or would it just be a kind of sweet swansong?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# In Praise Of Drainers

SOPS' LAW

How is it that people with the toughest jobs  
Are often the most competent and helpful?  
This afternoon, Sheldon came over to fix  
The pump on our wastewater system.  
He found that the sump was full  
So that he couldn't work on the pump  
But he recommended a firm  
That would drain the tank.  
So Gary came over with his tanker  
And I helped him back up against the fence,  
Having advised Laura who keeps the office,  
That we needed 20 meters of hose:  
So the tank was emptied and we found  
That the non-return valve had been damaged  
And that we would have to order a replacement.  
As Sheldon's firm is in Lower Hutt  
And the parts stockist is in Porirua  
It is now too late in the day  
To pick up the non-return valve  
And we may have to wait until Monday  
Before Sheldon can return to fix the pump -  
By which time the sump will have filled  
With toilet waste, shower water and sink slops  
So that Gary will have to return with his tanker,  
Suitably coordinated with Sheldon's boss Craig.  
Not that I am complaining - I'm grateful -  
But as a friend in the business once wisely observed  
About the economics of all this:  
'It may be shit to you - but it's bread and butter to me'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# In Praise Of The Odd Rigid Boundary

In the modern age chaos is counted fair  
But every meaningless becomes the same  
So failing beauty's bland successive heir  
Mutes poesy in deconstruction's name  
And every voice adopts digression  
Encumbering the clear with artistry  
From ornament's oblique impression  
To irony, pastiche and sophistry -  
So beauty's slandered with a bastard shame  
And nothing is clear in readership it seems  
While lines limp on from crook to lame  
As prosody the lack of wit redeems.  
Mourn then the loss of joy in sonnet form  
As jouissance gloss becomes the sonic norm.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## In The Lines

Amid the snares that wording pitfalls set,  
A no-mans-land of mined grandiloquence,  
Clumsily - at the tripwire of regret,  
I'm caught by flares of hurt and misread sense.

It almost seems you want to take offence.  
Understand I count my life to you a debt  
That I would gladly die in recompense,  
In freedom from the flack's reproaching threat

In true-belief that we are one and hence  
That you should grant me leave at the outset  
To be misunderstood and make poor sense  
But keep your love and caring nonetheless.

I'm heartbroken you so easily forget  
The absence of reserves in my defence.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# In The Year Of The Horse

ZEN GALLS

My pony would stand and let me  
Crumble the night-eyes on his fore-legs -  
Extraordinary muskiness -

Raised, dry, broken and calloused  
Like a dead wart or the crust on a roast  
Or a shank truffle.

And my dog would be snaffled by the smell  
Of the pieces that broke away  
And the three of us would share  
A weird sacrament.

It seems that time is an illusion  
And that its only purpose is so that  
Everything doesn't happen at once.

That old chestnut!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Isegoria

Come citizen, let us hear from you:  
Comments are open  
And you can make your case.  
Tell us then who you despise.  
Give vent to your prejudices,  
Give us reasons why a better future  
Will come from insult and intemperance  
Why division and self-interest  
Help you to live a full life  
Help to build better lives for us all?  
Let us see your views set down  
In social media  
Engraved forever on the ether  
Perhaps then you will reflect  
That time holds us all to account.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Isla Negra

Little by little  
The arguments killed caring:  
The sound became unendurable  
Of the endless after silences  
That demanded resolution.

Doubtless slowly  
You have erased me:  
Hardly a memory is left now  
But in writing about Pablo Neruda  
The past is whispering a say.

When we visited Isla Negra:  
There was no crystal moon  
Only a dull, cold and windy day  
And a nondescript concrete bridge  
Across the Cordoba Creek estuary -

A piped water main upstream  
Its distant companion on stanchions  
And dirty pools waiting to be cleansed  
By the tides from the black rocks or  
Floods and surges from the stream.

Then as now, the mud was stained  
With the ordure of ordinariness:  
El sucio y maloliente estero Córdoba  
(ubicado cerca de la playa Las Ágatas,  
en la localidad de Isla Negra) .

But when Neruda first came there  
Into the solitudes of that strand  
He came by horse, with his friend Don Eladio,  
Wading the pristine stream intoxicated  
By winter sprays of pollen, salt and wrack.

‘Era a media tarde,  
llegamos a caballo por aquellas soledades  
Por primera vez sentí como

una punzada este olor a invierno marino,  
mezcla de boldo y arena salada, algas y cardos...'

Now I recall the vines clearing on the trail  
As the horses scented fresh water upstream  
And we gave them their heads,  
Standing back on the stirrups,  
Letting them seek the beach between the rocks.

We should not have let love  
Grow implacable and bitter like we did  
Crossed so separately and stained.  
Once there was another land, another shore  
Where I am now resolved we are together.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# It Blows So Hard - T'Will Soon Be Gone

Evans D. Martin, Evans D. Morgan and  
If I remember right -  
There was a third 'Juffy' Evans at class roll call.

We also had a D.J Roberts and an A.W. Roberts.  
Chester is very Welsh for an English city  
The surnames said it all -  
But then again not using first names is very English.

I once went to school with a rose  
In my lapel for St George's Day -  
I was a strange child.

So it was with fascination  
That I find Dai Morgan Evans hosting:  
'Rome wasn't built in a Day'.

It was a long time ago but  
We both loved archaeology -  
Our heroes were  
Glyn Daniel and Mortimer Wheeler.

As D.M. said a couple of years back:  
'I'm fairly ancient - I'm 66, so I've been around for a while.  
I became interested in the Romans by being brought up in Chester'.

As his classmate, I was super impressed that he studied Anglo-Saxon  
At Robin Alden's Georgian townhouse in Abbey Street -  
After school!

As a country bumpkin, I had 90 minutes travel either way  
And had to talk to the cows along the Long Lane -  
As I biked home to the farm from the C84 bus.

But Dai and I  
[or David as I remember him] -  
Were bonded by relics, ruins and inheritance.

Again I was super impressed that he was one of the Ordovices

Who was still living near the Land of his Fathers - Wales  
[‘A place of bards, bigots, tenors, drapers, milkmen and journalists’]-  
When I was a sort of war orphan who was a bit of a  
Spare wheel.

But I hung on to the fact  
That my step-dad was an English yeoman:  
‘Cheshire born  
And Cheshire bred  
Strong in the arm  
Quick in the head’.

One time, D.M. and I took part in a dig  
In Watergate Street -  
Hoping for evidence of the Roman docks.

We got down about 10 feet  
And found planking – but it was still fresh -  
The ground had been used in WW1  
As a training area for digging trenches.  
Nothing changes that much.

The Ordovices got a pasting  
When Caractacus or Caradoc ap Cunobellin  
Lost the Battle of the Wrekin or Caer Caradoc -  
around AD 51.

Craddock took refuge with the Brigantes  
[My lot, I have since found out  
Through YDNA testing] -  
And our Queen handed him over to -  
Publius Ostorius Scapula in chains.

Paraded as a trophy in the Eternal city,  
He had this to say:  
'Does it really follow that everyone should accept your slavery?  
And can you, then, who have got such possessions and so many of them –  
Covet our poor tents? '

After that the Cornovii, who wore bulls' horns and had hill forts  
[My Cheshire relatives],  
Used the Pax Romana to build Uriconium into

Britain's fourth city.

They were descendants of Himilco

The Carthaginian -

So they knew their

Elephants [and cows] as far as the Romans were concerned.

They were a cunning lot, with an eye for

A bargain and what is practical -

And reinvented themselves again under the Angles

As the Wrekin Set -

With Chester and Shrewsbury

And their department stores and tea houses -

Browns and Quaintways -

Very nice too!

And 'the gardens of Blandings Castle

Are that original garden -

From which we are all exiled'.

And so it goes.

My uncle had a farm and then a pub in South Shropshire.

And my cousin [another David] and I

Cycled over once from Wenlock Edge to Wroxeter -

And brought back some shards of Samian ware.

'What's that rubbish?' his dad said.

That David died of AIDS in the 1990s.

As Housman has it:

'On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;

His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;

The gale, it plies the saplings double,

And thick on Severn snow the leaves.

'Twould blow like this through holt and hanger

When Uricon the city stood:

'Tis the old wind in the old anger,

But then it threshed another wood.

Then, 'twas before my time, the Roman

At yonder heaving hill would stare:  
The blood that warms an English yeoman,  
The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.

There, like the wind through woods in riot,  
Through him the gale of life blew high;  
The tree of man was never quiet:  
Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.

The gale, it plies the saplings double,  
It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone:  
To-day the Roman and his trouble  
Are ashes under Uricon'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# It Is Enough To Delight

My dear one is mine  
As mirrors are lonely  
Look into the glass  
And tell the face you see

Of how the lens gives power without purpose  
Reversed to purpose that no power redeems

Look more deeply  
Into the dark glass  
Matching devilry  
Against the angel

And how the spirit, so easily betrayed  
To cruelty, becomes so undermined

Then set aside the mirror and its meaning  
It is enough to delight without believing

For I will love the spring  
And cry to dream again  
My magic is my own  
I dance for death alone

Listen - new voyagers are seeking landfall  
They will awaken to the sweetness of the island

Water into the well  
Music into the air  
For the high green hill  
Sits always by the sea.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Joe's Brook

The lonely boy pulls on his rubber boots  
And calls the dog from her sacking bed  
In the small shed where the sticks are chopped.

He is off again across the fields to the brook  
Past the pit with its bulrushes and white ducks  
Down to the willows and the farm bridge.

There he will build causeways and dams  
Endlessly prising broken bricks from the mud  
Shaping and retaining structures to his daydreams.

Somewhere at a clearer stream - perhaps in Sussex -  
A more famous future poet is putting in place moments  
Carrying similar hidden watermarks of significance.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Kamchatka Lilies

LET US ACCEPT

To begin with, let us accept the following:

Poetry is love. Now we can continue:

So in Kamchatka lilies are blooming

In their naranja zest / burnt-gold hue

More beautiful than the russet curls

Of the youngest and most loved prince,

A scion of the Tsarskoye Selo world

From times that have passed to legend long since.

See the little boy gathered by the Tsarina

Her hair dressed with a dark diamante tiara,

Less in loveliness with all its arcane power

Than the Sarana's purpure-petalled flower.

So I gift with awe the verse that nature writes

In startling suns and jet-tipped star delights.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Karl

I see Karl coming up on the footpath  
And set my composure for the encounter  
He is as always cherry and friendly  
But in something of a dreadful strait.

I have known him now for 15 years  
Since he attended Buddhist classes  
And he still talks about the conveners  
With whom I have largely lost touch.

For as long as I have known him  
He has been ravaged by schizophrenia  
And now into his late fifties  
He is gaunt and his face is heavily lined.

He is returning from playing the piano  
In a bar - a task to which he is still suited  
Though at one time he played in a famous group  
And was highly regarded for his skill.

His clothes are dirty, torn and ill-fitting  
His jacket stretched across his slight frame  
Is both too small for his bones and too big  
For his emaciated and neglected torso.

He tells me that he is still living alone  
In reserved accommodation and that  
He has cut down his medication  
Taking only Olanzapine to help him sleep.

'Pretty wild in those Nelson Street Flats'  
He chuckles - they are cooking Crack  
On the top floor. 'Better stay off it' I say  
'I try to' he replies with a shy giggle.

'I'm off to hear Herbie Hancock play  
On Wednesday at the Michael Fowler Centre  
Somebody gave me a free ticket - he's  
Still the best at acoustic and electronic jazz'.

At which he wheels, feeling the audience is over,  
Having learned that listeners tend to edge away -  
And he is off with a crab-like gait, long hair flying,  
Muttering another improvised solo to unreality.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Kebechet

[For Amy Winehouse (1983 - 2011) ]

KEBECHET

Why were you so wild  
Heart-weighed child?  
Jazzy dreams and love's mistakes  
Lifting ladders, chasing snakes  
Dance the squares the dice-throw makes.  
What's that baby at your breast  
Princess, are you sure that you know best?  
The asps are in the royal quarter  
Bringing sleep my pharaoh's daughter.

The reeds are broken  
The river's spoken  
There's a basket floating there -  
And you my foundling needing care,  
With needle teeth to suck your share -  
Who will love you, who will dare?  
Seven lean years and seven fat  
Drought and floods will see to that  
Serpent goddess Kebechet.

Too brave to last  
The prophecy has past.  
The pyramid is raised and sealed  
Its mysteries stay part revealed:  
Sacred madness, cryptic rhyme  
Close the passages of time.  
But the hieroglyphs of melody  
Tongued by you to set the children free  
Still promise crossings of the crimson sea.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Key

What is needed to unpick the labyrinth?  
How can we find our way and keep track  
Of the endless corridors, steps and stairs  
Of the mind and its intricate delusions?

What is required to release melancholy?  
Where is the thread that will lead us back  
Having faced and put down our terrors  
And returned to everyday confusion?

What is possible in the besting of the beast?  
Will Theseus return a hero to found Athens  
And become the keystone of a Golden Age  
With Ariadne come to Naxos and deserted?

What is most and what is least at the last  
What secrets and prospects can be opened?  
Perhaps there is no key on which the world turns  
Only the thread of knowledge and its heartbreak.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Kiss Me Kate - Carefully. The Kangaroo

Poets often use many words  
To say a simple thing.  
It takes thought and time and rhyme  
To make a poem sing.

With music and words I've been playing  
For you, I have written a song.  
To be sure that you'll know what I'm saying,  
I'll translate as I go along...

Hum with me the tune  
And let us play amid the Bush  
Let us come together soon  
To consummate our crush.

In other words,  
Bounce my way.  
In other words,  
Share the hay.

Leave the billabong  
And let me sing forever more.  
You are all I long for,  
As I take your tender paw.

Careful with those shapely legs  
And watch when you get toey  
Treat me like a tray of eggs  
If you plan for us to joey.

Fill my heart with song,  
And let it sing forever more.  
You are all I long for,  
All I worship and adore.

In other words,  
Please be true.  
In other words,  
I love you...

Katie Kangaroo.

[To the tune of 'Fly Me to the Moon']

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Kiwi Fossicking

I sit at the bottom of the world, eyes strained.  
Internet browsing, surveying the scene  
Between my books and my fly-spotted screen -  
- intermittently attuned.

The convenience of the South Seas!  
Remoteness and its objectivity  
Are of advantage to me:  
The earth's voice is open to my inspection.  
My fingers are tapping on the key board.

It took years of separation  
To steady my gaze, looking out abroad:  
Now I hold the world in my hands.

Or let it loose to turn again slowly -  
I read as I please because it is all mine.  
There is no grasping in my gaze -  
Only distanced curiosity.

A new at oneness of life  
Directs my searches, guides my fantasies  
There are no restraints on my fancies  
No arguments contest my rights.

The Bay is below me.  
Nothing has changed since I began.  
My thoughts have permitted no change.  
I am going to keep things like this.

[With acknowledgement to Ted Hughes]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Larry's Song: For A Much Loved Labrador Rescued From The Pound

Fer `er sweet sake I've lain down on me trampoline:  
No trees and posts an' all that sniffy game  
Fer when a mutt `as come to know Maureen,  
It ain't the same.  
There's `igher things, she sez, fer dogs to do.  
An' I am `arf believin' that it's true.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Let Me Grasp The Light You Shed

I stepped up taking both your hands in mine  
They were delicate and cold and ghostly,  
Flesh against metal contacting eerily:  
I flinched slightly at our standing back time.

On your dress, spells in fretwork ribbons pour  
With edges sharp enough to cut or feel -  
And palms that berries stained are forged in steel  
To break and share a dead man's bread no more.

Woman of words laser-cut line by line  
Hailing the taxi of immortality -  
Iron killed your brother, ripped away his mask  
Do those bright fingers now avoid my clasp?

Although your silhouette may now be read  
So much surrounds you that is left unsaid:  
Let me grasp the light you shed - tacitly.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Liberal Is As Liberal Does

I dream of equity and brotherhood of man  
As only Oxford Nobs of Liberalism can.  
Of ancient lineage or so my mother claims  
I love progression and its fun and games.

I love the common man and guard his rights  
It's good that he has upper crust protection  
And if I put a finger down his tights  
It's just to muster favour at the next election.

The world is made for top-notch men like me  
That take both cake and biscuit - but bucket swill  
To grunts below them on the social tree  
Who suck it up but back the stuck up still.

I ride to hounds with the noble and patrician  
But ride the stable-boys for fairness sake:  
Unspeakable I'm not, I just jockey for position  
And hunt down rent-boys who are on the take.

"Great Scott, I wish that Norman dead  
That his goose be cooked and giblets served -  
His allegations leave me quite unnerved  
Will no-one rid me of that little turd? "

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Life As A Masterpiece

Look for an edge or pattern or corner  
And try to build up, build out or build back  
Look for groupings, forms, colours and order  
Trace the links, follow lines to ends, keep track.

This is a jigsaw that you are solving  
The intricacies of which are endless  
Or a mosaic that you are laying  
Where resolution is beyond tenuous.

Don't spill pieces or disturb the paving,  
Kneeling as is needed to make progress,  
Though icons and motifs defy saving  
The task will absorb you nonetheless:

This is the stuff of honest craftsmanship  
Where dedication is the masterpiece.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Life Itself Come Finally To Yield

When young you were as stunning as the dawn  
Red clouds threatening an impending storm  
Older you are as lovely as the dusk  
Quiet in twilight now the storm has passed.

Though darling buds fierce rain erases  
Rough winds will test but strengthen seasoned boughs  
And ruined choirs make perfect resting places  
As the sun's now waning power still shows.

No stranger to contempt, defeat and strife  
You little thought your day would last this long  
But the showers of summer brought new life:  
This the miracle that comes of staying strong

Time's bounty and its scars alike revealed  
That life itself comes finally to yield.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Little Comrade Klutz Teddy

LITTLE COMRADE KLUTZ TEDDY

????? ??????????: A translation of Andrey Usachev's Poem

Little Comrade Klutz Teddy  
In the forest  
Collecting pine cones  
Singing songs.

Then a cone drops  
And hits head first  
Smacking the bear cub -  
Bonk - and whoops a daisy!

On a branch  
A blackbird mocks:  
"A clumsy Teddy  
Trips on his own tail"

And then  
Five young hares  
Break from the thicket  
Screaming "clumsy Teddy".

All agree among  
The forest creatures -  
A klutzy Teddy Bear  
Is galumphing through the woods.

Back at the bear lair  
Little Teddy, still unsteady,  
Shrinks with shame  
Hiding behind a cupboard.

"Everyone is teasing me  
About my clumpy paws".

But Mum responds:

"Dumb son  
I'm proud of your feet.  
I'm a clodhopper,  
Dad is a clodhopper  
And Grandad is a real spud foot".

Klutz Teddy then  
Became very proud.  
He washed with soap and water  
And ate honey cake.

And he came out of the den  
Puffed and chuffed  
Ready to show everyone  
Some clumsy, klutzy, clomping!

[with apologies to A. Usachev from one poet to another]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Looking Deeply

Who is this young woman with her blue eyes?  
Is it the artist or the subject or perhaps both?

Who is reflected in the mirror - what is seen?  
Who is the painter - what is the intent?

How does beauty manifest itself - Question?  
Surely the subject and the artist must object?

Look at me - look beyond - look behind  
What is your intention in this interrogation?

The ordinary can so easily become uneasy  
Can you sense the menace in exposure?

Even in the children, there are portents:  
Innocence and beauty are unsure - at risk

Let them play and we will listen carefully  
And note the way in which the music unfolds

Let us watch who is sad, who is centre-stage  
Who is wistful, who is calm and who looks away

And this Midsummer, we should above all become aware  
That looking deeply into things is a sacred duty - the art of life.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Lord Give Us Frugality - But Not Yet

It is not so much a question of not knowing what to do  
We knew what's right and wrong before we were elected.  
We heard a lot of stories and we reckoned they were true  
About developments and the way they got selected.  
We know we mustn't fall into the pit  
But when we're on a roller  
We forget!

We are just a gang who can't say 'no'  
We're in a terrible fix!  
We always say 'Come on, let's go', just when we ought to say 'Nix.'

When a hustler gives a heist a whirl  
We know we ought to give his face a smack!  
But as soon as someone shakes the money tree  
We somehow sort of want to fill the sack!  
We are just fools when city lights glow  
We can't be prissy and quaint  
We aren't the types that just wait  
How can we be what we ain't?  
We can't say 'no! '

Whatcha gonna do when a scammer talks purty  
And starts to talk turkey  
Whatcha gonna do?  
Supposing that he says  
That there are rake-offs like baubles  
Or a pay-back which boggles  
Whatcha gonna do?

Supposing that he says there's pie  
In the sky that's sweeter than cream  
And he's got to build his dream or die?

Whatcha gonna do when he talks that way?  
... Spit in his eye?

We are just a gang that can't say no

Can't seem to say it at all -  
We hate to see a pitcher go  
When he is paying a call!

For a while we act refined and cool,  
A sitting on the velveteen settee  
Then we think of that old golden rule:  
'To do for him what he would do for me'!

We can't resist the con men  
Such plausible and affable chaps  
With an Apple on their laps  
Something inside of us just snaps  
We can't say no!

We are just a gang who can't say 'no'  
Yessin is how we get screwed!  
With or without the mistletoe  
Here at party central  
We're in a holiday mood!

Other councils may be harder to trick  
But those other gangs ain't havin' any fun!  
Every time we give a big tick  
We have a funny feelin' that we won!

Though I can feel the undertow  
The voters are muted in complaint  
'Till it's too late for restraint -  
Then when we want to but we cain't  
We cain't say 'no! '

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Lost For Words

'In the beginning was the Word'  
But surely there was a time  
Before words, when dreaming reigned?

And the dreaming was intrinsic scoping -  
Part-listening, part-musing, part meditation  
In a seamless word-less, pre-word world.

Then creation had no bounds -  
Imminent, predestined, immanent -  
It was unconcerned with particularity.

Are poetry and music then the echoes  
And reverberations of that time  
Before heaven and hell mattered?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Lost Village

The leaders and warriors of the village failed  
In their attempt to attend the ceremony:  
Caught in a storm, their canoes were overturned  
And their bodies were washed on to the rocks.

And when the tribes gathered to celebrate  
The ascension of the new paramount chief  
Into the sacred, lordly realms of the spirit gods  
The allotted kava and offerings went untasted

And the chief sought the counsel of a shaman  
On the insult to his mana - and of the taboos broken -  
And the priest decreed that the village should be eaten  
Each year, every year a mouthful - piece by piece.

At the season when the signs in the heavens signified  
A war party would be readied, beaching its canoes  
Behind the headland - demanding the necessary tribute  
Burning the huts of a family and clearing its taro fields

And smoked meat, young girl slaves and other tokens  
Would be taken for the great chief to appease the spirits  
So that the family and its people came to be extinguished  
And each year the village would grow smaller in significance.

And the time came when the last family was butchered  
And the clearings closed beneath the forest canopy  
So that nothing was left of that unfortunate lineage  
And its retribution to the gods became a story.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Love In The Time Of Singularity

Being in love is a highly disordered state - so there you are, about to leap into a black hole.

It transforms lives, alters judgment, consumes attention.

What could possibly await should — against all odds — you somehow survive?

'Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs;

Where would you end up and what tantalising tales would you be able to regale if you managed to clamber your way back?

Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes:

Falling through an event horizon is literally passing beyond the veil — once someone falls past it, no message could ever be sent back.

Being vex'd a sea nourish'd with lovers' tears:

They'd be ripped to pieces by the enormous gravity.

What is it else? a madness most discreet,

Should you then find yourself at the event horizon

A choking gall and a preserving sweet ...'

Tidal forces might reduce your body into strands of atoms through 'spaghettification'

Love does take us and transfigure and torture us.

The idea that you could pop out somewhere — perhaps at the other side — seems utterly fantastical.

It does break our hearts with an unbearable beauty, like the unbearable beauty of music.

What's more, because time distorts close to this boundary, this will appear to

take place incredibly slowly, so answers won't be quickly forthcoming.

But in so far as we have certainly something to do with the matter;

Maybe a black hole leads to a white hole?

In so far as we are in some sense prepared to fall in love and in some sense to jump into it;

Unlike a black hole, a white hole will allow light and matter to leave, but light and matter will not be able to enter.

In so far as we do to some extent choose and to some extent even judge -

Giving extra credence to the idea of black holes serving as a portal.

In all this falling in love is not truly romantic, it is not truly adventurous at all.

Such that singularity does not exist, and so it does not form an impenetrable barrier that ends up crushing whatever it encounters.

Or you might prefer a more cynical approach: it also means that information doesn't disappear.

If you ask me—and I have now had time to think about this—love, or what people call love -

It would be impossible to figure out what went in by looking at what is coming out

As it may be just a system for getting people to call you Darling after sex.

Someone crossing the event horizon might not actually feel any great hardship

After all, no neurons can be seen sparking with ecstasy

Because an object would be in free fall and, based on the equivalence principle,

And none are seen to fade or even pink or plonk with despair

That object — or person — would not feel the extreme effects of gravity

When the altered state returns to some kind of stasis.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Love Is Only Love When Love Can Grow

When young I fell in love four times a day.  
I was more careless then and desperate  
With little thought or heed of come what may  
When braving reticence to date and mate.

Often I saw a flash of eye that shone  
When cheeks' or necks' emblazoned blushes dimmed  
And schemed of pillow buddies deftly won  
And lobes and napes with kisses over-brimmed;

But as supposed eternal summers fade  
I chide myself that truth and wisdom show  
Deep seekers such as you are born not made  
And love is only love when love can grow.

And so each quarter day I stop to see  
Your kindness, laughs and hugs give life to me.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Love's Mystery

I promised you everything that comes to good:  
The compass points of life and being loved -  
What's worth retaining and what's before me  
And all that might achieve a legacy.

I promised you things that could not be done:  
Muting the keyboard and muffling the drum,  
Throwing all barking dogs a juicy bone  
Stopping the clocks, cutting off the phone.

I promised you things that were impossible:  
That I would pack up the moon and dismantle  
The sun, put out the stars and pour away the sea -  
In part melodramatic irony.

Why do lovers and mourners abuse hyperbole?  
When it's simpler to say: 'We shared love's mystery'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Lucky Tossers

Let's call it hopscotch!  
Now this is where it all begins  
A lot of talk and bull-shit spin  
Hit the zone, no time to wait  
Draw them squares out, 1 to 8  
Hopscotch!

Fake that spin and hop along  
And now you're ready to sing the song  
Spinning out a love match - bippity-bop  
Keep on skipping, no time to stop -  
Miss the piggy - the world will watch  
Hippety, hotchpotch, hopscotch hogwash!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Luminescence

How is it that the word is gracious light?  
That the light witnesses to the darkness  
And bright in dark reflection, darkly bright,  
Shines upon the comprehension?

In the beginning was the word manifest  
That there should be greater enlightenment  
And that those who make this atoned request  
Should receive the true light's endorsement.

Come from the shadows into your own light  
Be a lamp for yourself and take your place -  
And return from the dark glass to plain sight  
That you will know love and truth, face to face.

In such a life, light is everlasting  
And words and luminescence self- recasting.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Lunch At Cressage - Returning To Wroxeter 2013

The wind has set aside its ire for love  
And nuzzles nape of sun  
The shadows drain the blush above  
As ripples through the shallows run.

At Riverside the glasses bubble  
Where the basking Severn weaves  
And joys the Shropshire summer double  
With steak and beer and cheese.

Then, it was two thousand years or so  
That Marius chinked his glass  
And watched the boatmen heave and row  
Through willows to the quayside grass.

Here with the heat of day at peace  
Specks of why meet sigh and cease -  
The river of life ne'er ran so quiet and high  
Then thought Mario, now again think I.

The sun, it turns and shares the kiss  
So soft the courtship scarce begun -  
To-day we celebrate such joy as this  
With those who dream at Uricon.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Lymph Massage

That life should be so wonderful

That I have a carer who loves me.

She leans across me as I sit up in bed

And follows the instructions from the hospice

About lightly massaging - saying 'one thousand' -

Rotating her fingers according to the manual.

It is quite counter-intuitive - that such little pressure,

At such light touch, should have any bearing on outcomes.

And I start to think of things that bring tears:

I remember being terrified and unwanted as a boy

When we had moved to the farm with my stepfather -

And how we were overwhelmed when he became sick -

With me as a five-year old watching him heaving blood

In the back toilet from a perforated peptic ulcer.

And of being mystified as the dog was shot -

Brought from the pen in the old pig sty at the back

And set to wander to the abuse of the human beings

Before it was brought low in the driveway with a 22 -

And we returned to the kitchen to drink tea

Beset by so many fears and self-recriminations.

And me desperate for any kind of place or standing

That would help me survive the harvest of 1949.

And the incident of the open-top cart behind the tractor

When I was placed on the flat bed among the stalks and chaff

And the tractor pulled away - only to see the massive end-gate

Fall around me - missing me - but dashing down my toast and honey!

That was funny!

And come the autumn, of me riding the tractor draw-bar, harrowing

Across the pitted and corrugated fields - anything to be part of things.

But bloody dangerous! Sorry but this must stop. Rewind these memories!

Slightly tearfully, I thank my lovely carer and apologise for being such a nuisance

'You are worth it', she says - my tears welling - 'I'm so very sorry', I sob

'You are a lovely man', she says - and what is below the surface begins to give.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Making It New Again

There were constant struggles to understand  
Constant struggles to explain, justify, provide hope  
About how mankind came into existence  
About how their own tribe came to rule  
Or was dispossessed and brought to subjugation  
And the necessity of revival and reassertion  
About the nature of being a son and father  
The dangers of desire, temptation and betrayal  
And the fickle nature of women and their ways  
From homeliness to divination and blood-letting  
The rituals of forgetting and propitiation  
Acts of sacrifice, of mortification and ritual slaughter  
Of the need for valour in battle and loyalty  
Of making it new again and restoring greatness  
A trust in the after-life for the valiant and obedient  
The chosen ones coming to the throne of judgment  
Being welcomed to the resplendent halls  
With a promise of everlasting heavenly ease.

All this is becoming evident once more  
As we return to the ancient beliefs and ways  
And tribal commitments to blood and folk.  
But for some a small problem -not wanting to share  
Valhalla with Sean Hannity and Steve Bannon  
And if Odin has any sense, he won't either.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Marla's Song

When suddenly, I knew not why,  
There came a funny feeling  
Of something crawling up my thigh!  
I nearly hit the ceiling!

A mouse I thought. How foul! How mean!  
How troublingly tickly!  
Quite soon I know I'm going to scream.  
I've got to catch it quickly.

I made a grab. I caught the mouse,  
A wriggly little lump  
A mouse my foot! It was a hand -  
The hand of Donald Trump.

Tis irksome when the vermin  
Will brazen seek the cat  
But pussy is so charming

This louse don't think of that!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Matariki [maori New Year]

## MAORI NEW YEAR - THE SEVEN SISTERS RISE ANEW

Our birth-folk  
Sky and earth  
Together and apart  
Grief and yearning  
Heaving and strain.

Their children  
The woodlands  
And the seas  
The winds and waves  
The food stores  
War and stillness.

Though the young struggle  
With storms and snares,  
The dark and emptiness  
Are overcome by light and growth  
And the sky is clothed in stars.

Get ready for the westerly  
Stand fast for the southerly  
It will be icy white inland  
And icy cold on the shore.

May the dawn rise  
Red-tipped  
On snow, on frost

The breath of life!

## POWHIRI

At the island's edge  
The warrior-waves  
Swell and break  
In unison

And the shore  
Picks up the challenge.

Across the strait  
Are distant mountains,  
Arrayed like wise chiefs  
Capped with heron feathers,  
Snow-shone with white flame,  
Welcoming us to the winter solstice.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Memories Of Nigeria - And Such

Scents, a sense... scenes  
Of Nigeria tug at my memory:  
Smokey maize beer, yams and egusi;  
The beautiful girl who had been to Italy  
So lustrous black, so very beautiful;  
Fierce light, dark shadows, rough cast walls;  
Swimming in the Benue at Makurdi  
The river's surface arched with power  
Fishermen skating the flooded sunset.  
As for the crocodiles:  
'Poor Little Creatures  
The People have Eaten Them  
Long Ago'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Merienda On Buendia

[Another Special Lunch at the Asian Development Bank Office in Mondragon House - 1985]

## MERIENDA ON BUENDIA

As she is transferring to HQ on Roxas  
There will be merienda today for Rosa.  
There will be ukoy and ube-macapuno cake  
And the boss Dr Dhoni will make a speech.  
He will be charming and diplomatic  
And tell of Rosa's many talents,  
Avoiding reference to her penchant  
For bunking off and cultivating seedy affairs  
With senior expatriate staffers who should know better.

And the office girls will giggle  
As they load their Pancit noodles  
Onto paper plates and sip Mountain Dew  
Or take another slice of Sans Rival cake  
Saying 'Sir' in their sexiest voice  
And the professionals will ponder  
Nervously the beauties that beset them  
And talk seriously about interest rates,  
Country statistics and trade finance  
And the necessity of buying a generator.

And then as it always does  
The conversation will drift  
To the best deal on duty-free cars  
And which model has the highest resale value.  
After which mention will be made  
Of the Swiss man from the WHO  
Whose car was shunted at the traffic lights  
On Ayala and who unwisely got out and shouted  
At the Pinoy who had stopped short -  
Only to have his windscreen shot out by the accused.

But Chris who is new from Australia  
Will flirt dangerously with Baby -  
She with the shone jet eyelids and  
Slinky in oh-so tight silk skirts  
And he with the sweaty hairline acne  
Getting goose-bumps from the aircon.  
He whose young wife is at home gated  
In Dasmariñas Village isolated - sat sobbing  
Under the paddle-fan on the lanai.

And nobody will remember  
The young labourer from Bohol  
Who I saw being carried limp  
Off the building site  
After he had fallen from  
The bamboo scaffolding  
On the ninth floor  
Blood at the corner of his mouth  
His eyes already distant and opaque.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Messengers Relent - The Piwakawaka

I who have come so far, find welcoming  
Two small pied shadows dancing in the air.  
Laughing at their delightful powhiri  
I gather up their rautapu gifting,  
Cherishing their tumble-round uplifting.

Yet piwakawakas I am aware -  
You forewarn a threshold to my ending.  
Once under my roof there's no gift to share -  
Just dark warriors' stern attending.

We brought the farthings sparrows to your place.  
They once welcomed priests by flitting the space  
Across the roof beams of an old thane's hall  
And gave us hope of welcome everlasting  
To God's mercy, ending sorrow's fasting.

I proffer you this blessing shared with all.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Millennial Laertes Gets Some Advice From His Mum

ABOVE ALL BE KIND AND TRUE TO YOURSELF

Take off your head-phones and bloody listen  
I'm your Mum. Give quiet thought a fighting chance,  
Control intrusive and abusive urges.  
Have some mates, or not, but be your own man.  
Care for true friends as if they were the best,  
Grapple them to your heart with hoops of steel;  
But go-easy on the good-times and being loose  
And don't get led astray by smart-arses.  
Avoid getting into pointless fights and feuds  
And treat every girl and woman with respect.  
Weigh up what's said and speak carefully -  
Be critical and reserve your judgment.  
Don't get suckered in to waste and debt  
By following fads and being flashy  
And only buying the best brand labels.  
Don't wear jeans that show a builder's crack  
Think twice on tats, mullets and nose rings  
And remember that your Gran will see.  
Guard your money and value what you earn -  
Neither a borrower nor a lender be  
Loans can be a millstone for eternity  
Above all be kind and true to yourself.  
And help out others with the odd good turn.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Mirror

"Now we see through a glass, darkly;  
But then face to face:  
Now I know in part;  
But then shall I know even as also I am known."

Looking again for recognition and acceptance,  
Cleansing skin and wiping sebum  
From the oily insets of your nose lobes,  
The time has gone for greeting yourself -  
Smiling back to the self-stranger in the mirror  
Searching for the younger of the two of you.

Something is lost every day,  
Every day we die a little  
Neurons fail, memories fade  
Hours, places, names  
Houses, rivers, continents -  
Losing yourself is half the battle,  
Each wrinkle accumulating  
Without artistry or mastery.

Behind every door is a scream  
Open carefully - there may be  
Tigers, virgins or executioners  
Awaiting the turning of the lock.  
Forget threats and inducements  
And the regrets of incarceration  
What do you sniff - the scent  
Of innocence or feline ferocity -  
Is perfume deadlier than dander?

Which side are you on?

No matter how you consult the glass  
Your interrogation will not turn the key  
There is no walking through the mirror  
No matter then of liking or disliking  
The apparition of ordinary normality -  
There is nothing that you cannot face

And no turning away or seeing it through.

You will not find yourself,  
It was only ever reflection:  
Wipe the sleeps from your eyes  
And put away your tissues  
They may be useful yet for tears.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Miss J. Jade – Enchanted Game

Miss J. Jade, Miss J. Jade how well you have done  
Aceing at anchor the Island Bay sun  
Calling the lines to an admirer buoy  
Tether'd and weather'd with murmurs of joy.

What storm sets we shared you and me  
Toss'd and returned by the firmament sea  
With crafty obliviousness lightly you float  
I'm weak from your net calls fishy red boat.

The sound of the wind, the scent of the surf  
Iconic and tonic your importunate berth  
Flashing your stern where the bay breakers run  
Matching the waves, you've played up and won.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Modesty Their Standard [ice Picks And Violets]

Where wonders, wars, misfortune  
And stirring deeds are seen  
Where peace and wild confusion  
Have come and gone again

I could rhyme of Robin Hood  
Or Ranulf Earl of Chester  
England's ancient blood  
Its shield and its protector

But greater strife the country tore  
Wide wasting land and kin  
And Lads had died in mud and gore  
That hid the kind old sun

Now nature generation shows  
And young men take their place  
So noble is as noble does  
When scions pick up the pace

Like Gawain and Bayard  
Perfect knights of old  
Modesty their standard  
For quests and ventures bold

Called then the far dominions  
With bitter frosty skies  
The demons' dark pavilions  
Where devils hiss their lies

And though their mothers scheme  
And urge them not to go  
They smile and then explain  
The answer must be no

Before they reached the shore,  
What promises they made!  
And how high country's store  
Was stocked with glory's tread

Now huntsmen take their places,  
And all the hounds run free,  
As blood's up honour paces  
Swift to crag and shifting scree

Those lads their eyes grown bright  
Would soar, surmount the way  
Climbing on with great delight  
As sets the end of day

Bold Mallory unflinching drew  
His pick and staked his claim  
His mind's eye upward flew  
Summit set to be his aim

Then Irvine said with cheerful face:  
'Why shrink back from the quest?  
Though fate bring glory or disgrace  
A man must meet the test.'

Life can only little mean  
With loss so much in mind  
All faults they may redeem  
Through fellowship in kind

Spin the prayer wheel letters  
Tell of ancient noble truths  
Their story flagged in pennants  
The mountain people choose.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Moments In Waitarere - New Year 2015

I was in the 4-Square at Waitarere  
Buying a Dom-Post and an icy-pole  
When I lost it and bought 'Vs Moments'.  
It promised a Cinematic View  
On Fashion and Culture  
With specials on Uma Thurman and Kirsten Dunst.

Kirsten tries to look louche  
But looks spoilt and blasé  
Among the marble in the photo-shoot.  
Apparently she gave her cats cat-nip  
And they went ape-shit.

Outside on the bench, I sort of  
Half suck, half buck teeth razor  
My orange-lemon paddle-pop  
And glance between Kirsten's  
Santa Monica Mansion  
And the assembled beach raff  
With their bulging shorts and bonhomie.  
A bleary, ouch-tanned gaggle of ordinaries  
Pose for a cell-phone moment:  
'A real Kiwi Summer Photo, eh? '

And I turn to look at the 10-something  
Blonde-braided pig-tail perfection  
Who I had seen pirouetting on the beach  
In her black swimming costume with the gold stripe  
Faultlessly leaping and twirling  
Carefully practised ballet steps from  
Gillian's Modern, Tap and Classical Dance School  
In Palmy.

Kirsten's mum who looks after the cats  
Says once we could look out to the beach  
And say 'isn't this the most beautiful place in the world?  
But now our visitors train the balcony telescope  
On the car lot beside Ernesto's  
And say 'I wonder what

Celebrities are down there today? '

As I finish my Frujo, I put my jandals back on  
And the beautiful little girl becomes  
Resentful of my stolen adoration.

Last night we walked back after  
The rain had stopped and we had spent  
Most of New Year's Eve playing  
Some American game where you  
Pick black cards that provide questions or blanks  
And white cards that provide bizarre, rude or crude  
Answers or fillers that you can slot in when your time comes -  
In a tent as the southerly coming up the South Island  
Blew itself out.

Some of the questions and answers  
We didn't really understand  
But we laughed a lot.  
By midnight, it had cleared  
And the revels at the Bowling Club 'All Welcome'  
Died down for the countdown  
Five, four, three, two, one! ! !

Boom, cheers, fireworks - Happy New Year  
And then 'Auld Lang Syne', 'A Scottish Soldier'  
'Dirty Old Town'.

It was a great!

And we walked home through the clear, dark night  
Along the mud-sand drifted streets and their puddles  
To our batch or beach cottage  
As the sea celebrated  
With its own momentous song.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Monday Crossroads - Epifanio De Los Santos Expressway, Metro Manila

The car door closes,  
I step back alone  
To dirty streets  
And dark shapes.

I make my way  
Warily - as  
EDSA roars above  
The underpass.

The poor bring water  
To sidewalk homes  
In plastic buckets  
Yoked or dragged.

Vendors roll their mats,  
Set out their goods,  
Cigarettes and gum -  
Trifles and trivia.

On a concrete step,  
A dark-haired child  
In t-shirt and shorts  
Sleeps fitfully.

As dawn is rising  
In the viscous grey air,  
The traffic crowds  
To cacophony.

Reddening clouds -  
In the steel grey dawn  
Skyscrapers emerge  
In serrated edge.

The hotel canopy  
Takes me in

Cool marble and sweet air  
'Good morning, Sir'.

Entering my room  
There is disorder  
Sheets and pillows  
Thrown aside.

And you have gone  
And with you love.  
Sweet-heart stay well  
As day breaks hearts.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Monkeying Around With Shakespeare's Sonnet 3 [update]

Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest  
To grin and grimace and strain another  
Bardic turd - that if now thou not renewest,  
To besmirch the word and rhyming smother  
Will consign fair Shakespeare to the tomb,  
Disdaining the tillage of his husbandry -  
Endorsing those whose fatuous farts still bloom  
In monkey shit to stop posterity?  
Art thy primate glass is best dark to thee  
Leaving the lovely screen of empty time  
So thou through windows of each age shalt see,  
Despite the crap, the word still reigns sublime.  
For if macaques, in plenty to infinity,  
Type his words, mankind will not remembered be.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## More On Marilyn - Lagos Forty Or More Years Ago - For Theresa Lola

In Lagos, the atmosphere stands over you like a dark genie  
The water has failed in the smart concrete apartment  
And I shave using Sprite to foam my face  
But the electricity works, so the paddle-fan moves above my sleeping place in  
the lounge.

Burning myself out from work up-country for my engineering company  
I have come, fighting for my life again, to this dense dark city  
On the way home - back to Heathrow and the Home Counties -  
If they'll recognize my ticket at the Nigeria Airways desk - dash permitting.

I have somehow made it to a nightclub and become a little drunk  
And found myself liking and loving a girl who has excellent English  
Who also speaks Italian - having been what we would now call trafficked -  
My beautiful girl, my Black Marilyn, my night club pick-up.

The fan is still turning above this stifling ceiling of inadequacies  
That most beautiful of deep, dark lustrous skin to be cherished  
For both of us a petit mort - death itself in touch  
You were so much more than your beauty - I still can't take my eyes off you.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# More On The Art Of Letting Go!

Setting aside loss is a fine intention -  
so many things seem best lost -  
that they simply don't deserve attention

But so much insists on retention:  
coming back to mind at all cost  
denying erasure, resisting elimination.

Practising letting go, by resolution,  
is likely an illusion at best  
or a disastrous misapprehension.

Perhaps I lost my mother's affection  
or her kind attention at least at the last  
though forsaking her was never my intention.

I took her mantel carriage clock in reparation:  
for thirty years it has stood still - stood at rest -  
since she died - a troublesome acquisition.

The jeweller can do nothing in restoration:  
regardless of aspiration or cost  
the movements are frozen to inaction  
and letting go (like it or not) gets no traction.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# More Verse To Bring Tears To The Eyes Of Reserve Bankers

## FREE-WHEELING TO A FULL-STOP

Lower the rate: then housing loans are cheaper  
So buyers' pockets stretch a little deeper  
With Auckland as the premier spot  
Where bids are hot on every lot

Speculation now fires greed and envy  
And landlords join the feeding frenzy  
Which foreign buyers top collaterally -  
So housing prices rise again implacably!

Raise the rate: the money floods from overseas,  
For risk-free gains and un-taxed earnings please:  
The Belgian Dentist saves to buy his bonds  
And Ms Tanaka in Osaka soon responds

Now local banks in securing profit properly  
[And guarding their repute for probity]  
Must shift the money straight to property  
So housing prices rise again - predictably!

Hence Wheeler spins it round and round  
With hand-brake turns on shaky ground:  
Tracing tireless through excess liquidity  
[As assets bloat with wealth cupidity]  
The enigma of inflation's quiddity!

The puzzle deemed a Sisyphean task,  
With resolution seen a hopeless ask,  
No Change is thus what fate will now anoint  
In indecision as to what's the point.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Morning Star

Me he mea ko Kopu!

As fair as the rising morning star  
Her eyes are as brilliant as the full moon  
Outlining dark hills in a crystal-clear sky  
A presence so becoming she can  
Call in the returning tides.

Though the clouds gather in the night sky  
The stars are so numerous and startling bright  
With many caught glistening in the net  
Brought together by the vast cast of light  
Thrown across the heavens.

Who can bring to harvest the catch  
Before the billows hide the shoal?  
She will be waiting by the shore alone  
When the dawn clears to reveal  
The rainbow in its glory.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Morning Walk At Evans Bay

Then time took up the koru sun

That coiled and edged the bay

Burned and in its heaven spun

The spiral of that shimmering day

And waves fell tilted from the spill

To topple there and then at last lay still.

There the gyre and there the strand

In progress set to play and turn

The thrower takes the cast to hand

And catches ripples in return

So the steady foot step trails

And dusts the trace where imprint fails.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Moths And Butterflies

Life will take its way with you  
Snuffing out or bringing to earth:  
As a moth burns with the candle  
The butterfly is torn by the wind.

But be sure to take flight first  
Settling on damask or the autumn rose.  
Ask: 'why are you here, soul? '  
And have your time at rise or rest.

From cocoon or chrysalis:  
The moth gives up life for light  
The butterfly its life for beauty  
For freedom has its purposes.

Let eye-spots hold this insight  
As love whispers to your wings:  
'Taste the savour of your life  
In velvet dusk and petaled dawn'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Ms Lizzie Goanna

Billabong Lizzie Goanna  
Wore nought but a scarf and bandana  
Choofing weed from her tin  
She oft raised a din  
By playing her off-key joanna.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Mudbound

In Mississippi in 1800, each acre of cotton absorbed  
185 worker hours per year and substantial capital -  
Compared to 56 worker hours per year in upstate New York  
For an acre of wheat (after an all-told investment of around \$20) .  
Setting aside considerations of climate,  
Let's say a healthy young man could work 3,000 hours per year.  
This means that a lone white settler could farm 18 acres near Natchez  
And 60 acres near Syracuse.  
So what was needed in the South  
Was a populous peasant under-class  
While an enterprising man could find  
Liberty and independence in the North.  
Clearly something had to give.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# My Chicago Date

ANN - WAS THAT YOU?

In the Fall of 1976, I spent a month in Chicago  
Working with Harza Overseas Engineering  
Preparing the Agricultural Economics Analysis  
For the Jordan Valley Irrigation Project, Stage II,  
Having flown over from our London Office.  
I stayed at the Midland Hotel, 172 West Adams  
Which apparently started as Beaux Arts  
But stopped at 22 floors and switched to  
Art Deco and Contemporary when the Crash came in 1929.  
I was severely unimpressed by the CBD  
As it emptied every evening, leaving canyons  
Of windswept streets, and on one occasion  
A plate glass window fell from way up the Sears Tower  
Splintering on the sidewalk opposite from where  
I used to pick up my tall cardboard carton  
Of undistinguished percolated coffee and a doughnut  
On my way to work in the mornings in South Wacker Drive.

Anyway, the then monotonously dark-brown veneer hotel  
Was a dreadfully boring place to be after I had  
Finished up my evening meal at the Berghoff German Restaurant  
And one evening I set out to explore its mysteries:  
Finding one of the Great Rooms of the old Midland Club  
Which had been hired for the night by an Afro-American  
Community Group for a sort of sharing and giving talent show  
That celebrated and affirmed the gifts and confidence  
Of its young people. I asked if I could watch.  
Which was a bit of a mistake for they generously said 'yes'.  
So there I was, the only white person in a vast room  
Full of Black Americans who really wanted to be totally  
Rid of Whites for the purposes of the exercise.  
And disgustingly, I found myself looking for a response  
From a fetching young woman who was notably whiter than the rest:  
I thanked them and left - but they really should have thrown me out.

Later things looked up when I met a winsome lantern-jawed  
Dark-haired young woman in a Singles Bar on the North Side.

On the lam from her work as an expat in Indonesia  
She was attending a conference on micro-credit programs  
At the University of Chicago. She told me that she had a  
15-year-old son who had an African father from Kenya  
And a 6-year-old daughter to her second failed marriage  
To an Indonesian. Eighteen months older than me  
She knew the ropes and was out for a good time -  
Confiding after a second tray of slammers  
That she had once posed for raunchy photographs  
That were published in the soft-porn magazine Exotique.

Well, if you believe that, you'll believe anything  
But then some do - and seemingly we are losing all conscience:  
So stained, so insufficient, so lacking in decency -  
Pumped up by sexism, racism and braggadocio.  
The way things are going, it won't be long  
Before a whiter shade of pale  
Enhances the color of dishonor -  
White-livered, white-feathered, white-washed -

And there are waiting lists for melanin injections.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## My Love In Novel Fashion

Cherry, lay down your good vibrations  
And set aside the pulsing ivory  
To dwell awhile on lost love's agony:  
My thousand sighs and approbations,  
The high desire of futile aggravations,  
Running fast and loose in febrile alchemy.  
Slow down I pray and pity my calamity  
That you and I may match our perturbations.

Thy cheeks are stars to my astrology:  
Let me then chart celestial motions  
And synchronize our joint devotions  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic free -  
With I thy Galileo in discovery -  
In mutual orbit with your ecstasy.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# My Morning Chaffinch

Small passerine bird -  
One of the finches from England.  
I look you up - a chaffinch.  
You sit on the highest branch  
Of a native - an ake ake -  
Outside my window,  
Delighted with the regrown Bush.  
But you have nothing to report  
Nothing to sing about -  
Life is too good here even if  
It is not in clover.  
That's right have a  
Good look around -  
A 'Captain Cook'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Nach Schwerem Traum - A Personal 'translation'

Nach schwerem Traum

by Gerrit Engelke (1890-1918)

Ich bin Soldat und steh im Feld  
Und weiß von niemand in der Welt.  
Drum kann ich diesen Regentag nicht feiern,  
So kummerzärtlich, feucht und bleiern,  
Da mir dein Bild zur Nacht den Schlaf zerschlug  
Und mich in deine Nähe trug.

Ich bin Soldat und steh im Feld,  
Gewehr im Arm, und fern der Welt.  
Wär ich zu Haus, ich schlosse Tür und Scheiben  
Und wollte lange einsam bleiben;  
Im Sofawinkel sitzend mich versenken,  
Geschlossnen Auges deiner denken.

Ich bin Soldat im trüben Feld.  
Hier endet alte Menschenwelt.  
Der Regen singt, die nassen Strähnen fließen.  
Ich kann nichts tun - nur Blei verschießen.  
Weiß nicht warum, tu's doch als ob ich's muss:  
Ins graue Wetter kracht ein Schuss!

After the Dream 1918

a personal 'translation'

I am a soldier in the field  
A stranger to the world:  
Weary on this rainy day  
That sits so heavy - but tenderly  
Since I dreamed of your face  
And the place we both loved.

I am a soldier in the field  
Armed against the world:

If I was at home I would  
Sit alone, hunkering down  
At the end of the couch,  
Eyes closed, waiting for your touch.

I am a soldier in the field  
At the edge of no-mans-land:  
The rain sings a soft chorus  
As another blast crashes -  
Nothing but fire and grey sky -  
Needs must though I don't know why.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Nancy Brunning: 'the Totally Wonderful Eyes That Challenged Me With Aotearoa Dishonoured...'

My audio and video channels got mixed up.  
I started trying to listen to a podcast  
On Nancy Brunning the Maori actress who has just died  
And it got drowned out by a clip from  
'A Spoonful of Sugar' with David Tomlinson and Glynis Johns  
Waltzing around about making the 'medicine go down  
In a most delightful way'.

And I missed the talk with Nancy that honoured her mana as a  
Te Wahine Rongonui (a woman of tremendous influence and talent)  
Of the time when her people were starting to overcome their bitter past:  
Bastion Point, Dame Whina Cooper's Hikoi ...  
And the Rugby Tour Riots for decency over matching our beloved All Blacks  
Against the Racist Springboks from Apartheid South Africa in 1981.  
I couldn't go back and listen - it would have broken my heart.

Ka rongo i te ia o te aroha, he ngakau mahaki:  
Being genuine is everything in matters of the heart.

I'll just remember Nancy on the Number One Bus  
Into Town taking her little daughter to childcare  
Getting off at Macdonalds on Adelaide Road  
And her extraordinary and totally wonderful eyes  
That challenged me with Aotearoa dishonoured.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## New Kitchen

The dahl has dripped on the icing -  
Bloody fridge! Time for a new one  
That has all its glass shelving  
And doesn't ice up shaved ham  
Like a beard outside Scott Base -  
And the entire front has come off  
The knives drawer so that it falls  
On the floor if you are careless  
And I had to fix up the pan drawer  
With some second hand knobs  
And put scotch tape on the floor  
Of the food cupboard to mouse-proof it -  
And that's only the half of it.

Not to worry, the order has gone in  
For a state of the art Poggenpohl  
That will be shipped from Germany  
And have so many bells and whistles  
It will be an all singing, all dancing  
Kitchen that will knock the socks  
Off my fellow forty-something  
Yummy-mummies and be the bees knees  
Of Island Bay and Berhampore.  
The only problem now is finding  
The wherewithal to pay for it:  
But in the meantime, I can use it  
To cook up a few mixed metaphors.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## New World In Island Bay

A 2-litre bottle of Diet Coke  
from the New World Supermarket  
here in Island Bay now costs \$3.39.  
When local poet James Brown  
wrote 'Disempower Structures in the New World'  
twenty years ago, it cost \$1.95  
that's a 70 percent mark-up over time.  
The car park is always full.

James spends much of his poem  
decrying the 70 percent mark-up  
charged by the local 'dairy owners'  
on Diet Coke, vis a vis the supermarket  
- the offending capitalists in 1998  
being first generation Gujerati immigrants  
who run small, shabby corner shops  
where you can buy milk+ at unsocial hours.

James seemed to think that  
the seven-days-all-hours were making  
an unjustified potential retail profit,  
gouging him with a net consumer loss -  
and went home counting his change  
carefully after one convenient walk,  
seeming to resent the dairy owner  
talking in another language  
as he gathered up his crying daughter.

Well, I'll have to talk to my mate 'Alan'  
about what he charges now for Diet Coke.  
He used to give my little sons treats,  
including gummy crocodiles or 'crockers',  
when we lived down on The Parade -  
and my wife and I would chat to him  
and his wife about India - both having  
spent time there - Jane more than me.

Mind you, Alan's job is almost done  
what with two sons now through

university and into secure, well-paid jobs -  
and he's too stiff to bowl off spin nowadays  
for the Wellington Indian team in Hataitai.  
I miss chatting to him - and his cheery  
evening inquiry 'bisi-day? ' but we moved  
to a bigger house up on the hill  
and have to car down now to New World.

The young mums are still beautiful  
But they are not the ones that either  
James or I knew in our respective primes -  
they don't notice an old feller like me  
and I have to flirt with the checkout girls  
with their squeeze-out smiles.  
I saw my gay friend tonight with his  
Lovely little daughter holding his hand tightly.

The dairy on Dee Street has closed  
and the one on Mersey Street is closing  
killed by lack of parking and the new cycleway

Now and again, there is a young white guy  
who sits on the pavement  
looking purposefully miserable  
outside the New World,  
with his beautiful, over-fed black Labrador,  
begging for change and low denomination notes.

Oh, wonder!  
How many goodly creatures are there here!  
How beauteous mankind is! O brave New World.

P.S.

But bloody hell James, for all that,  
what are you doing drinking Diet Coke?  
If nonetheless you are still an addict,  
FYI the 2-litre plastics are going for \$1.95  
'on special' at PAK'nSAVE in Kilbirnie -  
setting aside nearness and one-to-one!



# Nippy And The Giant

Once there was a perfect princess  
Bedazzled in beauty and success.

'Fee-fi-fo-fum

I'll take the soul of the gifted one'

'So young, so sweet, so smart, so fair

I'll hunt you down, devil may care

Fee-fi-fo-fum

Run if you can, hide if you dare'

Said the giant with each foot-step thud:

'I'll chase you down like an ogre should

Fee-fi-fo-fum

I'll catch you however you run -

'There's no escape from reality

Whatever your skills in alchemy -

Fee-fi-fo-fum

Run and run, you'll never be free'.

'Fame and fortune are nothing to me

You'll never have peace if you can't just be

Fee-fi-fo-fum

I'll get you yet, just wait and see'

'I'll grind your bones to make my bread

As I mess with you inside your head:

Fee-fi-fo-fum

There'll come a time you are better dead'

'There are no lines that will bring relief

Grief drowned out is more fearsome grief

Fee-fi-fo-fum

I take the souls of the weebegone'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# No Love Affair With New Zealand - Taking A Steak Knife To Denis Glover

I have a lot of respect for Margaret Foster  
Who was born in 1902 in the grimy town of Dudley,  
In the heart of the English Midlands 'Black Country',  
But who ran off as a teenager in hot-blood  
To spend two years in the cabaret chorus line  
As a Bluebell Girl, traveling the world kicking up the traces -  
Later becoming a German contortionist's assistant  
And then dancing at the New York Winter Garden  
Where she met and married a Spaniard -  
Settling first in Buenos Aires and then on the Costa Brava  
Where she had a passionate affair with a German anarchist  
With both of them then joining an anarchist centuria  
Called the 'Aquilochos' [or Eagles] of the Corts Tram Depot  
Of Barcelona, fighting for the POUM in the Spanish Civil War,  
With which she took part in the attack on Almudeva in 1936  
Where she almost reached the Fascist trenches  
But had to retreat when the Communists failed to provide support -  
With she and Werner then organizing camps and relief  
For refugee children until they were dismissed by  
A communist delegate who did not approve of their politics -  
After which they were eventually reunited in England  
But interned for their anarchist and German links -  
Though they eventually escaped to New Zealand in 1940,  
Living in a derelict cottage near Paparoa in Northland  
Until the authorities allowed them to move to Auckland  
Where they met Frank Sargeson and his writers' clique,  
With him encouraging her to write about her new country  
Under a name she concocted from her mother's family forename  
And her first husband's surname - 'Greville Texidor'.

Not altogether surprisingly, she was bored and thought that NZ  
Seemed a wasteland by comparison with the scenes of her adventures -  
A desert of emptiness peopled with men and women  
Who were so repressed they could hardly bear to go near one another  
And whose existence was so numb, it made existentialism seem positive  
With Sargeson commenting diplomatically, that she was:  
&quot;unable to establish with this country relations which in any way resembled

a love-affair".

But what I like most about her is facing up to Denis Glover, the witty and brilliant Editor and writer who in addition to also being a notorious misogynist and obnoxious drunk

Was a Communist sympathiser, later awarded the Soviet Union war veterans' medal.

So when, at a North Shore party, the pissed-newt loud-mouth rat-bag taunted GT about the Fascists triumphing under Franco:

'She took a steak knife and held it to his throat until bystanders could overpower her'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# No More Porkies Please!

No matter then to some that truth is dead  
And thought and action dulled by fakery  
Or that slops of spin are served instead  
Like feed for swine in shit and infamy

And we who thrive on simple honesty  
Are left to starve on half-truth's bitter swill  
And turn away from mocked integrity  
To watch the porkers guzzle down their fill.

Remember still that truth was once restored  
When greed and pride and lies were overthrown -  
Then the brokenhearted prodigal returned  
To feast on fattened calf when welcomed home!

Turn back - it's not too late - enough's enough  
Let's scour deception from the public trough.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# No Separation

When sun has set and night has come  
The road not taken leaves no trace  
Of journeys once so near begun  
All thought to part now left in place.

But all roads cross and come to ground  
As dark paths shift and circle back  
There is no loss there is no found  
Thorns and flowers will edge each track.

And deep within the wily wood  
Other lanes will branch in offering  
Promises which are best withstood  
Though such is neither bad nor good.

No difference then to choose  
The high road or the low  
No use to fear to gain or lose  
If way there be, the dawn will show

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Not So Inclement

what a holy-f farrago  
on St Clement's imago  
reliquary attested  
bone chip divested

bit of sanctified body  
humped into the lorry  
dustbin man leathers  
tossing lost scapulars

come the end-time event  
no more trash or lament

tip trip rag and bony  
dumping sacramental baloney  
higgins&doolittle yet may care  
last load-drop compacted there

sorted out from refuse dishonour  
ossiferous amulet almost a goner  
rescued by a lower force  
salvaging bin hire power remorse  
scavenging souls its last recourse

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Nothing If Not Aware

Cartoons imagined as receptive

Frame senses to appear perceptive

Illusions spring without redress

Reality retreats in sleight recess

And what is real is just a guess

Caricature is loss preventive

More than this is just inventive

Watching now let mind confess

Blurred and blinded by pretences

Existence lives in half non-senses

Character and self are thus elusive

And skillful means at best evasive

Marking thoughts with patience

Breaths become my lenses

And absences my references

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Nutmeg Mannikin

It isn't over until the fat lady roosts  
Or the bear wakes  
Or the bat salivates or excretes.

Domesticated and smaller-brained  
We sing elaborate songs now  
That we have learnt from troubadours.

And prone to over-eating  
We poison ourselves with sugar  
That to the bear would be a little something.

And the bat which became immune  
Coping with the stress of flight  
Now hosts a crucible of viral spells.

Trills and warbles, bright and varied  
The society finches are easy care  
Though less robust than the scaly-breasted.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Occasioned On Some Infelicities By His Disgrace The Monetary Blogger Michael Reddell

Reserved Bankers with their brains have traced  
And fixed the point where OCR is placed;  
Mind then their petty whims and back-bite talk  
Of pinheads where they dance and walk

So Wheeler spins from hard-bound brain  
A funny-money sky of sun or rain  
At Number 1, he brings us joy or pain  
In settling there on those who lose and gain

But Reddell his fine judgment now contests  
And in his blog a percentage point protests;  
That Wheeler does not say the least right thing,  
On how long or short's a piece of string

The blogger so grows waspish, arch and odd  
At once for Mammon and for God  
Thus vexing both who gave him worth  
By hedging bets twixt heaven, hell and earth

Said Chairman Carr: his point is weak  
Not justifying a media leak  
He fails the test of citizenship  
In divulging so announcement's tip

And Bascand tasks: he's just aggrieved  
So his opinion should be disbelieved -  
More than that he's got things out of kilter  
Seeing everything through victims' filter

Now Hannah opines: his latest posts  
Are little more than rants and roasts  
And that he's lost Reserve Bank sympathy  
With his clashing \$ symbols timpani -

His latest blogs have been emotional  
With observations merely self-promotional:

So where and what's the point you ask  
In arguing so on such a menial task?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Ode To A Vegan Breakfast

Green the smoothie glugs with avocado  
And, if the gods smile, a banana too  
Nectar for the clean-gut slimming lardo  
With flaxseed oil to help it through

Next the turn of dust and silt to sludge  
So homemade muesli swells and plumps  
As molars through the sandy desert drudge  
And gritty bits betray inchoate lumps

Chia, quinoa vie now with kale and spinach  
And the swamp is drained or rather sumped  
So as breakfast stumbles to its scouring finish  
The contents of the bowl are slowly chumped

This is the vegan medley melody of song  
Long-dried fruit and roasted nuts inspire  
The kindling of new growth the colon long  
As oats and coconut some dental floss require

That madness and the inflatuate gut may breed  
With yogurt, kefir, ancient grains and seed.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Ode To An Australian Magpie

My head aches and throbbing numbness pains  
My sense, as though of Bundy I had drunk  
As I drag my bike out from the drains  
One minute past where pavement-wards had sunk;  
Tis through disdain of my unhappiness  
That thou, pied-wing bomber from the trees  
In some invidious leas  
Of eucalypts and shadows numberless,  
Chortle with glee in full-throttled ease...

&quot;Quardle oodle aardle wardle doodle&quot;.

O for a draught of Fosters! That hath been  
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth  
Tasting of hops with a dark tan sheen,  
Garden bars, cask plonk, and sunburnt mirth!  
Full of the true, the brashest youthful scene  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim  
Past pouted jaw-set mouth;  
That I might slink and spot the bird unseen  
And with a shotgun make an end of him...

&quot;Quardle oodle aardle wardle doodle&quot;.

Fade far away, shoot through and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here where hangovers give forth added groan  
And headaches shake the morning's parted hairs  
Where youth grows jaundiced, grey and sallow  
With parrot-parched despairs;  
Where sobriety cannot keep her lustrous eyes  
And new rounds shout for us beyond tomorrow.

&quot;Quardle oodle aardle wardle doodle&quot;.

Away! Away! For I will deal to thee -  
You that were never in my best regards  
Will meet my measure by Rule 303

Though the dull brain perplexes and retards;  
Already fly thee! Tender is the pate  
And unhappily I again make moan  
Knocked about by dive-bomb ways;  
But yet it is not too late  
Save for what from heaven is with the flies blown  
And murderous intent and vengeance pays.

&quot;Quardle oodle aardle wardle doodle&quot;.

I cannot see what wrigglers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft insects hang upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each treat  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the eucalypt, and the gum-tree wild;  
The wattle and the coastal turpentine;  
Retiring serpents cover'd up in leaves;  
And November's eldest child,  
The scarce-born lamb athwart the twine,  
The murderous haunt of flies on summer eves.

&quot;Quardle oodle aardle wardle doodle&quot;.

Darkly I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been in love with thy most painful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,  
To take into the air my choking breath;  
More than ever is it right for thee to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with some pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such cacophony!  
Still wouldst thou sing, and I thoughts in vain -  
That thy high requiem become a sod.

&quot;Quardle oodle aardle wardle doodle&quot;.

Thou wast not born for life, oh mortal Bird!  
The hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the heart of Sinbad, when, sick for home,

He stood in fear amid the darkening gloom  
Bearding the Roc's wrath  
On tragic battlements, louring on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in feathery lands way-worn.

&quot;Quardle oodle aardle wardle doodle&quot;.

Way-worn! the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back to thee to strip thy pelf!  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is famed to do, deceiving self.  
Adieu! adieu! thy final anthem fades  
Past the paddocks, over the quaggy seep,  
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the acacia glades:  
Waddle giggle gargle up the creek  
Fled is that music - still I shake and weep.

&quot;Quardle oodle aardle wardle doodle&quot;.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Old Dog

Feeling stiff and sleepy like an old dog  
Chasing cars in its dreams - desultorily  
Rerunning chases from the catalogue  
Of escapes that came with the territory

I am as they say - a bit passed it:  
Pulling up short from cats scrambling up trees  
Hopeless now at scaring postmen a bit  
Or chasing gulls lifting off with the sea breeze.

Not the kind of guard dog you want on watch  
Or a young pup to be shocked by Pavlov,  
I'm no longer hard to keep on the porch:  
Tending to scratch awhile and then doze off.

But every dog has its day or so they say  
And I'd be barking mad to have had it any other way.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Olga And The Swan [????? ? ??????]

A steady blow - the pink swan inflated  
Beside the turquoise lake of noxious dreams  
She yearns their hapless breasts jugated  
Is this much more or less than what it seems?

How can the lake in its polluted state  
Beckon the maid so seductively  
To dally with her rubber avian mate  
Sharing their water-wings adductively?

And what fouled aqueous chemistry  
Has mired this aquamarine surface  
As ash and cinders fed lethality  
And choked all living things with waste?

And does she now take up this shitty reality  
With the Siberian Generating Company?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On Being Liked And Loved

I used to think that the best way  
To deal with being and staying liked  
Was to get to work on yourself  
With make-up and jewelry  
To cover the imperfections  
That would otherwise be visible.

So that the cosmetic applications  
And delicate, intricate metalwork  
That I put in place artfully  
Might substitute for virtues.

At least that is what I thought  
When I was young and foolish:  
It seemed to be the way to go  
But it was not the way it turned out.

Out of all my fair-weather admirers  
Nobody explained what is important -  
Which is that love is deeper than looks:  
That all your flaws  
Tears and tantrums  
Mood swings and evasions

May be viewed as mysterious depths of feeling  
And delightful riddles by those who truly love you.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On Fine Fellowship, Understanding And Tigers

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When we were given a bill of passage  
Through the southern margins,  
As the wax seal grew hard,  
We were warned of the tiger country.

How is it then that as dusk falls  
We have reached the river's edge  
And set up camp in good spirits  
Having passed through unheeded danger?

Surely good fellowship has played a part  
As we took delight in our company  
And our understanding became fine wine:  
Surely that is the way to reach the shore?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On Getting Out Of Bed With A Cracked Rib

We lie there together my broken body and I  
Casting about for an approach to rising:  
Right arm splayed out seeking purchase  
Legs exploring the bed's edge for the floor.

We are aware that further pain is inevitable  
That any heaving up will touch the unbearable.  
We wait together, body and mind, fearing movement  
Pressed to rise to meet the functions of life.

The best of mind is kindness and poetry and music  
Visited by the clouds, kissed by the falling petal,  
The songs borne from the glades and snowfields -  
But powerless over pain and its jarred disharmony.

Nature is at no pains to conceal her imperative  
That beauty and meaning give way to the unendurable  
That she in the end will conquer with ice and fire  
As we drag ourselves about facing up to indifference.

We will try again my body and I to get out of bed  
To simply find our feet through the flinching agony,  
To resolve once more into sentience and physicality -  
Denying the basic truths of suffering and non-separation.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## On Regent Street In 1976

In those days, things were a lot quieter  
And out for a lunchtime walk  
Down Regent Street to Piccadilly Circus  
I was hailed by a boy on a large old bicycle.

It took me some time to recognize Douglas -  
He was wearing a heavy tan-coloured coat  
And dismounted somewhat clumsily  
From what I took to be his Gran's sit-up-and-beg bike.

Here was a lovely and warm young fellow  
Asking about my life - remembering  
That when we had known each other before  
I had been stepfather to a little girl.

Doubtless, he had been summoned  
To an imposing Georgian house in Mayfair  
To provide comfort and entertainment  
To its insouciant and privileged occupier.

He had been the boyfriend of my gay cousin  
Who was from the careless, hard and sharp side -  
Family who were unscrupulous and cutting  
But could also be witty and very entertaining.

Like Oscar Wilde, my cousin David believed  
'It is absurd to divide people into good and bad  
People are either charming or tedious':  
But both reserved the right to draw the distinction.

I mentioned my cousin to Douglas.  
He hadn't known David was now in San Francisco  
Having taken his Bentley out there to impress  
'I really liked him' he said, with a sad, shy grin.

Young Douglas never seemed tedious to me  
Just a nice well-presented poor boy from the East End  
And neither of us pretended to be charming:  
Just half-strangers well-met at the heart of things.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On Robert Pinsky's Shirt

Stuffed shirt, patrician, creases ironed out  
Something is not quite right I feel  
About your parables - about your morals.

But then I am also one of the privileged  
Although I am not of the neck-tie variety  
Being open neck, sleeves rolled up for work.

Theory is, I would give you the shirt off my back  
But in practice I just let my old t's accumulate  
At the back of the wardrobe until they sour.

Perhaps then there is nothing between us  
In our passing references to the others -  
The ones who sweatshop the oster seams

Those who, unlike us, long for the days' end  
Release from monotony and servitude  
And homecoming to pegged out squalor.

Take off the shirt, singlet, blouse or chemise  
And we are similar or such, being humankind  
Feeling the air around us or the touch of others  
Exposed and open to scrutiny and interpretation.

Consider the lilies how they grow, without spin  
And yet their glory outshines Solomon's shift  
And the grass clothed in heaven - cast into hell.

Perhaps a single poem can flower away the hurt  
Of the pinned-up bib behind cellophane wrapping  
A work of nature's art to offset the straightened material

But he said, if you wish to be perfect sell everything  
Give the proceeds to the poor keeping half a robe  
In return for treasures in heaven - and follow me.

He did not say, become a poet and muse on poverty  
Opine on the misfortunes of others and their losses:

The girls tossed like bales of cloth from the windowsill

Their skirts billowing up, showing stockings and bloomers  
Ready for the pavement ramming home the loose fabric  
The sidewalk roped off by wardens from the thoroughfare

Or the descendant of slaves, the field worker pickaninny  
Gathering the bolls into the basket to be weighed,  
The mill worker among the dusty clattering looms

Desperately awaiting time's up to return to her baby  
And Irma the old black lady who is a garment worker  
Checking cuts and seams, pockets and button holes

Making certain that the pins have setback the collar  
Showing its necklace to best advantage for the buyer  
Ensuring the transparent packaging is stretched taut.

And the word is and manifests - the labels explain  
Its cost, its clean smell, feel, colour, pattern and quality  
And whether it fits - fits the bill - is fit for purpose

The separation that is inevitable between us all  
And more particularly between the rich and the poor  
Between those who labour and the department store shopper

Between the poet and the subject of his poetry and pity -  
The pain that divides those who observe from those who suffer  
Silently to provide us with the covering we need - the second skin.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On Sexual Freedom - 'like A Rocking Horse To The Highest Bidder'

I love talking to poets and I thought  
That it was time for another chat with Hera Lindsay Bird  
Such that I clicked on her website and brought up 'Bisexuality':

'There's such a thing as too much sexual freedom....'  
Heidegger wrote that and he was bisexual too  
always naked on a black leash, scrubbing the telephone  
You think my heart is a shanty town...with fur curtains blowing

It's like turning your back on God.....but in a risqué halter neck  
Like a rocking horse at auction you go to the highest bidder  
You want to come home, but your home was destroyed in the war....  
And carefully refurbished, with an elegant leopard trim ...&quot;

Then I scrolled down and found a lead to Gonewild  
And had to click on that - just two degrees on the Web!

Where 'C\*\*tnugget-22 (f) acts: Age-24 Height-5'3&quot;  
Weight-Fluctuates Measurements-Who cares,  
every GW girl is different and they all look amazing! '

...

Had posted a fetching rear-end selfie  
Together with some loving hearts for viewers:  
???????????????

Which clicks me back to Heidegger on a leash...  
Though my mind immediately wanders to Nietzsche  
Being yoked and lashed by Lou Andreas-Salomé  
And I find myself searching again for the famous photo -

And then bringing up her poem 'Hymn to Life':

Surely, a friend loves a friend the way  
That I love you, enigmatic life —  
Whether I rejoiced or wept with you,  
Whether you gave me joy or pain.

I love you with all your harms;  
And if you must destroy me,  
I wrest myself from your arms,  
As a friend tears himself away from a friend's breast.

I embrace you with all my strength!  
Let all your flames ignite me,  
Let me in the ardor of the struggle  
Probe your enigma ever deeper.

To live and think millennia!  
Enclose me now in both your arms:  
If you have no more joy to give me —  
Well then—there still remains your pain.

... and pondering on the Wikipedia entry  
Which notes that in her later years  
Lou wrote a memoir 'Lebensrückblick'  
Based on her memories of her life as a free woman  
That sort of alluded, inter alia, to her relationship  
With the poet Rainer Maria Rilke  
Who she had noted 'was the finest Lesbian Poet since Sappho'.

'Whoever reaches into a rosebush may seize a handful of flowers;  
but no matter how many one holds, it's only a small portion of the whole.  
Nevertheless, a handful is enough to experience the nature of the flowers.

Only if we refuse to reach into the bush,  
because we can't possibly seize all the flowers at once,  
or if we spread out our handful of roses as if it were the whole of the bush itself

— only then does it bloom apart from us, unknown to us, and we are left alone.'

A few days before Lou's death in Gottingen in 1937  
The Gestapo confiscated her library.

As one of the first female psychoanalysts  
And one of the first women to write on female sexuality,  
She had written a book published in 1911 called Die Erotik  
And a well-regarded essay on anal-eroticism in 1916 -  
Both of which were admired by Freud who was Jewish  
And not popular in Germany at that time:

'You want to come home, but your home was destroyed in the war....  
Why does everything have to be so on fire? you ask yourself'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On The Centenary Of The Death Of Rosenberg's Rat

## I    Cosmopolitan Sympathies

Being of follower of Tom Paine -  
Like Rosenberg's Rat  
I have cosmopolitan sympathies.  
No doubt Remy would have said:  
'The world is my country  
To be a rat is my condition'  
Though in its squeak  
There would have doubtless been:  
'Un peu de sarcasme - Monsieur'  
[In an attempt to engage obliquely  
We idealists feign the droll and sardonic].

Across in the opposition trenches  
A German Corporal of Austrian origins  
Would not have approved of Remy or Rosenberg  
As he said some very nasty things  
About rats and Jews, purporting  
Both to be scavengers  
Who fought bloodily among themselves -  
With the latter hell bent on world domination -  
But Isaac wrote simply:  
'Nothing can justify war.  
I suppose we must all fight to get the trouble over.'

How the Gefreiter could have believed  
What he did is hard to credit  
Given that he was awarded the Iron Cross First Class  
At the special intercession of his Regimental Adjutant  
Leutnant Hugo Guttman who was also Jewish  
And who personally pinned the award to his chest.  
This he later wore as Führer und Reichskanzler.  
Hugo had been awarded the Iron Cross First Class  
Four years earlier to the day but was forced  
Twenty-five years later to flee to St Louis  
Where lived out his days as Henry G. Grant.

The Regimental Runner's life had been spared

At the Battle of St Quentin Canal in late 1918  
When the most decorated private in the British Army  
Henry Tandey had held his fire at Marcoing  
After Adolf had tottered into his rifle sights  
And as a sentiment the latter kept a copy  
Of an English newspaper report of Henry  
Being awarded his Victoria Cross  
For carrying a wounded comrade under fire  
And later acquired a copy of the painting by Matania  
That depicted Tandey's courage at the Kruiseke Crossroads

Of which he commented to Chamberlain at the Berghof:  
'That man came so near to killing me that  
I thought I should never see Germany again;  
Providence saved me from such devilishly accurate fire  
As those English boys were aiming at us'.  
Just a few short miles away my countryman  
Wilfred Owen died crossing the Sambre-Oise Canal  
Having won the Military Cross near Amiens  
And two years later his mother wrote to Rabindranath Tagore  
That Wilfred had said goodbye with:  
'When I go from hence, let this be my parting word'.

After the shrieking iron had stilled, the flames had cindered  
And the poppy was lustrous red, free of the dust of war,  
When the silence had come - the rats had a lean time  
With the end of their fresh meat rations  
But the trenches were filled, the borders opened  
And eventually dismantled in many places  
So people came and went as they pleased -  
Under Schengen and EU *acquis communautaire* -  
And scion Remy Ratatouille became a famous chef in Paris.  
It would be sweet to have dessert and sit back at this juncture  
But true stories are a movable feast and there is no separation.

## II Small Horizons

Growing up as a country boy of small horizons  
I was much in awe of old Edmond Tickle  
Who lived in a cottage on Long Lane in Wettenhall  
And worked then as a platelayer on the railways  
But who had been with the Cheshire Regiment

In Iraq 'chasing the Turks' - with his comrade Charlie Dickens,  
Who souvenired a copy of the Maude Proclamation in Baghdad:  
'Our armies do not come into your cities and lands  
As conquerors or enemies but as liberators -  
In the hope and desire of the British people that the Arab race  
May rise once more to greatness and renown...'

Britain had fielded an army of half a million men  
In the 'Mes-Pot' or Mesopotamia Campaign  
Of whom three quarters were from British India.  
Provisions and armaments for the sepoy were hugger-mugger  
And there were 3-4 doctors for every 3-4 thousand wounded.  
But conditions were not cushy for T. Atkins and E. Tickle either.  
During a three week period in 1917, temperatures  
Did not fall below 116 degrees Fahrenheit  
And 423 British and 59 Indian troops died of heat stroke.  
Though every effort was to be made to score as heavily as possible before the  
whistle blew  
And in October 1918 General Cobbe broke the Armistice of Mudros and occupied  
Mosul.

Outback of Townsville and up into Cape York  
I got to know Jack Kelly who had been a trooper  
With the Australian Light Horse in Palestine  
No doubt Jack have concurred with his English comrade Bob Wilson  
That, on crossing the border from Egypt, the land around Gaza  
Was 'delightful country, cultivated to perfection with chiefly barley and wheat  
If not better looking than on most English farms.  
The villages were very pretty - a mass of orange, fig and other fruit trees.  
The relief of seeing such country after the miles and miles  
Of bare sand was worth five years of a life.'  
The charges of the Light Horse and the Mounted Rifles became legendary.

So in December 1917, General Allenby walked  
Through the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem to show respect -  
British Prime Minister Lloyd George having described its capture as  
'A great morale boost and Christmas present for the Empire'.  
Allenby was the first Christian in many centuries to control Jerusalem.  
In 1099, Godfrey de Bouillon and the Roberts II of Flanders and Normandy  
Had taken Jerusalem from a Fatimid Garrison and  
'No one ever saw or heard of such slaughter of pagan people,  
For funeral pyres were formed from them like pyramids,

And no one knew their number except God alone'.  
And the Jews were incinerated in their synagogue refuge.

But things had not always gone to plan.  
Sir Charles Vere Ferrers Townshend's 6th Poona Division  
Had been besieged for five months at Kut-al-Amara  
And surrendered with 13,164 soldiers being taken prisoner  
For the British, this humiliation was followed by another  
Defeat in the Battle of Gallipoli four months later -  
Leading Curzon and Chamberlain to renew the campaign  
With greater vigour, arguing that 'there would be no net saving  
In troops if a passive policy in the Middle East  
Encouraged Muslim unrest in India, Persia and Afghanistan'  
So Jack and Edmond had to stick to the job.

And finally, the Australians under Chauvel swept in a Great Ride  
Spear-heading the capture of Homs, Damascus, Beirut and then Aleppo  
Traversing 800 kilometres from the Palestinian coast  
Across the plains of Armageddon and into Syria,  
As thousands of Turks and Arabs died and 78,000 were captured  
And T.E. Lawrence snarled at the Aussies winning the race to Damascus  
'Too sure of themselves to be careful... thin-tempered, hollow... instinctive'  
Meanwhile Townsend was made a Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath,  
And given the use of a yacht by the Pashas in Istanbul,  
Though they had executed, starved and brutalized his Indian troops.  
And he eventually became Member of Parliament for The Wrekin in Shropshire

III     What goes around, comes around

And now in the Pas-de-Calais and Picardy  
Come the summer, the rape seed will be gold  
Kissed by the deep high sky and the noble sun  
And the poplars will rustle in the light wind.  
But in the ancient land of the two rivers  
The crescent moon fades on barren land  
With sheep unshorn and the wheat unsown  
Shells, wrecks and sumps in the wilderness  
The sun rising pitiless where the shade is cut:  
So its sculptors rule with sneers of cold command  
And hands that kill let children go unfed.

And there will be wars and rumours of wars

Folk wanderings and escapes from bondage  
Pillars of fire before, and writing on the wall,  
Angered gods and stiff-necked supplicants,  
Promised lands flowing with milk and honey  
And homesick girls amid the alien corn.  
That there is nothing new under the sun is sure  
That we will wander following an empty ark  
For a century living off the fat of the land  
Or smitten by famine, plagued by boils and vermin  
Visited with iniquity to the third and fourth generations.

What goes around, comes around  
And what goes over the horse's head  
Comes out under its belly or behind its arse.  
So now we have thousands of dispossessed  
Fleeing from Aleppo and Baghdad  
The subject of a distant war and a want of peace  
For the pity is in the hundreds drowned  
And the thousands of fleeing children abducted:  
Of small figures floated face-down  
And brought to the shore and its pebbles  
With their tiny faces posed for reportage.

Higgledy piggledy - it starts again  
Rats in a hamper, sheep in a pen  
Flies in a bottle, frogs on the boil  
Trusting to sieves in seeking safe soil,  
Longing for harbour, haven and rest  
Risking it all - the worst and the best:  
Food for the waves, praying for land  
Children now mute with mouthfuls of sand  
Hist! Square shoulders, close up your gates  
We'll not let them in to our privileged states.

Now the dispossessed are again like rats  
For them the world is their country  
And to do good for their own is their denomination -  
With no place for them, they take their place  
In forced marches, in queues at broken fences  
Dashing, evading... on the look-out for scraps.  
But then the sea did not part for our own children  
As fired with portents and miracles

They crusaded and sought Jerusalem  
But were sold Into slavery by cruel merchants  
Or played to the deep by the Pied Piper

'There must have been a moment when  
There not being a war on went away -  
How did we get from the one case of affairs  
To the other case of affairs? '  
'Do you mean 'Why did the War start'?  
'The war started because of the vile warmongers  
And their villainous empire-building? '  
'No - the real reason was that  
It was too much effort not to have a war'.

The logic remains the same.  
There have been many villainies in pursuit of power  
Many treacheries in pursuit of oil, land and resources  
But the real reason is that life is not held sacred.  
When a shepherd in Lemnos named Nasos  
Milks his goats early to feed half-starved children  
When a Croatian policeman turns away in tears  
As a little girl embraces him for small kindnesses  
When helpers who visit The Jungle in Calais conclude:  
'Beneath the tragedy lies a painful, beautiful humanity of the most raw kind'  
The world is still ours and doing some little good keeps faith.

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Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On The Cliffs Above Houghton Bay

FOR THE EVER-WALKING MAN IN THE WOOLLY BEANIE

Little man, you are walking  
To a blank and darkened sky  
Step by step advancing  
However much you try.

Little man, you are blinking  
Averting thus my smile  
Step by step retreating  
A fearful distant mile.

Little man are you thinking  
Of times of joy that passed  
Or are you just avoiding  
The fact that nothing lasts?

Little man existing  
No one takes your eye  
Not even chance for grieving  
As strangers pass you by.

Little man, you are trudging  
Past a bench that's lost your name  
No dates of life appearing  
That celebrate the same.

Little man, you are faltering  
Each footfall brings you near  
The cliff top way still winding  
Where spray may splash a tear.

Little man no caring  
Only you can see it through  
Time its tide is keeping  
On the path that bears us two.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On The Closure Of Beeston Auction, Cheshire

In summertime at Beeston  
The auction pens were few  
The springtime heifers gone  
The dry cows yet to come,  
As farms brought harvest home.

The hay was sweet but short on sun  
When dew was on the lea  
And lots were cast on mowing then  
Or tedding swaths once more  
Or bringing heavy bales to store.

But if there was a spell  
To take a break the while  
And sell a bobby-calf or two  
Some brass for beers was found  
With whiskey chaser rounds.

And long upon the seasons  
The castle kept its watch  
On straight and crooked dealers  
On tip-offs on the stock  
And kickbacks paid for 'luck'.

Then at last the gavel fell  
As those who bid held back,  
The tricksters and the touts  
The buyers with their doubts,  
To hear the 'all done?' shouts.

Now the yards are silent  
And the gates are closed  
Weeds are finding purchase  
The farmers' deals are done  
The last lots loaded on.

Still the castle lours  
Like a guardian lion  
And bargains once hand-shaken

Are settled for a tidy sum  
Paid up for time to come.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On The Inherent Nature Of Art

The dawning, the brightening, and the light of day:  
Sometimes we see things as they really are,  
As they are becoming, as they take on existence.

Perception, recognition and realization follow  
The same path - in the noting of immanent moments -  
In the undertaking of the crafting of a work of art.

And those who practice their arts well and fully  
Can cast back the challenge to the ebbing shadows -  
Creating moments from nowhere for our reflection.

'Quod est inferius est sicut quod est superius.  
Et quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius,  
ad perpetranda miracula rei unius.'

What is below is there for what is above  
What is above rests thence on what is below  
That the miracle of unity may be accomplished.

[Treatise of Hermes Trismegistos - the 'thrice-wise' divine patron of the arts]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On The New York Times Apology For Apathy

For the Exhausted Majority

I am sad that you feel so exhausted  
About the political spats between  
Those who think the others stupid  
And those who think the others evil.

That it is not really about policy  
Or decency or doing the right thing  
But more about psychology-based  
Tribalism and the dynamics of resentment.

That it only concerns the fruits of privilege:  
Being a matter of competing narratives  
Between nasty brutish and short Hobbes  
And jaded noble savages de Rousseau.

Don't let the lies get you down  
It's only a drama orchestrated by power  
Go and have a good lie down -  
The Evil will wake you when it's over.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# On The Philosophy Of Life

The news that the American poet John Ashbery  
Had died, reminded me that he wrote, apropos  
Of the possibility of promulgating a new moral climate  
[In the slipstream of counter-culture Haight-Ashbury]:  
'Still, there's a lot of fun to be had in the gaps between ideas.  
That's what they're made for! '

Not only ideas - language is full of holes  
Even down to the spelling.  
Setting aside distinctions between fully peculiar and funny ha-ha  
This is an opportunity then for me to register one gap  
In my appreciation John - under my reprobation  
At the form that your surname has taken in American English.

I had a fine, bright and dandy American friend once  
Whose lustrous black hair betrayed his Italian origins  
And his surname De Rosa. But he confided that his mother's  
Family had English origins and that her surname had been Shrewsbury  
Of which he rapidly averred his intense dislike  
With its connotations to him of burying shrews.

This sounded appalling to me as I had been brought up  
Thinking that the lovely old county town of Shropshire  
Had a rather upmarket and sophisticated name  
Even though it started life as Scrobbesburh / Scrobbesbyrig  
Which may mean 'Scrobb's fort' or 'the fortified place in the bushes'  
[It had been taken from the Welsh who knew it as Pengwern].

Many years later, when the British took Fort Duquesne in 1758, from the French  
They built Fort Pitt around which the city of Pittsburgh grew up  
After Lord Jeffrey Amherst ordered smallpox contaminated blankets  
To exterminate the Amerindians who opposed western expansion  
Adding sadly that England is not ready for hunting them down with dogs.  
Clearly it could have been Pittsbury but even I can see the flaws in that.

Sadly, I reckon we have had a bit too much of clever ambiguity  
About the triumph of putting possibilities into play  
Or what the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette calls transformations, surprises, gaps  
In the drama of the mind at work - where poetry is not about 'content'.

If we are talking about exploring the wild, uneasy, spikey, pesky places  
Of a fully-lived life John, can 'u' say you did your best - come the spade or ash?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Once There Was A Garden

[for The Syrian poet Mohammad Bashir al-Aani and his son Elyas]

Like a lost boy as the fever peaks  
I dream of the doorway of my home  
Compounded by desolate abandonment

I have returned at last in my mind's eye  
To see my mother making bread  
And hear my father unroll his mat for prayer

And I am chilled and shaken by the beauty  
Of the fallen facing stones and broken concrete  
And the litter that rustles in the hot winds

Only rubble remains but there it is  
Garlanded by burnt rags and severed flesh  
As the sun's harshness brightens and burns

Once there were family meals and feasts  
There was laughter and companionship  
Our ancestry was recited and the future sung

And now my son you are brought to this  
In the memory of your dear mother:  
Would that I could die alone for you

Caught guiltless in the branches of a great oak  
They will sacrifice you as well to bitterness:  
'My son, my son - would God I had died for you'.

...

To calm our fears before the sword  
They are giving us sherbet and water melon juice:  
Lets us sip these in the garden where we will be still.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# One Equal Temper

I Ulysses have seen much and I repent.  
Always when the storms cease, the horizon  
Flattens and the circumference returns.  
So must the ship seek still by star and lode  
That at least there is some hope of harbour  
Come to ground in calm clear waters.

Do not tell me again of mystery islands  
Or the sirens seductive in their melody  
Or empires to be conquered come the dawn.  
Let me simply find a sand shore and footfall  
Set down and landed on the ocean's edge  
And feel again the particles of broken shells.

I will not be so foolish as to think of home  
Or finding hearth and solace in an ancient hall  
Or dream of sons to carry name and blazon.  
My only thought is that the storms are done  
And that the line is drawn so clear and straight  
That sets the lesser and the greater blue.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# One Kooka Short Of A Barbecue - The Kookaburra

Cook-a-bite under the old gum tree,  
See your steak go winging free  
Laugh Kookaburra laugh -  
Bang another snag on the old barbie

Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree  
Casing all the lamb chops he can see  
Stop, Kookaburra! Stop  
Leave some there for me

Barbie-robber sits in the old gum tree  
Counting all the burgers - one two three  
Stop, robber-cobber! Stop  
That's a mockery - that's mi tea.

Kookaburra lands on the old barbie  
Merry, merry, merry little bird is he  
Singe, Kookaburra! Singe  
Singe your butt - beauty!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# One Woman Army

In Honour of Qandeel Baloch - One Woman Army

'So she that doth redeem her thence might wear  
Without corrival all her dignities'.

'I know I am small but I am strong  
Life taught me lessons early  
As a woman, I must stand up for myself  
As women, we must stand up for each other

I stand against false beliefs and old practices  
For those women who have been  
Forcefully married and sacrificed  
I will fight for right. I will not give up

I will reach my goal: nothing will stop me  
No matter how many times I fall  
I am a fighter and will bounce back.  
If you have will power, nothing can let you down

Love me or hate me both are in my favour  
If you love me, I will always be in your heart  
If you hate me, I will be in your mind

It's time to bring a change because the world is changing.  
Let's open our minds and live in the present'.

She told me:

'Mum I'm so tired, of the cases and the criticism.  
But my time will come.  
Everyone says I have a bad reputation  
But I'll show them all what a simple girl from a small village can do.'

...

'She was a girl just like you  
She laughed a lot  
She talked a lot.'

[In her own words - and those of her mother]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Our Lady Of The Six O'clock Shadow

FOR SAINT WILGEFORTIS

The first bad-ass bitch with a beard  
Ignored her booty to become a saint:  
She took no mind folk thought her weird  
And traded beauty to emancipate.

A virgin queen with curls and stubble  
Men loved her curves but grew deterred  
By ticklish fuzzy follicle trouble  
Whose closer shaves would best go unobserved.

She was a feminist with cheeks remembered  
As prickly though she didn't give damn,  
And happily with shades of growth encumbered  
Her holy hirsute face dissed cute and glam.

Princess of the shadow and the cross  
Remember me as I bewail your loss.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Our Life As Stars

Is it that, as we live, we burn like stars?  
That in our deepest hearts, emotions  
Are transformed into new elements  
By the furnaces of hatred and love?

That starting simply with the commonplace  
Living may progress the transmutation  
Of stuff into the heavier rarities  
Of understanding and compassion

That at our death - at the burning out -  
New elements may be brought to alchemy  
From the crucible of good and evil  
That constitutes and represents our life?

And that those traces of ethereal dust  
Be then cast out to seed the universe?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Overheard In A Pc Swamp

Nymph, nymph, flash me your boobs!  
Piss off pervert. Why do you stare at them?

Show them me.

No.

Show them me. Show them me.

No.

Then I will howl all night in the reeds,  
lie in the mud and howl for them.

Scumbag, why do you love them so?

They are better than stars or water,  
Better than voices of the wind that sings,  
Better than those of a mortal daughter,  
The naiad's small pert water wings.

Hush, I stole them out of the moon.

Show me your boobs, I want them.

No.

I will howl in a deep lagoon  
For your little maiden breasts,  
I love them so.  
Give them me. Give them.

No.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Overseas Love - For Reinaldo Arenas

That child with the round dirty face  
Is always at my side in the street  
As I walk to my air-conditioned office  
Where I make plans for his better future.

He thinks me naive and easily inveigled:  
But for me he is a temporary nuisance  
As I engage in geopolitical engineering  
All to his best interest.

Believe me, I know what is good for him:  
I am an expat expert in development planning  
And can recall theories, run models  
And recount and apply my experience.

It's all very well young man asking for change,  
I know you would prefer to steal my wallet:  
I will not accompany you that's for sure  
There is a kind of knowing evil to your smile.

Go back to your cardboard square on the pavement  
Or to the thatched bough shed that's home  
While I calculate how many days are left  
To my assignment and what I am saving.

You are dirty and untrustworthy  
And knowing you too well  
Could raise a host of insanitary horrors -  
Threatening even restricted camaraderie.

My work is for the long-term good  
And little point is served in more than a 'hi'  
And an occasional purchase of your chewing gum:  
I bought your sister drinks last night.

The future is looking bright my little friend  
There will be irrigation and factories:  
And who knows, if you become a poet  
You can write your vengeance.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Ovid's Ode For The Getae

When I in Rome the Emperor displeased  
I little thought the Empire so diseased  
That at its margins lay the hairy Getae  
And I an exile here with you - yet I  
Now pay you tribute with my ode  
Hirsute fellows with your breeks and woad.

Consider though the Roman world  
Its culture, wealth and might unfurled,  
The meanest tribesman must admire,  
That trows for togas they must now retire  
And take a bath and scrub their backs  
Put down their weapons and espouse the Pax.

Once clean consider then my art  
Forego the sneer and moderate the fart  
I write of change and transformation  
To civilisation for the former Thracian.  
What then of freedom if you have the tub  
Poetic conversation and a post-bath rub?

The nymphs will tender wine and treats  
And luxury release its soft deceits  
As steam and soaping mellow you -  
Be clean behind the ears my newly shaven crew  
And clear your mind of impious errors -  
What's in between is now the Emperor's.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Ozymandias - An Update

Whose is this lost and heartless arcane land  
Of pride without pity, faced white with stone,  
Whose monuments to power's excess stand  
In mockery of simple flesh and bone?

And those who smile and sneer in cold command  
Let children drown - jeering the stateless dead  
Whose simple needs were scorned and then denied  
At banquets set at which the rich were fed.

Instead let us commemorate the lost:  
Let those who value kids and family  
Dream of boundary rivers safely crossed  
And girls and fathers brought to safety

Setting aside all pomp and statuary  
For loving care and loving memory.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Padparadscha

Simple pure girl of the forest people  
Conceived in desire of the doe deer  
Cast like a fawn dropped into the earth  
Deserted and left for the wolves  
And then become a source of life

Guarding the clearing and the vines  
Singing of her longing for the hunter  
The mountain god of sky and springs  
Master of the clouds' pavilions  
Of the torrents, rapids and cascades

Tempted first by the young warrior  
Who shrank back into the woodland  
At the challenge of the villagers  
Leaving a gift of honey and mangoes  
A bounty she fed to an old man in kindness

Who then demanded her innocence  
But she drew back from the embrace and shame  
Cursing that neither young or old would suit  
To take the place of the source of mists  
And the jeweled rainbow above the waterfall

But when an elephant broke from the jungle  
The old man promised to save the girl Valli  
If she agreed to submit and marry him  
And she having no choice took the hermit sage  
Finding him become her quickening dream

The young warrior Kandeyaka peacock-plumed  
Spirit of the river Kataragama gem-studded  
Losing herself to the run of the stream  
Grasping the sapphire treasures of realization  
Becoming the consort of the divine mountain

Tracing her arms deep, dabbling down her fingers  
Embracing the ripples for lights and flecks  
The multi-hued essence of awareness

The sacred pinks and reds and golds and amber  
Of the common stone become padparadscha.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Paeon For Scruffy

The little girl-cat  
Likes the wake-up  
Coffee ceremony  
Arching her back  
For some stroking  
Padding the duvet  
And then kissing  
Jane on the nose  
She knows that love  
Is being mothered  
And then being mum.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Pain-Ridden

Weary palfrey, who is it kicks your hide  
Stumbling along the way to journey's end?  
... footfalls darkening the wayside  
As tones of all too early dusk descend?

Husbandry and horsemanship disapprove!  
Broken beast, he has left it far too late:  
He brings the whip to bear from loss of love  
And growing distance from care's best estate.

Sharing anger, he rakes the bloody spur -  
All honour lost - his heartlessness impressed  
.. and you the mount must this disgrace endure  
With scar rent flanks in faithfulness distressed.

How heavy then to bear the penalty  
Of ridership with star-crossed cruelty?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Parts

We like to see our lives as a whole  
Coming to resolution - seeing the point -  
Everything having progressed gradually  
Despite the inevitable trials and set-backs.

What though if our lives are atoms of experience  
Composing bits and parts and aggregates  
That stand largely for themselves for a time  
Such that there is no narrative or story?

The sequences and trajectories that we see  
Being simply in the mind's eye, as comforters,  
Allowing us the illusion of heroic singularity -  
The intimation of progression and redemption.

.....

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Patrick The Blue Heeler Cattle Dog

Bright he bounds through opened door  
He's my mate of that I'm sure -  
Flashing a toothy smile for me  
He sniffs my strides inquisitively.

A pat, he shakes a coarse grey paw -  
A bowl and soon he asks for more.  
Tell me Patrick 'How'd you be? '  
Watch the sofa mate it ain't a tree.

Soon he's scouting out the floor -  
And at the bin for something raw.  
Hold on a mo mate, can't you see  
That's no place to cock and pee.

Sam you had better take your saw  
You should have done so long before -  
Don't let your bloody dog make free  
He's itching now against my knee.

Back in the truck and close the door.  
This audience is ended mate - no more.  
He's got the chops I bought for tea  
And there's a wet patch on my new settee.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Pedra Senhora

In the natural and engineered stone showroom  
Our small party turned down an aisle  
Between sets of kitchen 'Slab Gallery' slices  
Browsing a last look at bench top options.

It was a 'coup de foudre' or love at first sight  
Or perhaps better in Portuguese 'amor à primeira vista'  
Given that we are talking of black mosaic marinace granite  
From the State of Bahia in Brasil

-

Cobbles, pebbles, boulders, rubble, rounded scree  
Of grey marble, mottled vulcanite, gneiss and quartzite  
Tumbled in an ancient riverbed, conglomerate compacted,  
Imbedded in a crystalline matrix of gleaming black biotite

Brought to light from a deep polymict metamorphosis,  
Under eons of extraordinary pressures and temperatures  
1 billion years or so distant - possibly during the SAMBA orogeny  
Caused by Norway encroaching on proto-South America

-

Like peering into a deep clear profound eye to the past  
unconditional, unquestionable, undoubted, unequivocal,  
unlimited, unrestricted, unrestrained, unbounded, unbound,  
boundless, infinite, ultimate, utter, sovereign, omnipotent.

Turn away I must my supremely beautiful Medusa,  
Reaching for Jacques Monod's talisman of Chance and Necessity:

A totally blind process can by definition lead to anything;  
It can even lead to vision itself.

Man knows at last that he is alone  
In the universe's unfeeling immensity,  
Out of which he emerged only by chance.  
His destiny is nowhere spelled out, nor is his duty.

The kingdom above or the darkness below: it is for him to choose.

L'homme sait enfin qu'il est seul  
Dans l'immensité indifférente de l'univers  
D'où il a émergé par hasard.  
Non plus que son destin,  
Son devoir n'est écrit nulle part.  
A lui de choisir entre le royaume et les ténèbres.

Un processus totalement aveugle  
Peut par définition conduite à n'importe quoi;  
Cela peut même conduire à la vision elle-même.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Penguin Love Knot Sealed - Monty, Mabel And Willy

The wind was keening on the ice,  
Billowing with all his might:  
He did his very best to make  
The snow drifts fluffed and light-  
And to make things crisp and nice  
Plumped ice sheets for the Penguins' sake.

The sea was rime as rhyme could be,  
The rocks were smooth as smooth  
As Monty preened a tap-dance  
To let prospective lovers see  
Groovy slippery flipper moves  
Over easy egg without mischance.

Thinking of little happy-footed patter  
And shuffling pie-bald down the aisle  
A star-struck young bird named Mabel  
Whose heart had begun to flutter  
Watching Monty's Eggnam style  
Told him she was up-for-it and able.

But Willy the seal was lolloping  
With mischief and worse on his mind  
Of having it off while doing his thing:  
'Hornithological mollocking'!  
He wasn't the purist of seals of his kind  
When he saw the chance of a casual fling

He had no business to be there  
A cad amongst the rookery  
'It's very rude of him, ' young Mabel said  
'To interpose his blubber here  
When courtship's strictly birdily  
For lifetime bonds when once we wed";.

Now Willy pounced or rather rollicked  
Seizing Monty as he upped the dance  
And squashed him in a fierce embrace  
That dropped him as he frolicked

While Mabel gawked at this advance,  
Squawking of an inter-trans-disgrace!

'I weep for you, Chilly Willy said:  
'I deeply sympathize.'  
As with ersatz tears he padded out  
And left poor Monty iced and weak  
While Mabel dried her streaming eyes  
And pecked him squarely on the beak.

'O Monty, ' said the Emperor's daughter,  
&quot;My lips and yours are sealed  
Come home with me and be the one&quot;.  
No answer though was brought her  
As this was just what fate revealed  
When Willy left, young Monty followed on.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Perfect Spring Night

In the holiday let in the small hours  
The battery-driven wall-clock  
Goes tchuck-tchuck as the minutes pass  
But time stands still - marking time -  
And the big hand stalls on 'twelve to'  
Bouncing back - tchuck-tchuck -  
As I make no progress with my pain.

Somehow my bladder won't settle  
It seems wrung out, strangulated, aching  
No doubt a sign of things to come -  
And the times past when there was no pain  
Seem so distant now as the minutes agonize -  
No sense in returning to the bed covers  
And hanging my leg out beyond the duvet.

I push back the ranch slider and go out  
Into the perfect springtime night-sky  
And arrange two bean-bag seats to loll on  
Gazing up at the extraordinary vastness  
And the multitudes of stars that wheel slowly,  
For I prefer the comfort of the heavens  
Having no faith that misery can be held still.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Perfumed Kiss

After they had gleaned the wildfowl snares  
She should not have smiled and cleared her mouth  
But they were very young - out-daring scares -  
Longings and being too near were enough.

Long-summer sunset light across the fen -  
Come dusk, the brutal blow and depths for her -  
Beheaded girl never to see the sky again  
Lips betrayed by her fleeing lover.

Now here is that girl's face - envisioned!  
Broad brow, sapphire eyes, dark amber skin,  
After these years come to life, newly risen  
Free of the peat grave - our kissing cousin

At once atoned - named now with reverence  
Her resined breath outlasts the ritual axe.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Perhaps 2118

I am grown old in the years' contempt  
And the rise and fall of the kind old sun  
In lands late loved and dreams of lost content  
Whose moments of ceasing are close to done.

But as I grow old, they are clearer now  
The young who lost their youth that we should live -  
They come and chat with me and tell me how  
They smile at us and laugh as they forgive.

They come with heart-beat kisses for their kin  
And boons of comradeship with former foe  
Not caring who may lose and who may win  
Keen that trust and understanding just grow:

"These tags and talismans we pass to you  
Wear them, sweet friends and to our names be true"

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Personal Trainer

## FAT WITH THE PROMISE OF LEAN STREAKS

Late harvest saw us lifting bales to trailers  
And up from the trailers to shippon lofts  
Using a 2-pronged pitchfork or pikel  
Jabbed centre-bale and hefted up in one sweep.

At the glooming of a late summer's day  
The last loads would be brought in  
As a chill caught sweat and chaff  
With aches akimbo as the tractor backed up.

Dank bales leaved with Cheshire autumn  
From the flats along the Ankersplatt  
A fair jag on and one last tussle  
To put them overhead aired aloft.

&quot;Tha mun shape lad  
Dunna be like th'owd woman  
With a belly-full of butter milk  
An wimmy-wammy i'the bitlin.

There inna any way but reet.  
Tha mun stand reet lad -  
Jab an swing in one go  
Shifting as th'weight rises&quot;.

Big men and me a youth of sixteen  
Jokes and hard judgments -  
But they are long gone  
Mown down by salty home-cured bacon -  
Fat with the promise of lean streaks.

....

Late in life I have come back to the gym  
And succumbed to the debonaire charm  
Of my personal trainer Maria  
Who comes from Wroclaw or `vrotswaf.

She has devised a program to improve me  
And I stand looking at myself in the mirror  
Holding a weighted ball out-stretched  
Balancing on a BoSu and bending low.

I try to think of new things to say or ask  
About Poland to reduce the pain -  
But then she has me bridging  
And holding for 10 more - she can't count.

"That's very good"  
She says unconvincingly:  
"Lift your tummy up  
And squeeze your glutes.

Take a break if you are dizzy -  
Next time bring a water bottle.  
Now for your favourite  
The lunges, leading leg straight at first".

Beautiful people in pink and black lycra  
Pounding music and purposeful endeavour  
And I am still here  
Ready for a chick-pea and kinwa salad at the Maranui -  
Fat with the promise of lean streaks.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Plain Mr Robbing-Free T

Sir Robin banked some bonuses with great big options  
As he went among the citizens and bilked them till they bled.  
On Wednesday and on Saturday,  
Especially on the latter day,  
He vaunted o'er the populace - and this is what he said:  
'I am Sir Robin! ' (Ring the till!)  
'I am Sir Robin! ' (Rubber stamp!)  
'I am Sir Robin,  
'With my cold-faced lying!  
'I'll take that, and that, and that! '

Sir Robin traded inside and practiced tax evasion;  
A pair of dodgy doings of which he was particularly fond.  
On Tuesday and on Friday,  
Just to make the books look tidy,  
He would edit the accounts with a fiddle-stick wand.  
'I am Sir Robin! ' (That's gone)  
'I am Sir Robin! ' (Blank space!)  
'I am Sir Robin,  
'With my cold-faced lying!  
'Is there anything else they can trace? '

Sir Robin woke one morning and his credit took a dive.  
His accounts had been sequestered and cleared of all the loot.  
He was brought to judge and jury  
And tasked to tell his story  
While his victims waved a bankrupting salute.  
'You are Sir Robin? My, my.  
'You are Sir Robin? Dear, dear.  
'You are Sir Robin  
'With your cold-faced lying?  
'Delighted to meet you here! '

Sir Robin went a journey and he found a lot of cell mates.  
Who bullied him and shunned him and put porridge in his bed.  
Erasing every minus sign  
They scored and tweaked his bottom line  
As they put him through the wringer - and this is what they said:  
'You are Sir Robin - don't laugh!

'You are Sir Robin - don't cry!  
'You are Sir Robin  
'With your cold-faced lying -  
'Sir Brian the Lying, goodbye! '

Sir Robin struggled home again and wound down his entities.  
Sir Robin took his dodgy books and threw them on the fire.  
He is quite a different person  
Now he hasn't got his options on,  
And he goes about the city as a dealer who's retired.  
'I am Sir Robin? Oh, no!  
'I am Sir Robin? Who's he?  
'I haven't any title, I'm Treasury;  
'Plain Mr. 'Robbing-Free' T.'

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Playful Moon

A bright hot clear day  
On the bank at the Basin  
Watching slow cricket

Southee is working  
At dislodging Angelo  
Matthews with bouncers

The oval below  
Is flecked with white figures  
The crowd is festive

Some young guys come up  
And camp out under the shade  
Of my tree - jostling.

Earrings, tattoos, beer  
Good mates, good times under the  
Pohutakawa

Look says one: "the moon -  
I love the moon in daylight  
A smudge on a lens"

Listening gently:  
Poetry is everywhere -  
It's my round next.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Poetry And Pastry

A trusty old poet in case he  
Ran short of literary gravy  
Baked poetry rimmed with pastry  
Into pies that were rhymed and tasty  
But conversed with recipes vaguely.

Said a prodigious old poet of note,  
Wrapping pies in the limericks he wrote:  
'Rimmed or rhymed - so long as they are tasty -  
Oblivious of poetry or pastry -  
There'll be crusty and juicy - whatever you quote'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Power Is Life And So It Takes Its Course

FOR RUPERT MURDOCH AND JERRY HALL

'Will you love me, as I have my way  
When the prostate flares on cue?  
Now the charms of youth have passed away  
Will true love see us through?

'For ancient roosters, it's mostly swagger  
With swivelled hips in walking frame  
I'm off my rocker just like Jagger  
Though fair and balanced still in name

'Oh, I love you for your catwalk art  
And the blush the cheek has dusted,  
But most I love you as a celeb tart  
Whose bigger bang be busted

'When I'm riding round the world  
I can get no satisfaction  
Except with you my 6 foot girl  
Now you supply my girlie action

'I don't want you to cook my bread  
Just be there when I'm sad and blue  
And leave some buns upon the bed.  
So I can toast and spread a few

'Old men need to clinch a squeeze  
With champagne and vibrator  
The more to tease and please  
A lanky Yankee captivator

'As the Sun goes down  
On Fox and Friends and my Agenda  
When there's no else around  
I need your loving tender.

'For the eyes are all the soul has left  
With you I see right through:

That wiles and aisles have purchase kept  
With pearls and diamonds just for you

'I'll take you to the Rugby  
An Aussie proud and free  
Though when it comes to making money  
It's the USA for me.

'From now on I'll set the tone  
So see whose tricks are bigger:  
Best not play around, I'll tap your phone  
Just call me Dirty Digger!

'I may not be a Stone who sings  
My blowsy groupie queen  
But if you die a tone still rings  
As wretched hacks despoil the scene

'So the ageing dingo sly and ruthless  
Runs down calves without remorse  
Though I'm old, I'm not toothless  
Power is life and so it takes its course'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Prodigal

The world is in a bad way.  
But if it could come to pass  
I would watch out for it  
And then take it in my arms  
Clapping it with manly hugs and pats  
Swallowing my tears  
Knowing it had returned  
From fain eating what the swine would eat.

And I would kill the fatted calf  
Or provide the contemporary equivalent  
Of a pot roast in the slow cooker  
With a tray of roasted veggies  
And some lightly steamed greens,  
Taking the infusion  
To make some gravy  
For a good feed around the family table.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Prompter

There are clues that dialogue is ending  
The routine cues no longer whisper back  
And messages the silences are sending  
Hint of declamation way off-track.

Deftly draw the curtain on the story  
The mumbling of a monologue onstage  
Life and its strange eventful history:  
The seventh act reveals the final age.

"I'm losing my mind, aren't I"; he said  
She replied: "I will remember for you",  
Ready to prompt him in the days ahead  
Coaxing what yet remains to see it through.

Rehearsing memory herself tight-lipped  
She adds a note to margin on the script.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Pussy Riot Drowned Out

Ding, dong, bell  
Pussy's in the well  
Freedom's gone to hell!  
Who put her in?  
Little Vladdie Putin.  
Who helped the dump  
Little Donnie Trump.  
What cocky boys were they  
To grab her where they may  
By quim and curl and velvet  
They stiffened it as they felt it  
And hastened her descent.  
By drowning all dissent.  
A snatch that couldn't fail  
A wet patch in the pail  
For a past-it piece of tail -  
A sad and sorry tale -  
See her downward sail!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Qrc

At the edge of sleep  
Patterns of light  
Coalesce, glow and fade:  
The Quick Response Code  
Of the enveloping absences  
In our matrix barcode  
Scanned when we pass  
Through the check-out  
Of the day's supermarket trolley  
Salmagundi of experiences.

Hopefully no malicious codes  
Will overwrite the legitimate  
Contents of this portmanteau  
And expunge it overnight  
With a tagging or attack tagging  
Upsetting the apple cart plus-plus  
As the error correction function  
Fades and the mask pattern  
Is inverted, dwindles beyond a spot  
And is finally turned off.

With a last reading registering  
At the Lotto booth on the way out:  
'This is Not a Winning Ticket'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Qualia And Instancy

SEAS END

The little stub-nosed ferry  
Disappears behind the headland:  
If I swept away the rocky horizon  
Would I find her there?

She passes by and is past  
Making way in quickening swells.  
If we had shared that moment  
Would your gaze vouchsafe

A passage, imprint or quality  
Of sea losses to the land's edge?  
Did you - do you see what I see  
An instant the straight is crossed?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Quantum Infatuation

There are problems with relativity  
And matching it to quantum mechanics  
In trying to understand how  
In the great scheme of things  
The fabric of matter and time  
Comes apart when existence is radically uncertain.

Perhaps quantum gravity and quantum entanglement  
Provide some means of explaining spooky action at a distance  
With the bolt and throw of things being composed of threads  
Or perhaps minute space-time configurations that are quantized.

Speaking from my own experience I can only say that  
All these things are likely to be intermittently attractive  
And subject to sudden enhancement, swirling, and diminution -  
In the equivalents of passion, enchantment and murmuration -  
Such that may one reasonably talk about quantum infatuation.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Quietly I Catch Its Presence

The morning is one of the most glorious:  
The sunlight is making surfaces shine  
Transmuting their forms to treasures  
Such that presence and beauty align.

Do what you must restless relentless time  
To take away the lightness for shadow:  
This pure sunlit scene will always abide  
And I will protect it from foreshadow.

Time cannot devour this bright circumstance:  
Aside the lion's paws, the tiger's jaws,  
Like the Phoenix it is immune from fears  
And will always signify existence.

Quietly I catch its presence then  
And trace its beauty with a golden pen.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Rakiura Wren [for Sheila Natusch]

Diminutive, sticky-beak bird questing  
Hopping hither along the window frame  
Inquiring into life - looking, tapping  
Always wide-eyed and eager ... spin-drift tame.

No housing-keeping for you Rakiura wren  
No offspring to mind other than your books:  
Only the shingle-wash as it breaks again  
And the sky clearing snagged cloud bait hooks

The scream of the gulls and their shrill arising  
Spinifex, sand tussock, native musk ... flax  
Raukawa dolphins and whales surfacing  
The whip of the wind with its foremast lash

The songs of the straits and the lost islands  
Brought to reflection with claw-pen hands.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Reconciliation

The trouble is:

Our understanding of space-time,  
And gravity in particular,  
Is built from Einstein's equations of general relativity,  
Whereas the extreme conditions of the very early universe  
Can only be described by quantum mechanics -

No one knows how to reconcile the two

And as Rovelli has explained:

'The sun bends space around itself  
And the Earth does not turn around it because of a mysterious force  
But because it is racing directly in a space which inclines,  
Like a marble that rolls in a funnel.  
There are no mysterious forces generated at the centre of the funnel;  
It is the curved nature of the walls which causes the marble to roll.

...

In short, the general theory of relativity  
Describes a colourful and amazing world where universes explode,  
Space collapses into bottomless holes,  
Time sags and slows near a planet,  
And the unbounded extensions of interstellar space  
Ripple and sway like the surface of the sea'.

Just so are the mysteries  
Of our relationships  
Where spun by an austere imperative like love  
We find colourful and amazing worlds  
Where rainbows shimmer  
As suns shine  
And when it is lost  
Time slows and the unbounded  
Miseries of loneliness  
Diffuse endlessly left untouched.

As for quantum mechanics

It seems that all exists in a haze of probability  
So that we have a certain chance of being  
At Point A  
Another chance of being at Point B...  
Ad infinitum.  
And what is true of mass  
Is also true of a particle's other properties,  
Like its momentum, energy and spin  
Such that there will always be imprecision -  
As this is a fundamental property.

So my stars  
My loved ones  
I might never have found you  
In the crowd  
And my universe might never have become.

So my insights  
My understandings  
Might have been forever mute,  
Out of place, out of time  
And my heart and thoughts  
Unreconciled.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Reflections On Island Bay

I live in a house with plenty of glass  
So that vistas and perspectives and mirages  
Are part of every day in plain sight -  
Grandeur stretched across and beyond the little town.

I often rise early - as dawn's gold gloves  
Finger the rims of the Rimutakas  
And the stars start to fade,  
Spilt like gemstones from the robber sun.

And Pencarrow and Baring Head,  
Like jewels that have dropped to earth,  
Sparkle on the steel grey cloths of the headlands  
As fold after fold wraps back from shadow.

And the Bay below is still or wild or fierce  
And though this may seem incongruous  
And un-poetic, the blue frontage and night-long  
Glare of the Fu Xian Takeaway retreats.

...

Skylines distorted and re-aligned by the windows -  
A slice of the Orongorongo ridgeline matched  
With the Oku Street Reserve; with the horizon  
Levelled and the sea picking up the quilt.

The gap across to the Seaward Kaikouras  
Shows no mountains, touches no new edges  
But the reddening evening sky holds clouds  
That hint of land, and I swear I see the sea beneath.

...

Rinsing glasses in the late evening at the sink  
The lights of Island Bay are mirrored  
In the windows that enfold my dreamtime  
And the cars buzz across the glass and bolt.

Houses and streets spark against the hillside  
A second world refracted in the panes -  
Like a hobbit village, glowing with hearths,  
Open to a visitation from the wizard.

...

And I am here, an oakenshield with a grey beard  
And my straw Stetson hat bannered 'New Zealand'  
On the black band - set and ready to retake treasure  
From the pendants that flicker on the dragon's back -

And feast a summer's eve on paua fritters,  
Spring rolls, and fish and chips in Shorland Park.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Reflections On The Arab World - So Much Lost

In the beginning the word made man  
Keening for Eden where it all began -  
Bargain a son for a better life  
But bleed the ram in sacrifice.

Forsaking hunts and herds and skins  
For riverside cities where science begins  
Growing corn to the water's edge  
Finding a founder in rush and sedge

Tablets and marks in mud as token  
Pictures to sign where words are broken  
Back from the desert the prophet utters  
What scribes from Byblos seal in letters.

All revealed and then recorded  
The covenant that God awarded  
All concealed and then discarded  
It only heals the broken-hearted.

So many cities but so much lost  
So many pyres where books are tossed  
So empires rise and empires fall  
Divine the writing on the wall.

...

Our barber here in Island Bay  
Is a neat little man from Iraq  
Who is a lapsed Moslem  
Because he likes bacon and booze:  
I get to say: 'shukran kteer'  
And he says: 'ma'a salama'.

And this morning I talked to May  
Who runs the Blue Belle cafe  
And is a Maronite from Zahlé  
Whose sad dark eyes weep for home:

I get to say: 'shukran kteer'.  
And she says: 'ma'a salama'.

It sets me thinking about the time I spent  
In the Middle East back in the 1970s:

...

Zapping across the pitch-black Green Line,  
In war-broken Beirut -  
With a friend I met having coffee on shari' al-hamra -  
In his backfiring jalopy during a cease fire  
To visit a crêperie in Jounieh  
Risking it all for a taste of life.

...

Negotiating a road block around a sleepy sentry  
With a friend at in Beiteddine and being shot at  
Only to be redeemed when a column  
Of Druze army trucks came into view  
And the firing stopped as the  
Officer inspected our passports.

...

Stealing a weekend in Jerusalem  
With a lovely curly-headed English nurse  
And being buzzed past the Silver Star  
In Beit Lehem where Jesus was born  
By a Greek Orthodox Monk who was clearly  
'Majnoon' beyond the point of crazy.

...

And spending time in the Gulf States

Half wisely - on reclaiming sand from the harbour  
For industrial estates or developing  
A milk-recombining plant and dairy  
That used the emir's air-conditioned  
Friesians as a selling gimmick.

...

Or sleeping out under a crescent moon  
On the flat roof of the Authority offices  
In the terraces or zhors of the Jordan Valley  
Debating with my Arab friends  
The merits of dehydrating irrigated tomatoes  
For paste while the cities parched.

...

Or Damascus as it used to be  
A glimmering but dusty Parisian jewel  
And a trip to North East Syria  
To the Caliphate where Halabiye or Fort Zenobia  
Had been built as an outpost on the Euphrates  
By the Romans - and left deserted.

...

And living in Dokki and Zamalek in Cairo  
Troubled with heart's unease from loss  
And seeing a little girl twirl before me,  
Dress and no knickers, on the footpath at El-Gabalayah  
Then being swept by an invisible force to  
Smack against a bus and lie broken and lifeless.

...

And returning to an apartment block  
With its dark steps in the centre of Cairo  
Trying to find Clea in the confusion

Finding the right door but missing the right floor:  
Starched crisp sheets tousled in Crete  
And walls paved with mosquitoes in Mamoura.

...

And back further in the 1960s:

About camping with our Land Rover  
In the grounds of Mena House near Cairo  
And the yard of the Coptic Cathedral  
At Sohag under the auspices of the archbishop -  
And one of my fellow student adventurers  
Casually squashing a scorpion under his sandal.

...

And how there used to be a Barclay's Bank  
In the main street in Tobruk  
And we tried to get photographs  
Of a thermos flask in an unusual place  
Among the totally deserted grandeur of Leptis Magna -  
Where the August sun furnaced and forged.

...

And how my mind died to fragments in Tunis  
Laid low by sunstroke and dehydration,  
Moving into a nightmare limbo land  
As the gates closed and the seas retreated  
Only to recover to copious draughts of lime cordial  
And the wolfing of fresh fig jam on baguettes.

...

Of trying to set to rights more recently  
Now time is slipping underneath my feet:

When I returned full of good intentions  
Bitter among the lemon trees at Marna House  
In Gaza pondering the devil of a state  
Of peace without promise, meanness without ends  
Presaging dead children swaddled in white cloth:

'Shukran kteer - ma'a salama.'

Where will I find you my lost world  
That youth's sweet scented text should close?

With Durrell in Alexandria?

'I have been thinking about the girl  
I met last night in the mirror:  
Dark on the marble-ivory white:  
Glossy black hair:  
Deep suspiring eyes in which one's glances sink  
Because they are nervous, curious...'

Or with Cavafy - burning leaves?

'Don't mourn your luck that's failing now,  
Work gone wrong, your plans  
All proving deceptive — don't mourn them uselessly.  
As one long prepared, and graced with courage,  
Say goodbye to her, the Alexandria that is leaving.  
Above all, don't fool yourself, don't say  
It was a dream, your ears deceived you:  
Don't degrade yourself with empty hopes like these.'

Or perhaps with the Prophet Ghibran  
Weighing impulses and the impetuous:

'The devastating wars which destroyed empires  
Were a thought that existed in the mind of an individual.  
The supreme teachings that changed the course of humanity  
Were the ideas of a man whose genius became distinct.  
A single thought build the Pyramids,  
Founded the glory of Islam

And set ablaze the library at Alexandria

And all I love, may verse confide  
A deeper truth mere breath may hide.

'Books are written in Cairo,  
Published in Beirut and read in Baghdad'  
Was the old saying - and before that  
There used to be a library in Alexandria.

...

And who tried to burn so many truths?  
Was it the ruthlessness of the pagan Emperors Caesar or Aurelian?  
Or the mobs of the Christian Patriarch Pope Theophilus?  
Or the Muslim army of Amr ibn al `Aas ordered by Caliph Omar?

So many cities but so much lost  
So many pyres where books are tossed  
So empires rise and empires fall  
Writing must weigh and measure all.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Reflections On The World Refugee And Illegal Immigration Crisis

WITH EARTH OF MISERY BEYOND

These frolicked aisles of bling, these spoilt spots  
Of worth and property, fenced and barred -  
Heavenly consumer paradises -  
Fastnesses armed for the fortunate  
Against immigration with the writ of law,  
These lucky breeds of men, these wealthy worlds,  
These gated homes in global misery,  
Which exclude by wall and strict patrol  
As with a moat defensive to a keep,  
Against the entry of aspiring hands, -

These blessed spots - the democratic lands.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# 'Retard The Sun With Gentle Mist'

Let me watch you walk on alone  
The dawn is rising, darkness gone:  
The day will bring a closer death  
And both must take a lesser path

'Retard the sun with gentle mist  
Enchant the land with amethyst'  
That we may sip and taste again  
The anise dew and absinthe rain

But as you turn to bid farewell  
Invoke the amaranthine spell  
That we may drink in day-break's care  
And not be taken drunkard there.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Returning From The Land Of Youth

There was a time and place no smile was feigned.  
Once there was neither change nor death  
In the land where youth and beauty reigned.  
Each joy was blessed in kindly merry breath

All colours bright and gemstones fiery  
Each fear felt lightly, careless then to harm,  
No rules or law too strict, no task too weary  
Bright and quick the eye to every spell and charm.

This Isle of Apple Trees, the better Eden,  
Where the fruits of life and joy were hung  
All now wasted, it cannot come again,  
Except in mind's eye and the lilt of song.

So Oisín journeyed back and touched the past  
And all was lost in dissolution at the last.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Returning To Miyanoshita.

Young Lieutenant Fujita has returned  
In the early dawn to his village Miyanoshita.  
His commander lent him his favourite mare  
To make the trip across the mountains -  
Slowly making his way through the mist  
To his homecoming.

It was a boy who caught the train to Yokohama  
In his navy greatcoat, buttons shining, kitbag packed -  
But now a man returns from his duty to the Emperor.  
How will he tell the village mayor of his service?  
And speak to his own family - of steel melting as shells landed -  
Of the losses of his friends?

He swam 18 miles to shore from the Hitachi Maru  
When it was blown apart by Russian gunships  
After spies had disclosed that it transported  
A high calibre cannon that could win Port Arthur.  
The morning is cold - when will he turn again  
To seek his unmarked grave in Manchuria?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Returning To The Farm

No quay waits there - I will not build a ship  
To reach that disadvantageous land.  
It has no need of me, aged and paltry  
As I am - its shores will not welcome me.  
It is no country for old men it seems -  
Neither those past, nor passing nor to come.

Rather I will saddle up the spent bay pony  
And take him back to the lanes that we loved  
Kicking up a canter along the verge  
Past the hawthorn hedges under the oaks  
Not seeking Ithaca or Byzantium  
But homecoming to the farm's fields.

I have learned the names of many places  
And travelled skies and highways aplenty  
But when I was young the world was mine  
There in the cowsheds, lofts and stockyard  
And it will be well enough to amble back  
To greet the boy who waits and never left.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Reverie

Summer came today  
With sun bright across golden gorse and white arum lilies,  
Glistening and glossy in the native Bush,  
And flat with shadows amid the grey and beige  
And white houses on the hillsides below.

In the morning I had sat  
In a kind of ancient reverie  
Half sleeping – half non-thinking  
While I avoided the tasks  
That I had assigned.

And I pondered on how,  
Growing old, I had become more like a cat  
Looking now for chances  
To sun myself and slow the pulse  
Of life and just be.

The thing with the cats though  
Is that many dreams later  
They can bound up and kill  
While I am left to track day-dreams  
And bring them to bay.

The musing become laziness  
I finally set to planting some flax  
And to weeding the terraced garden  
Below the steps, watched by my favourite cat  
Who made her disdain all too clear.

Occasionally I would throw weeds down  
To the Bush below or wave a dead stalk  
And the little tabby would get the wind up,  
Her tail whip-staff steering  
A galleon that had sighted pirates.

Tonight no doubt she will raid the Bush  
For field mice and skinks  
Or the early nestlings of blackbirds

But all that I will have to show  
Is soil under my nails and these lines.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Riders To Avalon

Beautiful flaxen-haired one  
Daughter of the Sea-King  
Riding alone from the beach  
Outlined on the hillside  
As the sun sets westward.

Spindrift lady of the wave-crests  
On your father's white horse  
Chased inland by the deer hunters  
The protectors of the shores  
Brought to bay by their leader.

Too late in chastened hesitation  
To break the encirclement  
Fascinated by the strangers  
So much like and so much not  
In the meeting's enchantment.

Pale princess, fairy and bewitched  
At the mercy of a love of the land  
Taken aback by the hero youth -  
The bright bronze bridle seized  
That she should come to fastness.

But her horse stalled and would not move  
At which, while holding her gaze he  
Mounted the sure-swift steed  
To take its reins and she for fear  
Grasped his waist as the stallion flinched.

Then the wondrous horse Enbarr,  
Shaking his mane, free now of curb and rein  
Bolted abruptly, swiftly for the shore  
Galloping down to the broad, dry beach  
Thence into the sun-dipped shallows.

Until his furious hooves, plashing the surf  
Bore his prize of lovers to the open sea  
And across its waves and wastes

To Avalon the Blossomed Isle of Apples -  
Home to the mares and fillies of his following.

It was thus the riders were borne to Eden,  
Neve the pearl-pale high-born lady of the sea  
And Oisin the land-guardian, hunter and hero -  
Set down at last on the gold-screed beach  
All former longings faint and only scarce recalled.

O treacherous and self-willed steed  
Tremulous, headstrong and untrammelled  
Bearing heedlessly, endlessly into the night  
Those lost to the ride's enticements  
Amidst the sea-spray moonlit storm

How many others have you deceived  
Coupled by your breakneck homeward flight  
Thighs and limbs locked against your flanks  
Aching for release from clouded blissful pain  
In the headlong riding of the tides of love?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Ridge Attack

Whistle ready for the boots' clambering  
At the off ... over the top ... shell-fire led:  
An unfamiliar distance singing ... stinging ...  
Bright from the wire and the ridge ahead.

The One-Pip's yelling, revolver firing  
The sergeant curses and takes a fall  
Stumbling forward stifles rifles' aiming  
It's no longer the time for one for all.

Uncoordinated mindless chaos  
Blood raised and spilled in clamorous terror  
Emptied with killing, eddied with loss  
A vortex of scrambling, fumbling error.

The company now ragged and tiring  
Orders forgotten as the watch hands still,  
With losses so heavy it's time for retiring  
No chance today of retaking the hill.

Back in the trench, rum and stretchers out  
Bound for the wounded in No-mans-land  
They'll not get far from the first redoubt  
The task is too hard for the war-worn hand.

At nightfall, sounds from the darkening lands  
As the broken pray and the dying pass  
The fingers of numbers of failing hands  
Grasping and scratching tear-stained glass.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Riverton Dawn

I had been reading about Nietzsche  
In 'The Consolations of Philosophy'  
And woke early pondering  
His strange walrus moustache,  
Clumsy way with women, and the causes of his early death.

So I went into the purple blazoned dawn  
Took my camera and tried to catch the ebbing night  
As it cleared across the estuary  
And the moon still silvered the mirror  
Of the calm water behind the harbour bar -

And the lights of the little town  
Led me down towards reflection,  
Where walking on the grass strip  
In my bare feet in that most beautiful of mornings,  
I squished a dog's droppings.

Strangely there was no irritation  
And as I cleaned my sole on the grass  
Descended towards the bridge  
And said good morning to the sheep  
In the empty lot over the road

I clicked.

But gradually  
That magic subsided as the moments  
Between dark and light merged into colour.

It wasn't bouncing out into the Alpine mists  
To stake a claim on the next striven ridge  
Accompanied by a hound named 'Ego' -  
But there was a moment of becoming

A destined over-man  
Even if I had my feet in clay.



# Rocky Time For Poor Conversationalist

[Bodhidharma's 'Four Essential Practices' versified]:

## Practice of Retribution of Enmity

Having given up the fundamental  
And followed the superficial  
I have engendered much injustice  
The evil of my past calamities has ripened  
And I have left behind limitless harm:  
Therefore I accept my sufferings.

## Practice of Acceptance of Circumstances

The changing seas of circumstances  
Have brought forth consequences:  
Everything that is desirable will fail  
And all joys are transient.  
Therefore I seek a steady mind  
Without increase or decrease

## Practice of Non-craving

To be attached to things is delusion  
I will try to rest my heart and ask for nothing  
All existences are empty  
Both merits and darkness follow in step.  
I will set fire to the house  
And find calm in the ruins.

## Practice of Abiding by the Dharma

Though the self stains sentient beings  
Instances are emptied by non-clinging.  
There is no self in the dharma:  
I will practice without miserliness  
I will practice with generosity  
I will practice without hesitation and regret.



## Room 11-01

Another good man made love here

To his chaste and ever-loving wife,

In room 11-01 in the Moscow Ritz Carlton:

But the video held little spice for Vladimir -

Just kisses and caresses Chicago-style

Of a beautiful black woman and her man:

A prelude of sassy foreplay and passion -

A goodnight farewell of caring smiles.

...

'Not to worry Sir there is something else -

Your Presidential Security Service

Kept filming less salubrious encounters

During the 2013 Miss Universe Contest -

And in this very same suite we struck gold

When a real estate con man and swindler

Who later became President of the USA,

Made a special point of booking the room'.

'Watch as three of our girls from the FSB

Turn up as requested and peel back the covers

To delight the client, and please each other,

Before releasing the contents of their bladders.'

...

And this strange fellow celebrated hatred there

Reinforcing his insecurities in degeneracy,

In room 11-01 in the Moscow Ritz Carlton:

Becoming hostage with this video to Vladimir -

The subject of almost unutterable scorn

Among the dolls who donated their urine -

Playing perversion and deviance Vegas-style,

Netted into the gulag of subservient golems.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Roses And Wine In The Golden Weather

The brown cut grass on the estate lies rough  
Beneath the bent and dusty olive trees  
And welcome swallows lee-ho, pitch and luff  
The fading light to hunt the sun-crushed leas.

So are the vintners poets to our tongues  
With intense fruits from spicy forest floors  
Sweet-scented pallettes ringed with Côte-d'Or tones  
And berry truffle shades when sipping soars?

And are the artists poets to our eyes  
Deep-delving Provencal perfection  
Where iceberg roses brushstroke eves  
And life must still to light's refraction?

So must words such revelations trust  
That evening settles doubts with kindly dusk.

[High Summer 2015 at the Brodie Estate, Martinborough]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Rough And Blatant

The Rough Beast - the Blatant Beast  
Has appeared in the ordinary places  
Morphed in the supermarket car park  
Transpired in the Macdonalds drive-thru.

It wasn't what we expected  
Of strange times, interesting times.  
Who could guess the shape of anxiety  
Was so much piss, so little vinegar -

That what was eating us  
Was more like a gigantic tendrilled fungus  
Grown humungous though hyphae  
Fine filaments massing enormous bulk

Or colonies of Argentine Ants  
That cooperate and combine in vast numbers  
Their sheer aggregation and huge appetite  
Betraying the small individual mandible -

That what was bothering us  
Was above all the product of proliferation  
The inevitable spillage of profusion  
The natural consequences of excess?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Rough Sleeper

Life itself is an unfavourable condition  
And God himself is in rags at the doorway.  
None can enter - the threshold is barred  
Queue if you like, but you won't get in.

The doors are closed, the windows shuttered  
Try explaining to the bouncer or the doorman  
That you are an artist, a musician, a writer ... a poet  
It won't work, they have heard it before.

It is not as though there is no heaven  
It is more that everything is there on the pavement.  
Late in the early hours the old man will sleep  
And in his dreams things will open up.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Rounds With Li Bai In The Tavern

SAME OLD TIMES FRIEND

The portents are troubling  
Armies of the poor march  
Towers are raised in defence  
Silent spring to empty harvest

Quiet ashes, grey embers  
The phoenix chicks are gone  
Their first songs are mute  
Presaging interesting times

The pebble strikes  
The bamboo thicket  
Somewhere a z'tick  
Nicks the sapling lath

Early summer  
The lilies have passed  
The flax is unfolding  
Hatchlings and butterflies

Sinking his goods

Into the pond  
The old merchant  
Found a mirror

So much sadness  
In the ten thousand things  
Gaining so much  
We have lost everything

Falling off a boat  
Into the Yangtse  
Taken by the river  
Embracing the moon

Toppling into the water  
Did you catch the moon?  
Now the surface is still  
The moonbeams still swarm

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Sailing Cook Strait

The white-sailed 25-footer  
Out from Evans Bay for the weekend  
Makes steady way across the Strait  
Heading for Queen Charlotte Sound.

Her mast shoulders the 15-knot wind  
Dark swells kick up defiant sprays:  
Heading on she gives no quarter  
Heedless of challenge or safe harbour.

She is ready for a rumble  
Standing off or making ground:  
White knife slicing fume blue steel  
Striking sparks of sunlight.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Sappho's Welcome For Anaktoria

So you return, my repentant beauty  
And I deny my kisses and my lyre:  
I will match no notes to your entreaty  
Our songs long since consigned to fire.

No lyrics left for us my worthless maid  
My heart once shaken now is still:  
My lips no longer voice the love I vowed  
As oft they did before you played me ill.

...

Such indifference cannot count for much  
A fever blush now runs upon my cheek -  
I hear a strain that longs for finger's touch  
The music tells me you are mine to seek.

Eros plucks the petals from the flower  
So come once more into my arms this hour  
Let us segue desire's awoken power  
Breached walls and heaven's broken tower.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Scarlet Scandal

Dawn arose and left the Ocean sleeping  
Smiling now for secrets she was keeping  
With roseate cheeks she braves the light  
Blushing deep to mark her night's delight  
Her lantern tints her crimson dress  
So hem in hand she feigns distress  
And saffron trimmings o'er the hillsides pour  
As golden shafts spill out from daylight's door.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Scrape Of The Cock

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs,  
What mighty interests rise from trivial things,  
I sing—This verse to sleazy Barnaby is due:  
This, ev'n Turnbull may vouchsafe to view:

Slight is the subject, but too right in many ways  
To keep close tabs on sporty interns that he lays -  
And question what careless urges could compel  
This Kiwi Reffo to knock up a Dinkum Belle?

And ask what stranger cause, yet unexplor'd,  
Made Vikki not be sure paternity's secured?  
In tasks so bold, can smutty men and sluts engage,  
Let's change the sheets and turn the page!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Seeking Blessing

Saint Marina of Antioch be praised:  
That this may gain your intercession  
And we who love you be delivered  
From the devil dragon and temptation.

You took the evil one and threw him down  
Jamming your left foot on his scaly neck,  
Pushing his slavering maw to the ground,  
Demanding 'yield you scabrous wretch! '

Quickly he twisted - and then shook free -  
Taking you whole within his ravenous jaws,  
Swallowing your sacred body entirely,  
At which your holy virtue rived his guts.

Breaker of the monstrous demon's substance:  
Pray for us that we may live in heavenly grace.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Separate

'No man is an island'.  
True - though some come close.

Amid racist hysteria  
And panic about contagion  
In 1903  
A Chinese gardener  
Named Kim Lee  
Was marooned alone  
On a tiny islet  
Off Somes Island  
In Wellington Harbour  
New Zealand  
Accused of having leprosy.

Left to live in an open cave  
Given packing cases  
From which to make furniture  
His foodstuffs were delivered  
By the lighthouse keeper  
In a rowboat  
Or by means of a jury-rigged  
Overhead wire  
If seas were rough.

Kim didn't last long  
Before the howling wind  
The isolation and the terror  
And his TB did for him.

Today the sun was shining on  
Mokopuna Island  
And I thought of Liu Xia  
Under house arrest in China  
Now for eight years.

And her husband Liu Xiaobo  
Who died in custody,  
Hospitalised like Pablo Neruda,

Incarcerated for speaking out  
For simply affirming  
That any authority  
Which creates or condones  
Enmity has no legitimacy

And that freedom of speech  
Is basic to being human,  
Being the mother of decency:  
That we are all the less  
If we are not involved  
In caring about its erosion.

Accused only of love and loyalty  
In her isolation, Liu Xia says:  
"There is nothing I fear now.  
If I can't leave,  
I'll just die at home.

Xiaobo has already left,  
There is nothing in this world for me.  
Dying is easier than living:  
There is nothing simpler for me  
Than to protest with death."

Does that make sense Kim?

Looking across from Days Bay  
I was diminished by the islet  
Of the island in the harbour  
And the grief and anger  
And guilt that separates us:  
The remorseless grasping sea  
Tearing away at compassion.

But addressing his wife  
In statement to the court  
In her enforced absence  
Liu Xiaobo had this to say:

'I am full of regret  
Become an insensate stone

In the wilderness  
Whipped by fierce wind  
And torrential rain  
So cold none dares touch.

But my love for you  
Though broken away  
Is still part of the whole  
And even if it is crushed  
The dust will cling to you'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Shadow Fall

[For Jackie Trent (6 September 1940 – 21 March 2015) ]

## SHADOW FALL

Fifty years of shadows now have fallen  
But the minding is recalled unbroken  
Soft rain gently beating  
Walking with only kisses spoken

It is winter now but wonder has not faded  
Our lifetime love stays undefeated  
Though clouds grow dark above  
The light remains that love created

I no longer wonder what went wrong  
Though lost and distant we still belong  
And in my mind you come to me

To see how I've been faring every day  
And watch the years pass on their way  
So as my caring sets things to right  
It gives life to you again in love and light.

There you are now my love  
There you are now my love

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Sharing With Rembrandt

## MUG SHOTS

Rembrandt van Rijn painted  
Dozens of self-portraits  
He liked a good face look.

Some of these were 'tronies'  
Or mug shots -  
'Selfies' without a smile.

But florid and pudgy  
He was no oil painting  
Most of the time

And as far as we know,  
Thankfully, he never sat nude  
For himself or his apprentices

'Saved As' to the Cloud on a Apple  
Having given friends Permission  
To 'Like' on Facebook.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# She Cried But She Could Do Nothing

There were other terrified children  
Wounded - bloodied - brought  
To seeing the reality that evil  
Is everywhere and that love is  
Ephemeral and always in need  
Of renewal - and that hate  
Can be more lasting than revulsion -  
As told by those who insist  
The day of individual security is past.

In the chaos of domestic terror  
And the fear of foreign infiltration  
The conditions are ripening  
For making things new by force.  
A self-perpetuating war for the future  
Where the threat of surprise  
Terror, sabotage and assassination  
Arises within the masses themselves  
Triggering the psychotic and deranged.

If you wish the sympathy of the broad masses,  
You must tell them the crudest and most stupid things:  
Tell them that liberty consists  
Of one in five owning enough guns for every person  
Tell them that success is the sole earthly judge  
Of what is right and wrong and that  
The victor will never be asked if he told the truth -  
That human kindness is the expression of stupidity and cowardice -  
That life never forgives weaknesses.

Popular support is the first element  
Which is necessary for the creation of authority.  
But an authority resting on that foundation alone  
Is still quite frail, uncertain and vacillating.  
Hence everyone who finds himself vested  
With an authority that is based only on popular support  
Must take measures to improve and consolidate  
The foundations of that authority by the creation of force.  
If popular support, power, and tradition are united together,

Then the authority based on them may be looked upon as invincible.

But then remember the young people seeking a life  
Like 14-year-old Czeslawa Kwoka, tattooed 26947,  
A Polish Catholic girl murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau  
Deported and transported from the Zamosc region  
To create Lebensraum for the Master Race.  
And the photographs taken by Wilhelm Brasse  
Who was forced to collaborate in this final solution:  
"She was so young and so terrified.  
The girl didn't understand why she was there  
And she couldn't understand what was being said to her.

... this woman Kapo (a prisoner overseer)  
Took a stick and beat her about the face.  
The woman was just taking out her anger on the girl.  
Such a beautiful young girl, so innocent.  
She cried but she could do nothing.  
Before the photograph was taken,  
The girl dried her tears and the blood from the cut on her lip.  
To tell you the truth, I felt as if I was being hit myself  
But I couldn't interfere. It would have been fatal for me.  
You could never say anything".

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Shelley's Sonnet For Theresa May

An obdurate robotic ruler dancing on a string -  
Tories - the sparkles on an Eton Mess, all for show -  
Immune to public scorn while muddying the spring -  
Cozeners who neither see, nor feel, nor know -

Austerity a heist on which they've built their sway  
An emptiness of empathy revealed -  
They flaunt and fawn and then extend their stay  
With massive laws - and liberties repealed.

All leech-like to their failing country cling  
Blood-sucking liars in deed and reputation low -  
A people bamboozled / conned with virtue veiled -  
A government which should for God's Sake Go.

But given time the salt of sense and circumstance  
Will plump and drop the slugs' inconsequence.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Ship Of Gold

Bright ship of gold under a silver mast  
Are you safe to the twelve towns at last?  
Have you come home from the green stone sea  
Landing your wares at the crystal quay?

And are the markets now busy with trade  
With filigree trinkets and jewels displayed  
That each with his share will treasure that shore  
And none go short as the stock comes to store?

Then let us settle by the side of the sea  
And live out our lives in a fine white court  
Amid the sapphire and jet stone tapestry  
That the breakers and cliffs and spin drift wrought.

You promised me all this - I understood -  
When the precious landfall came to good?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Shit Happens

Old monk shits himself in the dojo  
A pebble hits the bamboo thicket:  
In the sacred everything is profane  
In the profane everything is sacred.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Short Sharp Script

She is small and perfect the young actor -  
Playing the girl who runs down her friend /  
And an attending mortuary doctor -  
Avoiding a dissemblance to the end.

Perfect in the ceremony of art  
Pleading for drama's rites with eloquence  
Not looking for approval in each part  
Oblivious to praise or recompense.

How do we know that her skill is perfect?  
That what is revealed is the absolute -  
That relatively there is no defect -  
That what is intrinsic is resolute?

Her intuition unveils role, form and space -  
All for truth and everything in its place.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Shot? So Quick, So Clean An Ending?

I hear from a friend that Wenlock Books is closing  
And she has asked for a valedictory poem from me.

What to say?

More than 60 years ago now, a snub-nose round-top bus  
Picked up my cousins and I from the village of Longville  
And took us, part of a rowdy and excited group of youths  
From the villages between Church Stretton and Much Wenlock,  
To the 'Flix' on Saturday Night to see a Cowboys Western.

I'm not sure of the film - but I do remember the jostling and singing -  
Not quite what A.E. Housman had in mind - he didn't do frolicking:

Right you guessed the rising morrow  
And scorned to tread the mire you must;  
Dust's your wages, son of sorrow,  
But men may come to worse than dust.

Possibly, the Wenlock Cinema movie might have been 'Big Country'  
In which Gregory Peck secretly breaks the stallion 'Old Thunder'  
And challenges The Baddies for water rights from the 'Big Muddy'  
After which he wins a stake-out six-shooter duel against Buck  
And ends up marrying sweetheart Patricia after the Old Timers kill each other.

Perhaps A.E. would have provided a valedictory for the losers -  
[Ignoring Gregory Peck's character the victorious James McKay]:

Far in a western brookland  
That bred me long ago  
The poplars stand and tremble  
By pools I used to know.

And what of the bookshop?

&quot;The sum of things to be known is inexhaustible, and however long we  
read,  
we shall never come to the end of our story-book.&quot;

Well that doesn't look so sure nowadays.

They came and were and are not  
And come no more anew;  
And all the years and seasons  
That ever can ensue  
Must now be worse and few.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Sketching In The Platypus

The Platypus is not monotonous  
It's at the opposite extreme.  
In fact it's quite preposterous,  
This jumbled bush-land monotreme.

As with the curious brontosaurus  
The platypus lays eggs  
But is twenty meters shorter  
And has stingers on its legs

The hippopotamus is perhaps analogous  
In haunting stream and creek  
Excepting an extra 4 tons gross  
And any signs of fins or beak.

The whale shark, also relatively enormous  
Shares sounding through its nose  
But takes in plankton through a sluice  
Discarding worms the sieving may disclose.

The elephant gives further room to pause  
But diverges most dissimilarly  
It does without wet fur or claws  
And has big ears that radiate capillary.

It seems that likenesses are of little use  
And similes just make plus the fuss  
When sketching in the platypus.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# So Much Lost - The Arab World

In the beginning the word made man  
Keening for Eden where it all began -  
Bargain a son for a better life  
But bleed the ram in sacrifice.

Forsaking hunts and herds and skins  
For riverside cities where science begins  
Growing corn to the water's edge  
Finding a founder in rush and sedge

Tablets and marks in mud as token  
Pictures to sign where words are broken  
Back from the desert the prophet utters  
What scribes from Byblos seal in letters.

All revealed and then recorded  
The covenant that God awarded  
All concealed and then discarded  
It only heals the broken-hearted.

So many cities but so much lost  
So many pyres where books are tossed  
So empires rise and empires fall  
Divine the writing on the wall.

...

So many cities but so much lost  
So many pyres where books are tossed  
So empires rise and empires fall  
Writing must weigh and measure all.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Some Limericks For Melania And Donald Trump

Pity Melania Trump  
Who was sculpted out of a stump:  
This rough-cut clump  
Was wooden to hump  
And came down to earth with a thump.

O beauteous Melania  
Our modern Cytherea:  
An Aphrodite  
In a rough-bark nightie  
Become our sylvan Galatea.

Pygmalion searches the bare-trunked trees,  
Getting wood from boles he sees:  
He comes, he saws, he chops  
And falls in love with what he lops -  
Chipping 'such a dryad's not so hard to please'.

A girl called Melania from Slovenia  
[A frontier forest or so from Transylvania]:  
Was naughtier than Little Red Riding Hood  
And turned a few tricks in the wood -  
Winding up notching 1600 Pennsylvania!

The woodman saw a pussy up a tree,  
No finer judge of cougar cats than he:  
He had no need of love - just power -  
Knowing that for him the good grew sour -  
And so he carved a wooden kitty - isn't she pretty?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Song Of Everlasting Regret [for Hong Kong] ??? [??]

???

???????????????

???????????????

?????????????????-

?????????????

?????????????????

?????????????????-

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????????????,

????????????????????????

## Song of Everlasting Regret

A certain Emperor longed for perpetual civil peace

And this he thought would be obtained by uniformity

Such that all would conform to his mandates of beauty -

Though there were those with integrity who swore loyalty

And averred that strength lay in difference and diversity

Bound by a common understanding of interdependence -

But for the most part, the majority feigned adherence,  
Coquettish and purportedly delicate like Yang Guifei,  
Their subservience presaged an empire drowned by the tide of history.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Sonnet For Ithaca

A little song will sound out fear and hope:  
Play out the knots and ease away the rope  
To fathom out the depths and rocky floor  
To skirt the reefs and safely land to shore.

These are songs for which the Sirens yearn  
And steal away to hear at Circe's court,  
Leaving the furious breakers left unsung  
And giving pass to those who dare the strait.

These are the songs to calm Charybdis  
And assuage the mountainous oceans  
Staving impending wreck and castaway  
With mystic chants and lyre-played wave-spray charms.

And we the crew that served Odysseus well  
Will sound all out in songs we sing and tales we tell.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Soul Taker - Judgment Day

What if that past should mute a life-end song?  
It cast my heart, stranger, with darkest spell  
And worse for years was nothing I could tell  
Or ever bring myself to voice that wrong.

All along, down along, memories be  
I still reassemble the terror of thee.  
Poor old man acting the devil a spell  
Molesting a child and leaving him hell.

Wicked spirits are horrid shapes assigned  
Though half-forgotten in a youngster's mind  
All this and more left bare and lost behind  
Peak a boo pops up when hopes unwind.

Poor old soul taker fumbling with fright  
Will you be present at the world's last night?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Source Of Irritation

Sprung from the horse's arse or gouged by hooves  
There is a stream of desperation  
That carries fools on viewless wings of poesy  
And stains their lips with inspiration.

Improbably feather-winged Pegasus  
Equine aerodynamic stallion  
You certainly farted or kicked up a fuss  
Knocking a wet spot on Mt Helicon:

The later source of much irritation  
By those who abjure the beaded bubbles  
And consequent inebriation  
Attributable to poetic fantasies -

Avoiding maddening draughts that might have been  
'Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Spring Sunshine Plays With The Wind

Spring sunshine plays with the wind,

What thoughts come to mind?

Delight, like children at the beach

Playing tag - plashing the rippled edge.

Delight like the bushland birds,

Wheeling in joy - alert, newly paired.

Delight like the old man without regrets,

Free of the demons of success and failure,

Throwing a poem into the stream of time.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Stable Node

When the phone rings 12-thousand miles away  
You don't quite know what to expect  
As somebody finally picks up the receiver:  
So it was a great relief to know that they  
Were all alright and then to find that  
Hollies Croft was flush with Aussie visitors -  
My niece having come home for a spell from Brizzy  
With her daughter Immy who adores England.

I know that feeling so well as you adjust  
To the pale-green lens of Constable's pince-nez  
And the mizzle-drizzle that makes the oaks bulk out,  
Picking up the smell of swaths of new cut grass,  
Listening to the song of blackbirds and whoop of the cuckoo -  
Everything suffused with a sort of crazy glamour  
That comes from an absolute delight in the old ordinary  
Suddenly rediscovered from a Rainy-Day Box of Treasures.

While I chatted to my niece, one Antipodean to another,  
The conversation rapidly drifted to blackberry and apple pie  
Though she had been charged with preparing an Oriental dish  
For dinner that involved something or other with coconut vinegar -  
But both of us had to set aside memory and reconciliation  
As I had to make sure that I asked about her father  
Who is a bit middling, knocking on as he is on 83  
And who gets a bit bothered one road and another.

John was as well as you could be expected Di assured me  
As at first one and then a second grandfather clock  
Began to chime eleven o'clock in the morning though it  
Was coming to the end of that self-same day in Wellington -  
There being two clocks because my sister had inherited  
The antique clock left by her grandmother Gladys when she died  
And been bequeathed the 'twin' from her mother Meg when she died  
Not having the heartlessness to choose between them.

And I knew that in my mind's eye, I could walk away from the oak chest  
In the recess where the phone was kept, out through the front door  
Onto the sandstone forecourt and be bedazzled by white and red roses

And all manner of wildly thriving plants in-flower from the garden centre,  
Looking to where my older boys used to play forts and shops in the hay-bays -  
And that, now that the hayshed had been taken down,  
If the day had been clearer, I would have been able to catch a glimpse  
Of Beeston Crag - as I had from beside my mother's deathbed at Crewe Hospital.

[For when she had been first struck down she had been taken to Leighton  
Or what we always knew as Letton - like we knew Cholmondeley  
As Chumley and Cholmondeston as Chumston before our betters put us right -  
With the new hospital being less than half a mile from Hoolgrave Manor farm  
Where my stepfather grew up between Church Minshull and Minshull Vernon.  
'A man who loved the land' as I said in the Foreword to my PhD Thesis  
On the Northern Territory Beef Industry - a man of whom our neighbour  
Fred Elwood used to say - carrying top-weight with a skin-full after Beeston  
Auction:

'Horace - I Iike him'].

And my niece chatted about how it would be lovely to keep the old place on  
Though as we were both well aware it was not really ancient  
Having been, along with another two fine houses in the terrace,  
Constructed in the footprint of farm's old cow sheds or shippons.  
Not that it's history of less than thirty years was uneventful  
With all manner of family gatherings in grief or celebration  
Like my lovely old 'Wharfedale Terrier' Rangi straining every fibre  
To entertain my young sons in a ball-throw even though she was more than  
past-it.

All of which set me musing on how time can heal and make things right  
From what had been a very crimped and damaged family  
For my sister and I, what with the loss of our grandfather David in the First War  
And the death of our own father Jay in the Royal Air Force in 1943.  
I told her how much the house was loved and that it would be classed  
By sociologists as a 'stable node behaviour setting' - but she was off to lay the  
table  
For lunch and when I let slip that one of my poems had been selected  
For a 2017 National Anthology she added kindly: 'if it makes you happy Luv'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Steel Enema

It is no secret - what passes  
Just thunder in the thickets -  
Guns - wild anger - a gold mine.

Confused by deception  
And predatory gangs  
Capital flows to their pockets.

Greedy dogs and black sheep  
Which tail is wagging now?  
Tufts of hair or hanks of wool?

According to the creed  
Meanness is not a vice  
Now that's the secret.

In America there is gold  
And coal and iron ore aplenty  
For both greedy and unfed mouths.

But it is no place for dreams  
Every second counting the \$  
The rivers turning to dust.

Everything is linked by tracks  
Covering moaning sleepers  
Rails that carry off - carry out.

The trains whistle and rush by  
Leaving the work crews in the shit  
Tending to the miles passed over.

And greed is the locomotive  
Of banditry - a steel enema -  
Can't you hear the farting?

Come the swept-gold sunrise  
The rich will have feasted  
And be ready to gorge again.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Sticking Point

Poems are like a Pooh Stick -  
You hunt around for something gnarly  
That can be recognized  
But that irrepressibly  
Has pretension towards fluid dynamics.

When you have found your stick  
Pare off the redundant twigs carefully  
Leaving only what's designed  
So that inevitably  
It projects personal ergonomics.

Then take a cast and launch the stick -  
Run across the bridge eagerly  
To see it bob and broach the other side  
Hopefully incredibly  
Taking leeway free of snags and hitches.

Too often though the stick sticks  
Stuck against a barrier irritatingly  
Dead in the water or tugged aside  
Though ineffably

The wise old stream flows free and wide.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Stirrings In The Gruel Sea - For The North Pacific Gyre And Its 100 Million Tons Of Garbage

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The void will not impede the reveller;  
Things cast aside; an empty tale is told;  
Banality is tossed upon the world,  
The speck-filled tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The purity of Eden's shore is littered;  
The best lack understanding, while the worst  
Regale in pleased apathy.

Surely some retribution is at hand;  
Surely a Second Fall is now at hand.  
A new exile mocking our Garden Genesis  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the seas of earth  
A shape of plastic drifts where listless currents run  
A haze blank and pointless as drunken daybreak fun  
Is moving its dark slime, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the flocking starveling birds.

The darkness deepens yet again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of slop have marred the deep  
Have made the ocean Bumble's ladle,  
And we the silly, greedy festive crew at last  
Slouch to perdition and still ask for more.

[with acknowledgement to William Butler Yeats]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Stonestacker

He lies on the footpath looking up  
Admiring his handiwork stalagmites -  
Pinnacles of beach rocks raised high  
Composed of smooth stones super-glued together.  
Does he see any more than you see  
After you have finished your briefing paper  
For the Minister or the plumber sees  
After he stands back to admire his new tap fittings,  
Or I see after I 'finish' a writing and move on  
Calmed, more content and self-satisfied  
To a cup of coffee or to watch an old episode  
Of Midsomer Murders or flick for sentimental reasons  
To the Last of the Summer Wine -  
Or perhaps hit Channel 89 'BBC World'  
To get a gutful of saddening and sickening events?  
That said, I drive my wife nuts looking for relevance  
Trying to make a difference, trying to save the world:  
'Just relax', she says, 'the world does not want to be saved'.  
But is an inherent property of mankind  
That we seek to create, to leave a legacy,  
Conscious as we are of our limited lease  
On life and the necessity or desirability  
Of generativity and passing something down to posterity  
'No stone unturned', as Moses would have said.  
Who is to say then that the shoreline pinnacles  
Do not represent something profound  
And that their builder with his infinite care  
Is not adjusting the very foundations to our benefit?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Stop

Somebody just flew  
A full plane of passengers  
Into a mountain  
Proving that if  
You fly a plane into a mountain  
It will stop suddenly  
And disintegrate.

But as the new day came  
I looked out to Baring Head  
And saw the lamp  
Of the light house winking  
Protecting the ships from the rocks  
Proving that if  
You are careful

And let your mind

Come to a full stop .

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Summat Not Reet

Words have been bothering me.  
Sometime back I wrote a poem  
About returning to the farm  
Where I spent my growing up  
Among the intricate expanses of the Cheshire Plain.

I talked of returning to the cowsheds  
And stockyards that I knew as a boy  
Sixty or more years ago now -  
When I really meant the shippons  
And stackyards of Corner Farm.

I thought that it was better  
To look forward and please  
The occasional new reader -  
When I really wanted to talk  
With the past and of what was gone.

And hearing the poem  
Read by a robot Siri  
In American on PoemHunter  
I feel sorry for the botty lady  
When she talks about 'co -sh- edds'  
As oo flummoxes the word.

I will go back and please the past -  
To hell with the odd understanding.  
I love the word shippon  
And it needs my comfort now  
That most of them have been converted  
Into £500,000-plus swanky terraced housing.

The standard etymology is that  
It derives from 'sheep pen'  
But I find this unsatisfactory -  
Preferring derivation from  
The dialect word 'shape'  
Much used to denote careful purpose.

'Tha' mun shape up lad'  
Was a common admonition  
And 'ee dunna shape up gradely'  
Was a chastening criticism -  
So, I am afraid that I can't let this go  
And will have to straighten things.

And it makes sense that the cattle  
Should have been enclosed with careful purpose -  
Though animal husbandry is a thing of the past  
Now that money and morality have been split  
And carelessness is regarded as cost-cutting  
And a necessary adjunct to profit and greed.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Take The Chance

Karma is a bitch - it comes back at you -  
Nothing lacking, no safe space, losing ground  
It comes right back at you - false becomes true.  
What goes around, goes around, goes around.

Time is always short, time to make amends.  
If we want a better life, then we must change -  
Pacing our responses after challenge -  
Right thinking - whatever bad karma sends.

What is given light must endure burning  
But true light always shines above the flames:  
Answer for your life, you only live once  
Kill sequels - break sequences - take the chance.

'Live as if you were living a second time  
As though you had acted wrongly the first time'

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Tane And Hine-Nui-Te-Po: The Maori Legend Concerning The Permanence Of Death

May verse seed hope in death,  
Being spent in bliss of love,  
Into that great darkness  
Where Tane came in dread  
To seek redemption and redress.

Formed from the earth  
His wife gave birth  
And their daughter  
The girl of the flashing dawn  
Was born in sunlit splendor

But he took this daughter  
As his slave and plaything  
Until shame caught her  
And she fled and sought  
The spirit world.

And at its gate  
She stopped her lover-father  
Bidding him return  
To care for their children

Saying: 'I will see them again  
They will come to me in due time'  
So death itself was born  
And she became the night.

But Tane grew angry,  
As those he loved were claimed,  
Hating the Dark Child-Mother  
But lusting for her still

Then he sought to enter her,  
A once and final act,  
This time to claim her forever,  
Becoming a penis for the task,

Penetrating so deep  
He would leave through her mouth  
To void the curse.

But vain as he was,  
He had summoned the birds  
To watch his vengeance  
And the little pied tumbler  
Or pi'waka'waka laughed,  
Waking Hine-nui-te-Po  
Who slew Tane with her thighs

And she appointed  
Thenceforth the tiny fantail  
As her messenger.

Then was mankind lost.

Now as we seek release  
Each little death quietens  
To an after-silence  
Sacred to the dark daughter  
And only poetry betrays  
Our longings and regrets  
For that ever-risen dawn  
Still misted from her breath.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Tau

A young carpenter would use a T-brace  
Nowadays to lock support and house beams  
But then tenons, joints, pins and mortices  
Were crafted to close together the seams.

Regardless, the workman crafts the lattice  
To set out the frame on the foundation  
Working with care under the open sky  
To bind together design and creation.

Set in such a fashion to bear loads  
With ribs of joists readied to carry boards  
The body of the building can be floored  
Topping out spaces - closure the reward.

And each upright speaks of the mystery  
The arcane letters of the bridging cross  
Tau, iota, eta - and Christ's mastery  
At last of death itself and the soul's loss.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Te Amo Mi Chorizo

FOR MARIA

That I had been kinder would have been better now  
You like the driven snow, me like the driven sleet.  
Your mother told you: 'Older men have sharp teeth  
Beware of lust and desire and the storms beneath -  
Cuidado con lujuria y el deseo'.

That I had been kinder, it would have been better so  
You with your angelic freckled face and flame-red hair:  
'I will fill you with babies and leave you in a council flat'.  
And you pouted and held back tears: 'Don't be malo:  
Te amo mi chorizo - I love you silly sausage'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Te Kahu - The Nz Swamp Hawk

E hui o nga kahu  
Ko te whenua i haroa e te kahu:  
Let those of noble intention  
Meet in the lands soared over by the hawk.

Te haaro o te kahu ki tuawhakararere  
E hoa ma, ina te ora o te tangata:  
Let us view the future with the insight of a hawk -  
My friends, this is the essence of life!

Te kahu i runga whakaaorangi ana e ra,  
Te pera koia toku rite inawa e!  
The hawk keeps watch from the heavens -  
Let us do the same, inawa e!

Me haere i raro i te kahu korako  
Manaaki whenua, manaaki tangata:  
Give us the keen discernment of the hawk -  
Let us care for the land, care for the people.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Tell Me Everything Is Now Forgiven

The needle tears a hole in every dream

And there are livid scars that can't be seen

The cloth once white - its threads now give and fray

As heaven's fabric wastes and wears away

The stains of time have marred both hem and seam

You can't repair what is or might have been

So tuck me tight, hold fast my hand and stay

As eons fold against the lifelong day

From the liar's chair give hope tight-lipped

Puff the pillow ere the bed be stripped

Shush my broken thoughts as I awaken

Sweetest friend before the cloths are taken

While the peace in token sleep is kept

Remember he who rose and he who wept

Tell me everything is now forgiven

And that Lazarus has since arisen.



## Text For The Day

Early this morning I woke in dull persistent pain,  
From the disease that is slowly enveloping my life -  
And alone, I tried to deal with these demands by  
Preparing 10 milligrams of 'quick release' elixir in a little plastic cone  
But struggled hopelessly with the unopened bottle top -  
And having already decided against a fold-over breaded smidgeon of the 'wacky  
butter' supplied by a kind friend -  
I finally settle in desperation for crimping two more paracetamol tablets from a  
blister pack.

And In my almost tearful confusion,  
I am haunted by the concrete furrows  
of the streets of New York -  
A drone skimming the grand canyons -  
As I rearrange my duvet -  
The city and I folded in synchronized  
Secluded vigil.

And like the good book itself, we settle on chapter and verse,  
The city and I in our dark imaginings:  
'For thou whose property is always to have mercy -  
Not weighing our merits but pardoning our offences' -  
With the empty streets / the sweat-stained sheets as our texts for the day.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Bellinger River Snapping Turtle

Ms Bellinger River Snapping-Turtle  
Would happily rarely stir till  
It was time for a gin  
And an accompanying grin  
That showed when Myrtle was fertile.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Bilby

How are things in Yooka Murra?  
Are the bilbys still snuffling there?  
A pixie, pootling mixture rare -  
Of chihuahua, wallaby and hare?

How are things in Yooka Murra?  
Is that black stump still baking there?  
Does that bilby with the beady eye  
Still come a'lolloping by?

How are things in Yooka Murra?  
Amid the creeks and coolibah -  
Does bracketed [macrotis lagotis]  
Still fossick lizards, seeds and flies?

How are things in Yooka Murra?  
Is the bilby species there still rooted  
By shrub and log and burrow,  
Sniff and snouting bandicooted?

How's that little pinkie down in Yooka Murra?  
Does he hide from prying kangaroos  
And never stop to jabber in his yakka  
Except to sing extinction blues?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Bramble Cay Melomys

Drat we missed and now we miss  
The Bramble Cay melomys:  
A mouse-like rodent on a cay  
First washed up then washed away  
It's kicked a clod - like us one day.

Any loss like this diminishes me  
When a tiny creature's lost at sea  
It's the first but not the final one  
And I'm the lesser that it's gone  
When all is said and Donne.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Bridge Over The Brook

Sometimes I'm Pooh  
And sometimes Tigger  
Sometimes I'm Roo  
Only somewhat bigger

Sometimes a boy  
Where the ripples gleam

But mostly a donkey  
Swept by the stream

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Bronze Girl

The rising sun trapped the willow princess  
As she bathed hidden among the shallows.  
He had plaited a copper basket to catch her  
That first she thought a palace not a prison.

But the sun rose in the sky and shut the door  
And forced himself upon the frightened girl  
Who fought and set herself against him,  
Caring nothing for his overarching majesty.

Then spent in his lust and rage, the risen sun  
Gave the girl to the demons as a plaything  
And she became a helpless, friendless outcast  
Visited and revisited endlessly by nightmares.

Set free, she sought the sallow water's edge,  
Unable to smile or love or feel or heal her terror,  
Turned hard as bronze to match her hated cell  
Whose copper laths grew tarnished green - and wept.

But then her father, the river ruler, returned  
Righteous in his anger at the violent rising sun  
And set to work to clear the debris of this folly  
That osiers might greet again the rain of evening.

And this same sullied girl became a goddess  
In her suffering, weaving talismans and charms,  
A source of spells protecting hearth and child,  
In quests for justice, honour and compassion.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Bryde's Whale

Bride's or brooder's either way  
This dinky whale's a party animal:  
It only lives from day to day  
An Auckland swell ephemeral  
And likes to spout and bask away  
As JAFAs do in general.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Budgerigar

NOT SEEN FOR DUST

So trills the Budgie - in the curtains high  
As vacuuming the housewife lists his cheeps.  
Missing awhile the avian treasure nigh  
Changing the dust bag, lax attention creeps.

Now Joey downward from the pelmet flies  
And mounts a shoulder on the matron's blouse  
To strut his stuff, as she the draw string ties!  
A journey out to void the bag brings open sky

And from the very temple of deceits -  
Its cuttle bone and swings and bells and treats -  
Bidding adieu the bird soars out the house.

Empty now the melancholy sovran shrine  
Joy's bubble burst, he mounts the washing line  
Disclosing dusty deals from parakeets.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Calamity ('aitua') Of Creation

Night had conceived the seed of night;  
The heart, the foundation of night,  
Had stood forth self-existing even in the gloom.  
The shadows screen the faintest gleam of light:  
The procreating power, the ecstasy of life first known,  
And joy of issuing forth from silence into sound -  
The progeny of the Great-extending filled the heavens' expanse.

[Tane's chant for Creation]

Our ancestors and the elders  
Tell of how the sky father Ranginui  
And the earth mother Papatuanuku  
Were locked together in the ecstasy  
Of nothingness, darkness and chaos  
Until they were torn apart  
Giving birth to Te Ao: the creation  
Of the elements and sensation,  
Of light and the natural world.

Consider then the pain with which the lovers were parted

Consider the flames, their dangers and their warmth  
The lull and anger of the wind in storms and quiet,  
The splash of water against your cheek, and the wild seas,  
The grounding of the earth as it receives endlessly.

Look again at your lover's smile beckoning:  
Hear her say softly or in passion 'I love you'  
Sense again the scent of her hair above the ear  
Taste her breath and the saltiness of her lips  
Touch the shy curl at the nape of her neck  
Or the clefts and furrows that show she is a duality  
Joined in symmetry by seams and couplings.

Look again at the sun and its light, and its loss in shadows  
Hear the music of the wind caressing and scolding  
Sense again the scent of earth after the rain has ended  
Taste the dew, and the salt spray from the ocean,

Touch the land that is raised and the land that falls away  
That has come together in foregrounds and horizons:  
This is the body of the earth mother given anew for you.

'Fire is hot, wind moves,  
water is wet, earth hard.  
Eyes see, ears hear, nose smells,  
tongue tastes the salt and sour.  
Each is independent of the other;  
cause and effect must return to the great reality  
Like leaves that come from the same root.  
The words high and low are used relatively.  
Within light there is darkness,  
but do not try to understand that darkness;  
Within darkness there is light,  
but do not look for that light.  
Light and darkness are a pair,  
like the foot before  
and the foot behind, in walking.  
Each thing has its own intrinsic value  
and is related to everything else in function and position'.

Consider then the pain with which the lovers were parted

Then there was the impenetrable and profound darkness -  
The inestimable presence that permeates the universe.  
Of only dark matter and the matter of darkness  
That constituted two lovers locked within the essence of touching.

Then there was no source, no clarity, no brightness  
No subjective, no objective, no relative, no absolute:  
The lovers were inseparable, dependent, interdependent  
There were no edges, no boundaries, no erasures in their love.

Nothing could be lost, nothing pulled away, nothing broken  
And they loved each other coalesced, congealed, entangled  
Without recognition, atoned only by a raw emotion  
The passion to quicken the primordial chaos with our reality.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Canterbury Knobbled Weevil

Leave well alone that scabby little devil  
The Canterbury Knobbled Weevil  
Hadramphus tuberculatus  
Is almost no longer with us  
So beetling past's the better lesser evil.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Carpet Pythons And The Banana-Bender Laocoön Grandma

Under the shade of the hood  
Under the domed canopy  
We seek the grilling gate  
And the ancillary hot plate  
Come to light with a switch  
And the spreading of our meats  
Given a light oil spray  
And the promise of cauterization.

Lo! In the summered garden  
Invested with seasonal flies  
Sauced family members wait  
Oblivious to burger or sausage  
The anticipated breaded slot -  
Except at times when a friend  
Jostles to the fore to have a gander  
Out of his place at the bar  
Temporarily, mutters an advisory  
About the necessity of onions  
And the advantages of mushrooms,  
The longed-for accessories -  
Not for ourselves, indeed,  
Seeing that this is our hope,  
But for our children and wives!

So, under Brisbane skies  
Compass the inebriated throng  
When the barbecue is opened up  
Neither anxious nor afraid  
Of unseen labyrinthine gloom -  
But quickly lost to consternation  
When the pythons wreath  
Out of place in this festivity  
Unwelcome serpents at the feast -  
And in the crowd, the cry goes up:  
'Who will save us from these snakes  
Infesting as they do the grills and jets

Denying sustenance from cinder  
Seeing that a good feed is our right  
For us, our children and our wives? '

Neither miffed nor feared  
Of the Lamia of this circumstance -  
The marbled coils of mishap  
That girdle the unlit griddle -  
Grandma reaches in  
Grabbing serpentine musculature  
And tugging free the first of two  
Drops it into a waiting chilly bin  
Followed soon by a second -  
Unencumbered unlike Laocoön -  
Unafraid, putting all to right  
The snake-snagged barbecue.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Chesterfield Skink

The Chesterfield Skink  
Liked to plump and sink  
On a quilted roll-armed sofa:  
But fate has forced a rethink  
And now its sits upon the brink  
No staid lounge lizard loafer.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The City After The Storm

In the silent movies, a girl will smile slowly  
And the camera will linger as we fall in love:  
She will glow and the vision will shimmer  
[The results it seems of rubbing Vaseline  
On the lens or optical flat sitting before it,  
Suitably and softly lit by subtle chiaroscuro,  
Aided by skilfully-caked theatrical make-up].

Being a person at the mercy of illusion  
Especially of wiles and ethereal pretence,  
Easily captivated by gloss and halalation,  
Artifice or not, I am hopelessly smitten..

Cue camera action: the object of obsession  
Daubed with sunlight bewitches the scene  
Setting herself in a steady gaze that turns  
Slowly to amusement at devotees' sighs  
Her tumultuous wayward storms now past  
The tantrums of the dressing room forsaken  
Her presence haloed hauntingly with glamour.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Copper Beech

[A visit to the family graves at St Mary's Churchyard, The Barony, Nantwich]

Home to haven, thanksgiving and prayer  
Where earth had settled the ferryman's fare:  
Safe from the crossing, at refuge from care,  
Rows of skiff-kists beached to memory there.

Guarding the landing where they had come home  
A grand copper beech resurges the graves  
Tumbling gently both kerbing and headstone  
In quiet relentless insistent waves.

Magnificent homeward-harbour tree  
Channeling blood and bone, both tide and quay  
Swelling your crowning bronze to ecstasy  
At one with the slipway and the sea

Brimming and breaking and welcoming me  
My loved ones at one in your majesty.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Crossing - Mid-Atlantic On Tuesday, September 24th 1850 On The Three-Mast Ship The Charlotte Jane

I needed to know who you were,  
The neglected and hidden child,  
Borne to paradise with porpoises.

Nobody seemed to care.  
The ship's surgeon Dr Barker  
Received 10 shillings for  
Every passenger safely delivered to Lyttelton  
But had to pay back 20 shillings  
For every passenger who died.

Economists have a label  
For this kind of arrangement –  
If you write the script -  
It is 'moral hazard'.

But there is a name  
Crossed out in the Passenger List –  
Bridget Maitland, aged 11.

It seems that she was travelling  
With George and Ann Allan  
And their daughter Ann Elizabeth  
Aged 9.

And that George and Ann's indifference  
Betrayed the fact that she was an orphan  
Tagging along as a shadow -  
A sometimes servant  
A sometimes playmate -  
At the ragged sleeves  
Of the family of a poor labourer.

But how majestic Bridget  
That you should be welcomed  
To the deep by heavenly creatures,

Following God's purpose  
Across Enchanted Seas  
To the Land of Beulah.

[After reading: 'The Journal of Edward Ward – Canterbury 1850-51']

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Darling Buds Of January - For My Wife

Somewhere between Collingwood and Takaka  
I watched the paddocks skim by  
As you drove my Corolla -  
I didn't know then  
That you drive an automatic with two feet.

Shall I compare thee to that summer's day  
Or simply say  
That you are the Love of My Life?  
And add that  
I avoid watching the brake and the accelerator.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Drop Bear

ONE day young Elsie Randle  
Cooled off at Swaggie's Run,  
Her bra straps and her girdle  
There flashing in the sun.  
'Twas New Year's Eve, and slowly  
Across the ridges low  
The sad Old Year was drifting  
To where the old years go.

The New Chum's mind reviewing  
The Facebook pages of her life —  
Her love for Pommy Breeding  
Ere she became an Aussie wife;  
She sorrowed for the sorrows  
Of a heart not nobly won,  
And she pined that she was trouble  
Out there on Swaggie's Run.

The sapling shades had lengthened,  
The summer day was late,  
As Elsie quickly hastened  
Beyond the homestead gate.  
And if the hand of trouble  
Can leave a lasting trace,  
The lines of care had come to stay  
On poor sweet Elsie's face.

She walked among the gum trees  
As the shadows gathered there  
Lost in thought of Brucie Humphries  
Whose manners drove her spare.  
And great black clouds of menace  
On Bush and Creek descended  
'No gent will ever show his face  
'Where politesse has ended'.

Then a Drop Bear's rude descent  
Knocked poor Elsie flat -  
It heard her Pommy Accent

And couldn't stomach that.  
Lord save her from that hell  
I beg in girlhood's name!  
For if it gives a vampire kiss,  
That ends the bleedin' game.

Could England or its sisters  
Hold up their heads again,  
To face the Outback's malice  
Or claim the love of men?  
And if it plants a smacker  
It were better were she dead -  
As when its fangs retracted  
Its premolars glowed bright red.

Just then up came the Squatter  
Riding on his thoroughbred  
He saw the maiden in distress  
And this is what he said:  
'Relieve yourself young lady  
And rub it on your head'.  
And so young Elsie sprang a leak  
To shake the Drop Bear dread.

The sad Australian sunset  
Had faded from the west;  
But night brings darker shadows  
To hearts that cannot rest;  
And Bruce the Cocky sits rocking  
And moaning in his chair.  
'I cannot bear disgrace, ' he moaned;  
'Disgrace I cannot bear.

'In hardship and in trouble  
'I struggled year by year  
'To make my homestead better  
'Than other Bush Runs here.  
'And now my girl's a squatter's sheila  
'How can I show my face?  
'I've nothing left but Mutt the Heeler,  
'And a slip rail bough-shed place!

'Ah, God in Heaven pardon!  
'I'm selfish in my woe —  
'My girl is better set now  
'Than many that I know'.

But Elsie on her big verandah  
Rocked and pondered her relief -  
She thought of Brucie only now  
And missed the Vegemite between his teeth.  
And ere a two year's dawning  
They set up home at last;  
And this is but a story  
Of woes now long since past!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Druids' Hymns To Cernnunos The Horned

"To be a poet in a destitute time means: to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods. This is why the poet in the time of the world's night utters the holy." [Martin Heidegger]

## THE DRUIDS' HYMNS TO CERNUNNOS THE HORNED THE FIRST TRUTH

That the sky is our father  
The earth our mother  
The sun our elder brother  
The moon our elder sister  
And the stars our kin  
Is not to be doubted.

But there is one ruler of all  
The creator and destroyer  
The one who also sustains  
Knowing things must be:  
Bringing the changing seasons  
And the night that follows day

The sunlight, air, ground and water  
Nourish and the greenness grows.  
Nothing is more harmonious  
And the rain, snow, lightning and rainbow  
Are edicts and signs, as the mists  
Rise from the marshes and return.

So the trees are born  
From the smallest tokens  
To reach for the heavens  
From tangled roots  
Linking and branching  
From the common stock.

That the hunter will track his prey  
And the forests will come alive  
When the young girls dance  
And the ploughman will break the earth

The harvest will be brought home  
And there will be feasts with joy.

#### THE SECOND TRUTH

The trees shed their leaves at the Fall  
When the stags bring their horns to full  
So is the green tree left bare branched  
And the sun-deer in winter crowned  
After the hunt and forays to the bounds  
The feasts with venison and elfin sounds  
The sport of hunters, the lap of maids  
The cauldron filler with dearest bloods:  
That at the waning of the green one  
Herne will dance to return the sun -  
Antlers aloft, dressed to the greening,  
Priests intoning, maidens keening.  
Then come the Spring, the horns fall  
As the deer lays its head to velvet  
And the sun takes lengthier time to set.  
Let all rejoice - in warmth is born the fawn  
The carnyx played, the brightest colours worn.

#### THE THIRD TRUTH

Beware the criminals and the evil  
Threatening the even level of things -  
The heavenly rhythms in cycle,  
The ordered radiance the sky sings -

Beware intruders of our shire oak marks:  
Stranger enter not at all or with dread -  
Deep in the forest hung with captive torques  
Our god will deck his horns with your half-dead.

There oak and holly are garlanded in sacrifice  
With captives hanging as fruit for cropping:  
Our druid priest invoking plenty thrice  
As the cauldron fills with vein-bled sapping

Each year of flesh-fed growth the axe arrests  
Felling the cross tree like an antler crown

The branches laying down their hallowed guests  
Interred to rest as the woodlands' own.

Where lightning strikes the forks at first are bare  
And galls will form where the bark is broken  
The mistletoe will root and prosper there  
With our chieftain's daughter's sash in token.

At summer's start our maidens dance their dance  
When our life-tree is born again as its greening swells  
Take care not to feed its roots in grave mischance.  
As the sun-deer kneels to the green one's spells.

Bow deeply then to the Ever-Changing -  
Horn-crowned, broken-noose / torque-holding:  
He who may grasp death's serpent's writhing  
Where the wolves await the carcass tithing.

#### THE LAST TRUTH

Men and women have three natures:  
A form which warms the earth  
A force which challenges the heavens  
And a shade or mist or wraith  
Whose stories, songs and poetry  
Tell our best thoughts in words.

And there are paths and ways  
That lead to understanding  
For the great truth is that order  
Is divine - and that the wayfarer  
Must leave imprints heading home  
That those who follow may find.

History, mystery and immediacy  
Define us.

The first tells of stories  
And sagas, the greatness of some  
And the struggles of the commoners.  
The second tells of fear of death,  
Of the vast beauty of the night sky,

Of the need to cry out with humility  
And the need above all for love.  
The third tells of the life we live  
Hand guarding hand, step by step  
Where the wagon makes its way  
Where the wheel grinds the knife.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Dust Of Love Is All We Have At Hand

A photograph of a small girl  
Taken by her heart-broken father  
Shows his daughter in hospital  
Pretty, bare-chested but in dreadful pain

Her mouth rictus clinched  
Tears in her desperate eyes  
Waiting for something, anything,  
That offers relief and reliving -

She is only four years old  
Dying in torture from cancer.

If I or perhaps more likely you  
Had faith as much as a grain of mustard  
This mountain could be moved  
But then again not a speck or mote

Has ever been brought to atonement  
From the very beginning of the universe  
Though seeds have been long planted  
And offerings asked of the bereaved:

Faith is too fine a grain for us it seems -  
The dust of love is all we have at hand.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Eastern Barred Bandicoot

The Eastern Barred Bandicoot  
Is diminutive, furry and cute  
Snuffling here  
Snuffing there  
It needs special care  
From becoming too rare  
So guard dogs are now in pursuit.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Eastern Rosella

Harlequin Eastern Rosella:  
Dandy Little Aussie Fella  
With his bright rainbow suit of light  
Now our Bushland's flashiest sight -  
A spruiker from Australia  
Right at home in Aotearoa!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Echo Of Love

As the stars reverberate  
I cup my ear to listen  
And hear repeated  
Resonating  
The tones of our voices  
The echoes of those sounds  
The longings in those echoes.

We are echoes  
We are echoes  
Immemorial  
We are a memory of each other

And whatever the distance  
It can touch your heart  
I will reach out  
In love  
Holding you tenderly  
Holding you with tenderness  
With longing in that tenderness.

And as the darkness gathers  
Towards sunset and dusk  
Night will not part us:  
Stay close  
I will recall you then  
Cherishing our remembrance  
Sharing memory and recollection.

We are memory and remembrance  
Each sound, each touch  
Has its response  
A shadow  
And a reflection  
So that every echo is timeless  
The tone and timbre of memory itself.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Fine Print Of Purgatory - For Seamus Heaney

Like Seamus Heaney, I was a farmer's boy  
Or rather I became one  
When I was four and signed my lease  
In hearts' loss -  
Paying my ingoings  
In mud and shit and love.

I too saw kittens drown -  
And pigs slaughtered  
Squealing at hell's gate,  
Blood caught in an old tin bath -  
And dogs shot in the drive  
Slinking as the 22 rose and leveled.

There can't be many of us  
Who felt white-washed walls  
In the dark, as the cows respired -  
Smelled the poetry there,  
Looking up the stock at night  
By torch and latch and moonlight.

Those cattle died of plague  
And ended in a bulldozed pit  
Near the stack-yard -  
And my almost father  
Broke his heart for loss  
While I was bush-bashing outback tracks.

Few I'm sure will know now  
The turnip shredder in the picture  
Or have eaten a slice cold from the handle swing.  
Now and again, we used to feed turnips  
To my Connemara pony Jonty  
Before he was knackered by a winter's standing.

There is cruelty then in much remembering -  
But life it was in deeds that dated  
With death foreshadowed in a codicil.



# The Fouling Of The Throne Must Bring The Dearest To Disaster

## IPHIGENIA AND THE SACRED DEER

Cutting down reason and resolution  
Her father slew the sacred deer Telos  
Impiously coursing to negation  
The milk-white hind beloved of Artemis.

This end of innocence presaged slaughter  
When the goddess pressed reparation  
From the father demanding his daughter  
Dead to call the readied fleet to action.

So wars are born of foolishness and pride  
And children sacrificed to circumstance,  
And dreadful means are often justified  
By chains of error, hubris and mischance.

Being so bloodied at the altar stone,  
Betrayed by her reckless, heedless elder,  
Did she perceive the fouling of the throne  
Must bring the dearest to disaster?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Garlands Once That Gaped And Graced My Head

I was the symbol of new life arising  
The cross reborn in resurrection -  
But carelessness and pride despising  
Sense has brought sweet nature to rejection.

Recovery lost in this betrayal  
You have cut too hard, too deep to the quick  
Rhyme and reason, rhythm and renewal  
Have been stilled and the wounded earth grows sick.

From teeming autumn with its rich increase  
The barrenness of winter you have won  
And silent spring its wasted power gone  
Mouths only now of summer's sad disease.

What scarring have I known - what dark days seen?  
Man come stow your axe, you have hewn far down  
My strength is gone to heal and then redeem  
I can no longer raise my green-cleft crown.

The garlands once that gaped and graced my head  
Are lost to greed, adorned with gold - and dead:  
There was no honour in the blows you dealt  
You were not equal to the love I felt.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Goddess Of Protection

Economists are generally unromantic creatures  
And visiting Hyderabad to make a presentation  
On Public Sector Finance  
I was more interested in buying cheap silk  
At the tourist emporium,  
During a break organized by our hosts,  
Than in the line of trucks along the roadside  
Which were being fussed over for the puja,  
Carrying representations of the Goddess Durga  
Preparing to promenade serenely on her tiger + Tata.

And now, grown gnarled and sage, as a poet of sorts,  
I find myself writing:

Doubtless now it will come to women  
To have the last word in the last days  
In a world run from the alpha to the omega  
To the seventh seal and the seventh angel.

This is the dawning of the Age of Amazons  
...

To take arms against a sea of male foibles  
And rescue the world from perfidy and dishonour.

-

But ladies or better perhaps women  
Surely you already have your own familiar -  
Armed eight-fold by the gods themselves.  
The female form which, when the male Devas had been bested  
By the Buffalo Demon Mahishasura, rose to the challenge  
And defeated the ignorance and chaos that he represented,  
By killing the fearful, overwhelmed and outwitted horned one,  
Piercing his heart, while riding him down on her liger Dawon.

Shiva your supposed better half  
Gave you three pointers as to when to act;  
Vishnu gave you a discus to spin the world

Around your index finger and bring down evil;  
Varuna gave you shell to put against your ear  
So that you could discern justice and truth;  
And the sword or spear that Agni gave you  
Will cut fine and sharp in judgments, free of doubts.

Maruta gave you a bow and two quivers of arrows  
The sources of energy and action;  
Indra gave you the thunderbolt of confidence  
The flash of understanding that strikes home;  
Krishna will clothe you with righteousness  
And the garments of forgiveness;  
And then there is the gift of Vishvakarman  
The enlightening lotus flower born of muddy waters.

And Himayat, the spirit of the mountains tamed the snow lion  
As your proud and playful jousting steed,  
With the tiger from the jungle of the terai,  
Meek but boundlessly fierce as its alternate -  
And a snake at your feet promising a transformation  
In consciousness to the highest state of pure bliss.

Then there are additional gifts like the bell of Indra's elephant Airavata;  
A replica of Yama's staff of death;  
A noose from Varuna, the lord of waters;  
The string of beads and a water-pot donated by Brahma, the lord of beings;  
With Surya bestowing his own rays on all the pores of your skin;  
Kala providing a spotless shield;  
And the milk-ocean chipping in a pure necklace,  
A pair of undecaying under garments,  
A divine crest-jewel, a pair of ear-rings, bracelets,  
Brilliant half-moon ornamented jewelry - armlets for all your arms,  
A pair of shining anklets, a unique necklace and rings for all 80 fingers;  
Visvakarman also providing an unsurpassed axe,  
Weapons of various forms, and impenetrable armour;  
The lord of wealth (Kubera) setting up a drinking tab, ever full of wine;  
And Sesa, the lord of all serpents, who supports this earth,  
Treating you to a writhing-necklace bedecked with the best jewels.

So that overall you have your hands full riding high -  
Regardless of having 8,10 or 18 arms;  
Whether winking one or more of your three eyes

Signifying moon-desire, sun-intimacy  
Or the middle eye of fire, intuition and perception;  
Or being transformed into various avatars  
Like Kali, Bhagvati, Bhavani, Ambika,  
Lalita, Gauri, Kandalini, Java, and Rajeswari  
Or appearing in any one of nine manifestations  
Like Skondamata, Kusumanda, Shailaputri,  
Kaalratri, Brahmacharini, Maha Gauri,  
Katyayani, Chandraghanta, and Siddhidatri.

I could go on and the very mountains would ring  
But suffice to say that Hollywood giving Wonder Woman  
A sword and buckler, isn't the half of it.  
And now I see that passing the line of floats  
Being prepared for the puja in Hyderabad  
In 2008, I should have been more respectful.

- - - - -

I am the Queen, the gatherer-up of treasures, most thoughtful, first of those who  
merit worship.

Thus gods have established me in many places with many homes to enter and  
abide in.

Through me alone all eat the food that feeds them, - each man who sees,  
breathes, hears the word outspoken.

They know it not, yet I reside in the essence of the Universe. Hear, one and all,  
the truth as I declare it.

I, verily, myself announce and utter the word that gods and men alike shall  
welcome.

I make the man I love exceeding mighty, make him nourished, a sage, and one  
who knows Brahman.

I bend the bow for Rudra [Shiva], that his arrow may strike, and slay the hater  
of devotion.

I rouse and order battle for the people, I created Earth and Heaven and reside as  
their Inner Controller.

On the world's summit I bring forth sky the Father: my home is in the waters, in  
the ocean as Mother.

Thence I pervade all existing creatures, as their Inner Supreme Self, and  
manifest them with my body.

I created all worlds at my will, without any higher being, and permeate and dwell

within them.

The eternal and infinite consciousness is I, it is my greatness dwelling in everything.

—?Devi Sukta, Rigveda [1500 - 1200 BCE] 10.125.3 - 10.125.8

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Good Swineherd

As a farmer's boy in Cheshire back in the 1950s  
I read the Bible extensively with the Scripture Union  
But some unlikely things bothered me  
[Gentile that I was, gathering crumbs under the table]  
Like the Gadarene Swine going over the cliff:

And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.

And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand,) and were choked in the sea.

And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And

they went out to see what it was that was done.

And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind; and they were afraid.

And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.

And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.

And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.

Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.

And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

Now Gadara was at the very edge of the deep cleft  
Of the Jordan Valley and the last staging post  
For trading caravans from the Fertile Crescent and beyond  
Before they wound their way down to Galilee and Nazareth  
And thence to Caesarea or Ptolemais-Acre and the Med.

And we neglect I think that Jesus was caught between two cultures  
And that he would have visited the Decapolis cities  
Smelling pork roasting and bacon frying  
Perhaps even listening to a mendicant Buddhist teacher or two  
Preaching the virtues of tolerance and compassion.

As for me, I always loved pigs and it seemed so sad to me  
Sending those beautiful animals to the Devil -  
So here I had to differ with the quiet young man  
From Nazareth with his mesmeric admonitions  
Wanting me to forsake all and follow him.

Years later I had to farrow four sows  
Over the space of a week and my sometimes midnight  
Midwifery resulted in 42 healthy piglets  
That I sold at 12 weeks old and lost money on -

Having been far too generous with the weaner nuts.

And we had four saddle back gilts that I became very fond of  
Though they didn't prosper on a concrete floor  
And needed to be run free – notwithstanding  
My going over the Larkey's paddock to the big oak  
On Cornhill Drive to collect acorns for them in a bucket.

Years later again, I found myself on mission in Bangladesh  
In the Chittagong Hill Tracts as we toured a Hill Tribes village  
And my excitable young Bengali guide asked me a tough question:  
'That animal you see there – What is it? '  
And I found myself telling him to his consternation that pigs were not halal –  
haram  
Where I came from and that I had once been a pig-farmer.

Now my charismatic young Yeshua tell me something:  
Why the Good Shepherd and not the Good Swineherd?  
Does it simply boil down to the fact that pigs  
Like humans are inquisitive, gregarious, awkward and indolent  
And resent being herded with the camels in the desert scrub?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Greater Short-Tailed Bat

The Greater Short-tailed Bat  
Being prey to stoat and rat and cat  
Goes incognito in a furry hat:  
A refugee on Big South Cape  
With disguise it may yet escape -  
So now forget I told you that.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Grey Nurse Shark

The Grey Nurse Shark is much misunderstood  
Being best regarded not as bad but good  
Calm and gentle like the Killer Whale  
A sort of fishy Florence Nightingale  
It would bring a bed pan if it could  
And check your stool for signs of blood.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Grey-Headed Flying-Fox

The Grey-headed flying fox  
A wise nocturnal frugivore  
Keeps apricots in its socks  
And it's where it likes to store,  
Eschewing any kind of box,  
A plum or two in fruity paw.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Heroes And The True Treasures

There is more to be told about Death and Sin and Satan  
About the shroud spectre, the tarn hag and the dragon  
And how sin coupled with the dawn-devouring serpent  
Bearing in her turn the loathed all-consuming adversary -

And how the Christ himself gave his life in redemption  
Of that dreadful compact of a daughter's rape and incest  
That the ghastly child, the unremitting arbiter of life itself,  
Should feel the loss of hope as resurrection triumphed -

And how Beowulf the hero also gained honour at the last  
By ripping down the indiscriminate slayer of our kinfolk  
And descending into the dark mere to seize a tokened sword  
By which to kill the fish-tailed harlot and crop her son's corpse -

And how our heroes bested the fire-unleashing guardian  
Of hell's treasures and all its beguiling wealth and plenty  
Taking nothing from this earthly realm in just reward -  
Leaving only the steadfast gifts of honest hearts and wholesome life.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The House Of Life: Non-Renewal Of Subscription

Pale Dante Rossetti - wan and intense  
( 'Might-have-been, No-more, Too-late, Farewell' ) :  
Upon the beach, nought but a soundless shell  
Is left of noble thought and faith's pretence.

Heed me, how pissed off I am old bean:  
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise  
Of cast up life and its foam-fretted sighs  
And next the emptiness where beauty's been.

Mark thine eyes the tweets where that is seen  
Which had Truth's form in Lies but by their spell  
Are become rampant memes intolerable  
Of things best left unuttered, best unseen

And shamelessness spins tides of ignorance  
That foul the shore with washed-up bitterness.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Identity Of Relative And Absolute

&quot;Everybody's shit is relative to their own shit&quot;:  
And shit just happens -  
Even if you don't give a shit  
You have to get your shit together  
No shit -  
Because life is a shitty business.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Inky Raindrops Of Calligraphy

Finally at the furthest point of my walk  
I prepared for the harbour to have its say  
But first popping into the Academy of Fine Arts  
I found myself almost alone wishing bright life:  
Listening to Hokai Shibayama's brush strokes  
And the imaginary inky sounds of Japanese calligraphy.

Apricot blossoms on the way  
Are in beautiful bloom  
Spring birds are calling in a sweet voice  
Everywhere in the mountains:  
I have help while I am unaware of it.

I have no container  
I will take it in my hands -  
Is it the sound of drizzling rain?  
Go into the rain and listen  
And understand feelings with heaviness.

And Akiko sort of materialized  
In a most beautiful kimono  
Smiling that sweet, blinking slight smile  
That is something of a Japanese speciality  
And I said: Are you the calligrapher?  
'No' she replied 'But I also practice'

As for me, I am at home I told her  
Having somewhat studied Zen -  
Minded of the Paramita Heart Sutra  
And the Identity of Relative and Absolute -  
Like the foot before and the foot behind in walking:  
We are nothing special but nothing is lacking.

Let me respectfully remind you  
That Life and Death are of Supreme Importance:  
Time Swiftly Passes and Opportunity is Lost  
Each of us should strive to awaken  
Awaken! Take heed:  
Do Not Squander Your Life.

And we bowed to each other with gentle hearts  
But cynic that I am, I later recalled  
That everything in the sacred is profane  
And everything in the profane is sacred,  
When mulling a wheat beer by the harbour.

So I watched a young crowd joss and dance  
To a lazy Sunday afternoon of groovy music  
The girls jumping into the laps of their men  
Playfully smooching and mounting other girls  
With one brave-heart tipsy sailing a skate-board.

As the froth fell in my glass - foam ring by foam ring  
I thought again of one of my earliest memories  
Of the farm that we had moved to when I was four  
And of sitting at the window of the farm kitchen,  
Watching the raindrops in the darkening autumn,

Waiting for them to coalesce and resolve  
On the glass and for the heavy droplets  
To suddenly streak down, racing each other  
To the broken paintwork of the window sill  
Disappearing like mirages in mirror form.

And how this always reminded me of the first story  
That I had been read by my primary school teacher  
About a scarecrow that had come to stuffed-straw life,  
Miraculously animated by her stern but smiling face,  
As she communed with words and their mysterious letters

And how all my conscious life, words had befriended me  
With their letters like the gentle patter of rain -  
Or droplets of words rushing to a meaning -  
And I laughed, as I walked near Frank Kitts' Park,  
That somebody had written in chalk in an excellent hand  
'Save the Whales - Eat the Japanese'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Italian Cross [????????????? ??????] By Mikhail Arkadyevich Svetlov (1903 - 1964)

A 'translation' by Keith Johnson

There was a black cross on his chest  
No engraving, no design, no patina:  
A treasured heirloom charm  
Bequeathed to this alien Italian.

My Neapolitan boy what will be left  
Of you here on the Russian fields?  
Were you not happy enough  
On that magnificent bay?

I shot you dead near Mozdok  
As you dreamt of distant Vesuvius!  
As I dreamed of the Volga flowing free!  
Perhaps we could have shared a gondola!

Mind you, I did not come with a gun  
To ruin an Italian Summer:  
My bullets didn't whine  
Above the sacred land of Raphael.

Here I killed you! But we were both born  
Where there is friendship and pride  
Where there are epics and sagas  
That defy translation. But I ask you:

Are the meanders of the River Don  
Much studied by overseas geographers?  
Has our ancient homeland Russia  
Been ploughed and sown by outsiders?

No! But you were armed and marshalled  
To seize and dispossess distant lands -  
That cross of yours from your ancestral home  
Destined to overshadow your grave.

I will not let you take my country  
And enslave it from foreign shores!  
I'll shoot - it is not a matter of justice  
Ultimately just a matter of bullets.

You have never had the right to be here!  
But glistening in these snowy fields  
Your eyes tell of Italy's blue skies  
As they glaze and their light fades.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Kaka [nz Parrot] And The Kuku [nz Wood Pigeon] – Funny Old Birds

The kuku loves domestic bliss  
The kaka likes life's turns and twists

The kuku is at its best at home  
The kaka though is prone to roam

While kukus plump for picturesque  
The kaka goes for picaresque

For the kuku absences are antithetic  
Contrast the kaka - he's peripatetic

Like Zorro the kaka wears a red bolero  
Not so, the demure and retired kereru

The kuku is polite and workaholic  
Where kakas are ever prone to frolic

At a party, you can guess who's most shambolic  
The kaka always gins without the tonic

The kuku rarely doffs its vest  
While kakas often dance a wild burlesque

The kaka will raise the decibels with yakka  
And soon he'll ask his mates to haka

So all in all, the kuku's just an early player  
And it's the kaka who's the party-stayer

Birds of a different feather they may be.  
"Have a drink! Which of them do you think is me? "

'He kuku ki te kainga,  
He kaka ki te haere.'

["He is a wood-pigeon (kuku / kereru) when he's at home but a noisy parrot

(kaka) when he's out and about."]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Kakapo

Let me elaborate on ambassador Sirocco  
A bird whose trysts are often quite rococo:  
This kakapo is all trundle, boom and bust  
And indiscriminate in terms of lust  
So before your scalp reflects the light  
Beware this flightless 'parrot of the night'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Kea

DOUBLE CROSS DAYS: [Whereby Picnickers Are Forced to Attend an Annual Torment in the Southern Alps]

Mischievously wickedly back they fly  
Clowns from the clouds, with tricks from the sky  
Pulling out rubber, pecking on wire  
Loosening the windscreen, slicing the tyre  
Skating the tiles and sliding the roof  
Looking for weakness but charmingly goof

Seeking out back-packs and shiny white plastic  
Dissecting pack lunches and twanging elastic  
Out from the mountains and skirting the snows  
With tumbles and jokes and red furbelows  
Nodding so sagely but eyeing its chance  
The Kea is ready to lead us a dance.

Hist! Square shoulders, tidy your crumbs  
And clean up the teacups — here he comes.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Kune Kune Piggy

The Kune Kune is a sort of Maori Pig  
Whose face is dewlapped with a whiskery bib  
These wattles, tassels or piri piri  
Make them look both cute and silly.

Their name in Maori means fat and round  
So much so, they seem to lard the ground  
And when they grunt they make you laugh -  
And look for slops to fill their trough.

Pot-bellied, friendly hairy creatures  
They beg you: 'Mrs - kindly treat us! '  
So save the peelings, bread and cold spaghetti  
And drop them off ere you forgettey.

[Pronounced 'Coonie Coonie']

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## The Last Word?

They may never come again who knew the joy  
Of youth among the mountains there  
As time and use degrade and then destroy  
All but the memories those hearts alone still bear.  
But yet the hillsides graft a gentle scar  
To bind the happenings of those who care  
So that neither time nor loss can mar  
The roots that land and lives forever share.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Legend Of Morven Mere

It was thus in the time of siege and famine:  
A poor farmer sold his little daughter  
To the asrais and nixies of the mere  
So that the harvest might not fail again.

Then the farm prospered and all were fed  
So no more was thought of the bargain  
Though the reeds at the water's edge  
Sang of the prize that was expected.

And Meggan, growing fair but also strong  
Took to ploughing with her horse,  
Coming on her sixteenth birthday  
To till the rich silty fields by the lake.

It was springtime and fine weather  
And she and her horse Meadowmane  
Worked quietly from shore to headland  
As the gulls followed the turned turf.

On a start, a milk-white charger appeared  
Its golden mane and tail flashing in the sun  
Its dappled flanks afire with rainbow flecks  
Snorting and prancing in courtship and display.

'I know you Brookenhorse', said the girl  
'The mount of Jenny Greenteeth Grindlelow  
Sent from the dark depths of the mere  
To claim me as a prize for the tarn-hag'.

Then the enchanted stallion came up  
And nuzzled Meadowmane on the cheek  
Nipping the old cart horse on the neck  
At which the Brookenhorse shape-shifted

And took up the plough collar and traces  
Heaving the ploughshare and coulter  
With such force that the task was soon done  
And the meadow seared with perfect furrows.

At which the Brookenhorse bolted for the lake  
Taking with it both the plough and its mistress -  
And she trapped by the reins that she had wound  
To the handles was dragged beneath the water.

'Welcome my beauty' said Mother Grindelow  
'You my drowned princess are my catch now  
Take up your deathly pallor and sleeves of green  
And sing with us amid the mere of midnight silver'

'I have my prizes now - my temptress Morgwen Fey-  
And the sharp steels of the foreshore and coulter  
With which to forge a sword of endless enmity -  
The enchanted plough become the stuff of strife'.

But Meggan shunned the hell-bride and her watermaids  
And dreamed of the bright spring meadow flowers  
And the warm sun and scent of heaving Meadowmane -  
Finding at last the Brookenhorse in its watery stall.

At which it flared its nostrils, reared and stamped,  
Abject in its thrall to the monstrous Borrage Queen,  
Now become once more an ancient broken steed  
Mere knucker bones and hide, bleached by the depths.

But Meggan wept that it had lost its rainbow glimmer  
And placed her arms around its neck in comfort  
Reaching to her kirtle purse to find a scrap of bread  
That she had kept to share with Meadowmane.

At which the Brookenhorse glowed fine and white again  
Lustrous and resplendent in its strength and beauty  
And she broke down the stall gate and freed the horse  
Leaping to its back as it bolted for the sunlit sky

Seizing the sword of enmity now become destiny  
That mystical Cut Steel - Cleft Evil wand Excalibur  
Until at last they came to safety and the light of day  
Where she became her maiden self with Meadowmane.

And her father threw his arms around her with joy

Lamenting only the loss of his much-loved plough  
But handling with amazement the magic sword  
That shone among the peaceful fields of plenty.

So in time a knight came, seeking justice and love  
And found at last the sword beaten from the share  
Taking it up reverently from the Lady of the Lake  
Bringing her and her treasured milk-white foal to Camelot.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Longer You Live The Force Becomes The Farce

How do you translate black laughter?

Medical professionals in Australia  
Have devised a 29-point predictor  
Of death within the short term -  
Thirty days, thirty pieces of silver,  
And the medium term of 12 weeks -  
Eighty-four days, Three Moons.

In the hope that treatments are not wasted  
And honest discussions can be engaged  
With Older People who are frail and sick.

We speak of release: we speak of the quick hit,  
Even as preferable to the thing that lingers.

If you are over 65 and admitted to the accident ward  
In an emergency  
You have a 25 percent chance of  
Popping your clogs or dropping off your perch  
In the next twelve months.

And one of the causes of dementia  
Is that older brains slow  
Knowing too much and getting jammed.

And many of us will not do it well  
Although we have carried its mark for a long time.

&quot;He or she died following a short illness&quot;  
The obituaries note.  
At least now I know that a short  
Illness is one lasting less than Lent or Ramadan  
And that a medium illness is one lasting  
Less than the payment schedule for your property rates  
Providing absolutely no relief  
For what may be outstanding.

At the last, some can only be seen as they were always seen

Not ennobled by it but reduced.

I did a quick check of the twenty-nine points  
And scored eight  
But my wife who is a nurse  
Hadn't a single tick  
In my boxes  
So from a clinical perspective  
There are no thieves evident in my night.

Why we are frightened is that we in part  
Know ourselves and what is possible.  
Walls fall; doors slam on daily lives more  
Often than caution prepares for -  
Where there is blood some is likely to spill.  
And whether the kiss or the curse is the truer  
Metre of passion is difficult to foretell.

NOTE: Quotations from 'True Confessions of the Last Cannibal' by NZ Poet Louis Johnson (1924-1988].

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Loss Of Everyday Goodness

There revealed from a bend in the river  
Was the most perfect of little towns  
A cathedral's cupolas crowning the bluff:  
At the wharf a nose-bagged nag  
And his tipsy, sleepy drosky driver.

Sophia, this is peaceful perfection  
A place for us both to paint, to love:  
I will be your frog here by the river  
And you can sing to me from a terrace  
And kiss me that I become a prince.

I have one small secret though  
As an artist I despise the ordinary  
And as a frog, I eat grasshoppers:  
Be sure that you can set aside  
The loss of everyday goodness.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Metamorphosis Of Laura Into Liberality

Then Herpes thus:

A nymph of late there was  
Whose heav'nly form her fellows did surpass.  
The pride and joy of far America's plains,  
Belov'd by Murdochs, ador'd by Ailes:  
Laura her name, by Republicans pursu'd,  
As oft she did the lustful Gods delude:  
Like Megyn clad, Megyn's lesser self she seems,  
So tall, so streight, such well-proportion'd limbs:  
The nicest eye did no distinction know,  
But that the goddess bore unblemished brow:  
Distinguish'd thus, the sight she cheated too.

Now while the lustful God, with speedy pace,  
Just thought to strain her in a strict embrace,  
He fill'd his lips with sores, new rising on the place.  
And while he sighs, his ill success to find,  
The tender limbs were parted for the wind;  
And queefed a mournful air, unheard before;  
That much surprizing rump, yet pleas'd him more.  
Admiring this new musick, Thou, he said,  
Who canst not be the partner of my bed,  
At least shall be the confort of my mind:  
And often, often to my lips be joyn'd.

Thus form'd the pustules, proportion'd as they were,  
Unequal in their blain, yet wax'd with care,  
They now besmirched the cheeks so former fair.  
While Herpes mocked, her suitors stare  
And Impatient to revenge her injur'd head,  
She wreaks her anger on the blisters dread;  
And Furies sting her from her native home;  
To drive her gadding, round the world to roam:  
Nor ceas'd her madness, and that all should know  
Deep throats the co-hosts of her Fox News show.

Then Herpes spoke in publick, told it to her face;  
Nor durst she vindicate the dire disgrace:  
Even she, the bold, now sensible of wrong,

Restrain'd by shame, holding thus her cankered tongue.  
To hear an open slander, is a curse:  
But not to find an answer, is a worse.  
Make some sure sign; and be you liberal shown,  
To right my honour, and redeem your own  
And then he plastered Zovirax liberally about  
Her face and limbs and beg'd her to resolve the doubt  
By kissing Hannity's erupted pimples snout.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Northern Quoll

The importunate Northern Quoll  
Finds its hunger hard to control:  
For snacks it's a sucker  
Scoffing cane toads for tucker  
That rissole its last patrol.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Nz Bellbird

If you should read these lines or hear  
The bells sound deep in the forest  
Then those you loved of old will near  
And in your sweet thoughts find their rest.

Toll for them for heaven's sake  
As the bellbird chimes at daybreak  
And in the incantation  
Ring their celebration.

And if your love for them grows faint  
Let the wise world take up the song  
And sing of them without restraint  
In tones to which all dawns belong

'he rite ki te kopara  
e ko nei te ata'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Nz Internet Party And The Kim Jumblies - Sieving Knives And Fools

I

They went to beg from a Kim, they did  
From a Kim they went to beg  
To sell themselves and their ethics betray  
On an autumn morn, on a stormy day,  
To a Kim to grovel and beg!  
And when the Kim turned round and round  
And every one cried 'You'll all be drowned  
In cash for hire' they called aloud  
'Our Kim's so big, he can spread it around  
So we don't care a button! We don't care a fig!  
With a Kim we'll win just see! '  
Far and few, far and few,  
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;  
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,  
And they went to beg from a Kim.

II

They went to beg, they did,  
In closet cars with tinted glass that just sailed past  
To a Coatesville Mansion on a pocket book trail  
Stuffed with deals in a craven tale  
As the voters turned and looked aghast  
And every one said, who saw them go,  
'O won't they be soon upset, you know!  
For the sky is dark, and the voyage is long,  
And happen what may, it's extremely wrong  
To sell to a Kim what's asked! '  
Far and few, far and few,  
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;  
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,  
And they went to beg from a Kim.

III

The bilge it soon gave in, it did,  
The bilge it soon gave in;  
So to keep them dry, they wrapped their feet  
In secretive papers folded neat,  
And they battened it down with some spin.  
And they passed the night in Kim's cocktail bar,  
And each of them said, 'How wise we are!  
Though the sky be dark, and the voyage be long,  
Yet we never can think we were rash or wrong  
To pan handle the Kim with a tin! '  
Far and few, far and few,  
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;  
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,  
And they went to beg from a Kim.

#### IV

And all night long they sailed away;  
And when the sun went down,  
They whistled and warbled a phony song  
To the echoing sound of the chamber's gong,  
In the shade of the mountains brown.  
'O voters o! How happy we are,  
When we sail by expedience's darkened star  
And all night long in the moonlight pale,  
We sail away with the leavings stale,  
In the shade of the mountains brown! '  
Far and few, far and few,  
Are the lands where the Jumblies live  
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,  
And they went to beg from a Kim.

#### V

They sailed to the Southern Sea, they did,  
To a land all bestirred with breeze,  
And Kim bought a Brash, and Peter's First,  
And a Norman nice, and a Corkery Tart,

And a teacup of slippery Banks.  
And he cashed a Cullen, and some Green Gee-gaws,  
And a sad old Mallard with paddlepop claws,  
And 30 silver pieces of Harawira,  
And some clandestine openings from Keys -  
And no end of political tease.  
Far and few, far and few,  
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;  
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,  
And they went to beg from a Kim.

## VI

And in six months they'll all be back,  
In six months or more,  
And all will say, 'How fat they've grown!  
For they've been to the Trough, and the Pocketing Zone,  
And the slops of the Bankroll Bore';  
And we'll drink their health, and give them a feast  
Of dumplings made in Asia's east;  
And all will say, 'If he'll only give,  
We'll cut our cloth and our haircut too for Kim,  
For the slops of the Bankroll Bore! '  
Far and few, far and few,  
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;  
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,  
And they went to beg from a Kim

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Nz Kakapo: The Nocturnal, Grounded, Lek-Breeding Parrot

Randy but bandy and late

The kakapo booms for its mate

As skyward it trudges

Not the least like the budgies

In its rotund and flightless state.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Nz Kingfisher Or Kotare

Anticipating... it holds harmony  
With the surface in reflection -  
Life and death in quiet economy  
Perfect in its delved completion.

So does te Kotare, the kingfisher,  
In stillness and silence dive deep,  
As it hunts the perilous river  
In reaches that fierce spates make steep.

No need of whetstone or stropping  
This knife in the water stays keen -  
Its point and its edges redeeming  
The intent of patience unseen.

Take heed of this sacred privilege  
That sharp awareness keep its edge.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Particularity And The Dream

The impressively monikered Karl du Fresne  
Has just given 'social scientist' Camille Nakhid  
A good wiggling for expressing the view  
That immigrants should be given longer shrift.

Karl grew up in a small Hawkes Bay town  
And he walks across his lawn every day  
In the Wairarapa to write in his shed  
For the Pakeha Establishment in Wellington.

Actually, I'm amazed at how tolerant  
Our new immigrants are about how stuck  
Up and up themselves the Old Chums  
Are about their tightly-held corners.

And I think Karl is missing something  
When he snides that we can safely assume  
That people immigrate to New Zealand  
Because it's infinitely better than the place they left.

...

And I get pissed off when the Oxford Companion  
Makes a big point of the fact that Allen Curnow  
Was a fourth generation New Zealander  
Who lived in a succession of Anglican vicarages in Canterbury.

And that the keepers of New Zealand literature  
Quibble about whether Greville Texidor or Eve Langley  
Exhibited a sufficiently restrictive desideratum  
In articulating a New Zealand particularity or 'common problem'.

And that Kendrick Smithyman slags  
Tanned, earnest Slavic Polynesian faces  
Or that David McKee Wright assumes that  
The native who is a brother is a Pakeha.

Or that my beloved Iris Wilkinson  
Talks so casually - so disparagingly about Nigger Jack...

Or that Tariana Turia cites an enormous public ignorance  
That is starting to become actual hostility towards Maori.

...

Time to give some ground, time to move on  
Time to open things up and make some space.  
Let's face it, a quarter of us were born abroad  
And then there are the more and more mixed.

Maybe the New Chums from Cambodia, Tonga  
China, India, Iraq, Somalia, Nepal and Kingdom Come  
Really need a bit more slack so that we can all pull together  
To bring up the future with a golden tether.

The young, the best, the intelligent, brave and beautiful,  
Have made a long migration under compulsions they hardly understand -  
New generations are homing from distant shores  
Imprinted with this destination by their dreams.

And an extraordinary thing may be happening.  
From the edge of the universe, New Zealand  
May become not only the site of our own dreams  
But a place where the world wakes refreshed.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Ploughman

The team moves forward taut to harness  
As I the teamster brace to join the toil -  
Good as gold my shires named Tom and Jess,  
Their hooves hold firm to break the yielding soil.

An honest ploughman under God's great sky  
Turning the earth as the shadows lengthen  
Each furrowed meridian straight as a die -  
Readied to sow when the sun's rays strengthen.

Come the headland and we will take a break  
And I'll sit by the hawthorn hedge and eat  
From bread and cheese and apple and cake  
Gifting crusts and cores for an equine treat.

More than content with the lonely furrows  
We'll share the fields with our joys and sorrows.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Poem Writer

The slurp sucked at the brimming bowl  
The porridge caked the baby's hair  
The toddler dodged the food-crust towel  
And drove her mother spare  
By questioning which day's tomorrow  
And whether it's today's to borrow.

'Let's get a rabbit then' the mother cries  
'God no' the father interjects -  
While spooning still the mother plies -  
Her bunny offer Lucy curt rejects  
As with a hamster preference lies  
[a furry brontosaurus in her eyes].

Now the mother's sadly overwrought  
With dinosaur and pet shop pain  
As endless sleepless moments sought  
Hush and order for her brain again:  
'Darling, help me change the baby's nappy  
Maybe that will make you happy'  
But Lucy skips to subjects new and brighter  
She wants to be 'a poem writer'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Poetry Of The Valley And The Hills

'The subtle source is clear and bright:  
the tributary streams flow through the darkness.  
To be attached to things is illusion...'

Every mountain is a source  
And every source is uppermost  
If time is sought.

Every river leads to the sea  
And grades the hill-side slopes  
If time is taken.

Everything that comes to grade  
Becomes becalmed or stagnant  
If time stands still.

Every step becomes rapid  
And every flow a fall  
If time quickens.

Every river is fit for its valley  
And every valley fit for its river  
If time is given.

Every upland is an encirclement  
And every cup will overflow  
If the hills rejoice.

Every tributary is a vein  
And every vein flows empty  
If time runs out.

Every main is a trunk  
And every branch its subject  
If time conquers all.

Every catchment is a system  
And every tract is caught up  
Time after time - over time.

Every juncture is a nice adjustment  
Of feed-back and declivity  
If time is not wasted.

Every estuary is a revelation  
And every revelation a new beginning  
At the end of days.

Every landscape has its own silence  
And every moment is empty  
If the truth be known.

Every journey along the way is a joy  
That unites the source and the sea  
If time flows freely.

'If you do not see the Way, you do not see it even as you walk on it.  
When you walk the Way, it is not near, it is not far.  
If you are deluded, you are mountains and rivers away from it...'

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Poetry Reading

## THE POETRY READING

There are five young women on the dais  
And four of them read their poetry  
In fits and starts - sometimes hesitant  
Sometimes assured and bold  
Speaking from the floor that represents  
What is well-founded and fertile  
The earth mother Papatuanuku  
Above which extraordinary images  
Traceries, totems and grotesques  
Make claims for the world of men,  
And questions are asked about  
Forms and motivations

One of the poets mentions  
The high seat or sky-throne of Odin  
With an unpronounceable name Hli?skjálfr  
And a tree big enough and old enough  
To grow roots right through the earth  
To become sea-serpents in the welcoming oceans.  
But I think of Yggdrasil and the Norns  
Who draw water from the Well of Fate  
To sustain the tree - and tell of what is  
What was and what should be  
Drawing up meanings cast as runes or names  
For what is lost but may yet be found.

Doubtless now it will come to women  
To have the last word in the last days  
In a world run from the alpha to the omega  
To the seventh seal and the seventh angel.  
This is the dawning of the Age of Amazons  
As beauty awakes and ancient veils are lifted -  
Of the Warrior Princess and Wonder Woman  
Bouncy, chosen daughters in leather pelmets  
Trained and equipped with sword and buckler  
To take arms against a sea of male foibles  
And rescue the world from perfidy and dishonour

In a maelstrom of improbably costumed martial arts.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Poetry Round

## TAKING ON WATER AS I TACK HOME

Up at the bar, the timber looks new  
Shiny, stripped back and light in colour.  
I have moored my yawl on reclaimed land  
And set my money down for an IPA  
Here at our oldest pub, The Thistle.

As I enter, a sign claims 'Founded 1840'  
And I browse between the prints and photos  
Showing the building's sepia history,  
Circumnavigating a table of bright young things -  
And a dark lady in the corner.

She notices my trawling and asks  
Are you interested in the past?  
She brings her drink and then her hand bag over  
And we sit and share a conversation  
At first about the Wearable Arts Show.

Soon, we share common ground at the shore  
And I remind her that the great Chief Te Rauparaha  
Used to drag his waka up the muddy beach  
And order a whiskey or two, while chatting to the whalers,  
Yarning stories about his kids and his massacres.

Then we exchange names at which she is playfully precise:  
'Hine Mahoney but you can call me Jenny -  
Don't say Maloney - don't say baloney.  
You say you are a writer, let's do rounds of poems'.

This more or less was one of mine.

When it has come to my advantage, I call  
'The Love of My Life' to tie the rondeau.

She responds - dreamily, insistently  
'My whakapapa: for I am wahine atua  
From te whare tangata (the doorway of life) ...

They took our language not just our land'.

I chide them for her, the Founding Fathers:  
The only country in the world founded  
By Real Estate Agents, who divided before they grew -  
Still speculating on a housing or a dairy boom.

Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black.  
In the old age black was not counted fair  
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;  
But now is black beauty's successive heir,  
That every tongue says beauty should look so.

The fisherman has tide and fish to catch  
The sea has beach and cliff to own  
The heart breasts waves that ebb and die  
Swimming deep it falters by and by  
And those who grieve are oft bereft alone.

Two is my limit, I'm afraid -  
I don't want to wrap the car round a lamp post.  
My young sons were overwrought from  
The school production and set to watch a Pokemon film  
And there is a 20: 20 later tonight from India.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Pohutakawa On The Driveway

Into the stark retaining wall  
Formed of planking and stanchions  
Seed-dust was blown in late autumn  
Finding a foothold.

Thin sustenance and moisture:  
But a form, a chance of life  
For an indomitable spirit  
Seeking the light, and the hope of grounding

As lost and distant as the early earth itself -  
Where flowering first cast back the sunlight,  
And stem and leaf drew nectar from the soil -  
The dreamt land for which all hungers seek.

Slowly the seedling crown is formed  
Its roots edging apart the piles -  
Coming increasingly to culmination,  
Branches standing out, standing up.

And then hope against hope and more  
Adventurous adventitious rootlets drop,  
Trailing, searching red-ragged for crevices  
And pockets of dirt - for a place to stand.

Come this summer, bedrock has been gained  
Interminable to calculus and ecstasy -  
And happy in that delightful, loose release of ease  
Festivities of flowers now celebrate in fountain sprays.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Possibility Of Refuge

No doubt love was born in attraction and protection.  
The attraction of sexuality to ensure procreation  
And the necessity of protection for its creations -  
The ability to foster the defenceless and needy young  
And the partnerships that protect and defend caregivers.

And the age-old pain, chronicled in numberless forms -  
Of being apart and being together, of return and farewell,  
Of intimations of predation, famine, disease and madness -  
Is an inexorable and necessary precursor and condition  
Of universal joy, universal sorrow and universal life.

What then of the light of the lode-star, the guiding star  
Piercing the immensity of the dark sky and its eternity?  
Such stars we know are not fixed but trace out circles  
On the celestial sphere aligning, revolving and retreating  
Timelessly in our reckoning but also inevitably finite.

The starlight brings us back to what we feel and hear  
Touching the clear stream, listening to the necklace  
Of songs remade of the spellbound heart, born of affection,  
Given life by desire, coition, neediness and sustenance  
And the possibility of refuge as the stars endlessly align.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Pukeko And The Kiwi

RED-NOSED STICKY BEAKS AND QUIET ACHIEVERS

Pukeko:

You wouldn't come down from the tree  
To grub the forest free  
Like the good Kiwi.

Quirky- perky; gawky-jerky,  
Clumsy-lurky; swampie-turkey

Pukeko:

Now a stubborn mean old marshy  
Poking a red flash nosey  
How would you be?

Quirky- perky; gawky-jerky,  
Clumsy-lurky; swampie-turkey

...

Kiwi:

Once aloft flight-borne and feathery  
Adorned in coloured finery  
Nought left to see.

Quaintly-quietly; darkly-shyly  
Dimly-dainty; delving-nightly

Kiwi:

Brave one, flying down from the tree  
To grub the forest free  
Loved by Tane.

Quaintly-quietly; darkly-shyly  
Dimly-dainty; delving-nightly.



# The Raspberry On The Window Sill

And so after twenty years I returned to her cottage  
There is an otherness to its steps and roof and lights  
But the porch still creaks, the awning still moves in the wind.  
I am twelve again – I run barefoot across the rough ground  
Having picked raspberries and held them in the palm of my hand.

I stretch up to the kitchen window and there is grandma at the stove  
I put one raspberry on the window sill as a keepsake  
And then I hide. The time has gone to pick gooseberries  
Eat veggie soup or water the garden flowers.  
But this scene will always be with me.

Still we must gather and eat - there will be black bread with white salt and  
golden oil  
And loved ones around the fire – though here the hearth is cold and we have  
parted.  
I simply can't pick gooseberries without grandma.  
The house grew tired of waiting for me but now at least it is happy  
That I am standing in the kitchen sensing a whiff of home-made soup.

[Translation / adaptation of a poem by the contemporary Russian poet Anna  
Horwitz]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Red-Tailed Black Cockatoo

Lonely and lofty in the Stringybark Gum  
With scarcely a chance of seeing a chum  
Even with a bright red flash on its bum  
There's rarely two of this black cockatoo:  
Which gets it down and makes it blue  
As would be true too for me and you.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Reproof

The old king reigned over bounty and plenty  
But justice failed and none respected his rule -  
Until a warrior came who stood firm in renown  
Pledging honour and truth at the hill fort gates.  
And the king, who was enchanted, wagered  
The highest prizes of the kingdom's manifest  
For the emblems that the warrior displayed  
Signifying the everlasting beauty of what is true.

For the warrior held a staff bearing nine apples  
Of red gold bonded from the orchards of Avalon,  
And at his waist was hung the sword Answerer  
That none could gainsay with lies at the last,  
While in his pack he carried a golden bowl  
That would break three times if lies were spoken  
And meld three times, becoming whole again -  
Bringing the dead to life - if the truth was spoken.

'Take them all old man, for what is right is right -  
That there be no more deceit or double-dealing,  
That honour becomes the mainstay and cornerstone  
Of your kingdom - the music of justice a delight  
And amusement for those who are well, and a healing  
For those who are ill - bringing joy, sleep and solace.  
And as for me, I will take in return nothing that is special  
Simply that which in nature is love and therefore truest.

And betimes the warrior returned to take up the bargain  
Standing fierce in the power that honour brought -  
First taking the king's daughter and then his son  
And then his beloved wife - leaving only the honesty of loss.  
Then the king saw beyond the excess of what had been -  
Beyond heaviness, sadness, jealousy, envy, and pride -  
Hearing true melody when the bough was shaken  
The sword tested, and the golden bowl resealed.

Watch! Riders thatching with the wings of swans  
Will not close the roof tree against the stars:  
And the young lord turned profligate and wastrel

Will burn fine oak beyond replenishment:  
See! The five streams of scant understanding  
Run to sand from the Well of Knowledge:  
And silence beset men of artistry and deception  
As lies, dishonour and discredit come to nought.

For what was given must be received  
And the cattle which stray be returned:  
Such that which was brought is checked  
And each ones' granary holding affirmed:  
And the milk of the seven cows is yielded  
As the fleece of the seven sheep lies shared:  
That the king and his kindred be then restored  
And the debts of the Land of Promise redeemed.

And so the old king slept, awakening to the truth  
That to safeguard those he loved he must rule well,  
That truth is to be seen in the smiles of those beloved  
And that the commonplace is the source of what is sound.  
And it passed in a dream - the sword was not put to the test,  
The bough was not brought to harvest and the bowl held whole:  
And the warrior who wrought the judgment reproofing falsehood  
Returned to the sea's enchanted realm and its righteous constancy.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Right Tempo

## ROAD PATROL

I was on road patrol this term.  
My team Hannah and Claire  
Did a great job.

I was supposed to have been  
With my ten-year old son  
Theo and his mate Otis.

Theo said: "please dad don't  
We'll be fine";.

Anyhow, Hannah and Claire  
Were always on time  
And used the lollipops well

Weighing up the traffic  
And the kids, mums and strollers  
Carefully.

'Poles out - Cross Now'  
Looking left and right  
And left again.

The one time I did it with Theo  
He nearly totalled a toddler  
With a lollipop backswing.

It's just a shame  
That the world is not run  
By ten-year old girls.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Scarcely-Seen

There are signs from past places that find us  
Times from past phases that surprise us  
Presences drawn from beyond the veil  
From other lives, other planes, lost regions.

At the drop of a latch at midnight  
The guttering of a spent candle  
The start of a droplet of rain or blood  
Can you sense them, the scarcely seen?

At the passing of the moon into cloud  
The wolf's howling come to silence  
The charcoal hand-print on the rock wall  
Can you sense them, the scarcely seen?

At the black rising of the rookery  
The alertness of the fox at earth-break  
The dropping of the burning stave  
Can you sense them, the scarcely seen?

At the failing of the winter sun  
The gathering of bats in the eaves  
The hiding of vermin in the wainscot  
Can you sense them, the scarcely seen?

At the enfolding onset of slumber,  
As dreams are wrapped sleep-tight  
And there is a sudden violent tumbling  
Can you sense them, the scarcely seen?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Seat Divine Sees Monarchy Renew

TO THE DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE

MADAM

Thus we have welcomed you with bare delight  
And shown the promise of our swelling throngs  
So we display our best within thy sight  
And you may share our native thongs and songs.

But soon the reasons why you're loved by all,  
Grow infinite, and pass what glimpsing teaches,  
Regardless of the straps that rise or fall  
Betraying gaps the Maori challenge breeches.

Since you are then Will's masterpiece, and know  
His token for our loves, do as you do;  
Make your return home gracious, and so  
Vouchsafe this sight for us - the best of you.

But as, although a squint short-sightedness  
Be ungracious, you cannot leave our lands;  
Without a moment that I might express  
My love, when I perceive the zephyr lift your dress.

As the helicopter eclipses and despoils  
Royal modesty when the rotors ground,  
Amid the turmoil so the vesture roils  
And photographic flashes there abound.

Venus help me, I could not miss you there,  
Your Kallipygos guise has claimed my token,  
And any ills that flesh may bear  
Erase with awe and majesty awoken.

Plain and sweet the left, plain and sweet the right;  
By these we thus divine the absence of tattoo  
The rumps which have the blessing of the light,  
The seat divine sees monarchy renew.

In everything where nature grows  
Are winds to keep it fresh and new  
And turning cheeks the rear end shows;  
Your birth and beauty are this balm in you.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Sentence Of Sentience - And All That Bulldust

What Richard Dawkins can't seem to get his head around  
Is that our creation or evolution or whatever you want to call it  
Is just an enormous joke - a life form jest punctuating eternity

So now we have seven to ten billion of us standing at the edge  
Of a kind of cosmic black hole wavering on the brink of  
Our own subsequent anonymity - largely oblivious to the abyss

But there is a kind of collective half-understanding  
That we are reaching an impasse and that there may be nothing  
Sensible to be done - that our time is disappearing into singularity.

Sometimes steers go mad when they near the slaughterhouse  
And although they are limited in terms of imagination and intelligence  
They sense the horror of the end - upsetting the equilibrium -

And the abattoir guardians of the stun-gun impose order on chaos,  
Just as strong men and women are now arising amid human confusion  
Appearing to promise hope - and a return to an ordered processing.

But more generally we infer that space and time may exhibit 'holes' or 'edges'  
With singularities that are best defined as some kind of 'pathological behaviour'  
That takes place on the swilled floor provided by infinity - inevitably.

Anyhow, as gates are closed on the mob, I'm determined to stand back  
And cherish the small glimmerings of collective empathy  
And noble purpose that we glimpsed on our stock-truck trip - what a laugh!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Seven Sisters Lost

In the dreaming time  
The Napaljarri sisters  
Were wooed by Wardilyka  
An old Jampijinpa man  
Whose skin-token  
Matched the tribal taboo  
But the seven girls  
Did not love him.

Then as the sky darkened  
Jukurra-Jukurra  
A Jakamarra brave  
From a rival caste and clan  
Also sought the girls  
Though his skin was forbidden  
And in delight the seven maids  
Loved him from afar in fear.

And so the seven sisters fled  
From both shame and love -  
Sought by the unwise old man  
And the young stranger warrior -  
Until in their haste  
They fell from the edge of the earth  
And were chased into the dark sky  
Becoming pure but pitiable stars.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Silvereye Or 'stranger' [tauhou]

Farewell my love, the ship slips hove  
With mollies set shore-side  
Our whalers' rove in Sydney Cove  
Has reached its time and tide.

Finches flocking high above

Pigs on deck, rum and cheese to hold  
Sails are furled out-wide -  
A whale-ship bold with harpoons stowed  
And eyes now quickly dried.

A cloud to mast-trees tied

Beyond the heads the course is set  
For Tasman's eastern isles  
To Zealand's coast where whales are met  
And lads must face their trials.

The flock ne'er once resiles

The skipper looks up top and smiles  
To see the sweet birds wheel  
With passage fair, far the miles  
The shadows rigging-resting steal.

And the mascots sleep aloft

The tops break white and bright  
The weather light in breeze  
A sea with greenstone azure tint  
That sparkles bright turquoise.

Stranger now the die is cast

Twenty sunny endless days have past  
Amid the rocking trees -  
The flock grows weaker at the last  
Abreast the western breeze.

A nau mai haere mai tauhou

The morning dawns to gulls at sea  
And fresh dews on the deck -  
See long white clouds at distant lee  
With land a hinted speck.

A nau mai haere mai tauhou

And soon the old brig draws to shore  
Near Paritutu Rock  
And warriors to whalers roar  
While gifts are taken stock.

A nau mai haere mai tauhou

As Maori break the musket chest  
Whalers gather daughters  
But silvereyes are now at rest  
That wide calm sea has brought us.

A nau mai haere mai tauhou

...

'Kia korero koe i te ngutu o te manu,  
Kia hoki ana mai to wairua ki te ao nei—i—i! '

[Welcome - welcome stranger.  
Speak with the bill of a bird  
Reincarnated to this world.]

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Slow, Low Ache Of Seasoned Testing

I very much suspect that growing pains  
Continue as our substance lays down rings:  
Like the monsoon trees that grow with the rains -  
Or the temperate trees that winter brings

To stasis and sleep for the time being  
When the frosts and snows value strength not growth -  
With the Spring mere creed for the believing  
And Summer's prophesy a doubtful oath.

Rough bark, thin-skin, bast, sapwood, heartwood, pith  
They are there within us. Cut through and see  
The outer shell sawn back to seedling birth  
Each scarred circle the making of the tree.

Can't you feel the deadwood and its dying  
The slow, low ache of seasoned testing?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Song Of The Cicada [[maori 'tatarakihi']]

Singing children:  
School platoon on the march,  
shepherded carefully  
by the harbourside  
to Te Papa.

I listen  
to the song  
of this wiggly taniwha

telling of the cicadas  
lost to the night  
... and Parihaka.

Tara ra ta ki ta ki ta  
Tara ra ta ki ta ki ta

Stumbling-bumping,  
kerfuffle-shuffling  
clumsily-queuing:  
chanting their haka.

Nga tamariki e waiata  
ana i te Tatarakihi

The children  
and their song  
about the cicada.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Southern Cassowary

The flightless Southern Cassowary  
Casuarius casuarius johnsonii  
Has a dad who is customarily  
Abusive  
So is understandably  
Shyly and warily  
Reclusive.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Southern Corroboree Frog

The Southern Corroboree Frog  
Used to sing in the tussockland bog  
With squiggle-top skin  
It hopped out and in  
To serenade logs in the fog.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Sthenurus

COMING OUT AS BI

Roo keep movin' - youse swankin' something dilly  
Something's up your pouch so confess  
You've been flammin' when you should have been griffin'  
And now science has put it to the test

Youse roos were made for walking  
And that's just what youse did  
Spruikin' won't unsure us  
Youse struthin' Sthenurus.

Yeah, you keep amblin' when you oughta be hoppin'  
And you keep stuntin' when you oughta upped it  
You keep slopin' when you oughta be a scotchin'  
Now, what's right is right but you ain't been right yet

Youse roos were made for walking  
And that's just what youse did  
Spruikin' won't unsure us  
Youse struthin' Sthenurus.

You keep strollin' when you should have be stillin'  
And you keep thinkin' that you'll never get caught  
But I've just found me a brand new box of fossils  
That ends the lies I never should have bought

Youse roos were made for walking  
And that's just what youse did  
Spruikin' won't unsure us  
Youse struthin' Sthenurus.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Stubborn Fragility Of Orchids

We have two orchids which had become very much neglected.  
The one, though apparently healthy but barren and austere,  
Denied sufficient water and nutrients, overtopped its pot  
And struck roots deep into the emptiness below the glass cabinet,  
An ugly, straggled tangle, in places scarring the surface of the wood  
Desperate for sustenance and an opportunity for life -  
The other, in a small pottery box, was beset with a hardy weed  
That grew like tousled cress and came to tiny blue flowers  
But the container, lacking any kind of drainage,  
Ponded what little water had been provided, stunting  
The second orchid so that only two shriveled, scarred leaves  
Protruded from its alternately saturated and dessicated cup.

After I had visited my sister and seen how her orchids flourished  
The reproaches of the Buddha that guarded the glass cabinet  
Became too much to bear and I resolved to amend my caring.  
I bought two deep identical plastic containers that hold basal water,  
And a sufficiency of enriched wood chips appropriate to orchids.  
In the first place, I carefully wrapped all the excess roots into the container  
And packed the flakes of bark around them leaving the plant standing proud  
In the second, I gently nestled the damp and half-decayed roots  
Among a cornucopia of woody detritus that simulated a tree bole  
And then I reminded myself to water gently, considerately, consistently  
My two adopted green orphans, new charges for my daily rounds  
In setting things to right and creating space for growth in homely order.

This morning when I learned of the death of an old friend,  
Heavy with regret and reminiscence I wrote to his wife:  
"Heather, I was so sorry to hear your news - a wonderful man.  
Please accept my most sincere condolences and best wishes".  
Now I don't think that he would have complained of being neglected  
And nor can I claim indifference in the great scheme of things:  
We have had good lives, well lived with friends and family,  
With consistent caring ultimately making all the difference -  
As for the orchids, they are going gang-busters under the new regime  
With the larger one parading a bunch of magenta blossoms  
And the smaller and most neglected first opening and greening its two leaves  
To then disclose the promise of tight overlapping buds at its centre.

No doubt there are lessons to be learned here about men and orchids  
About the processes of renewal and transcendence  
But considering the mix of nature, nurture and fragile vitality  
It is beyond me as to exactly who or what is contained.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Swift Parrot - Love Is A Many Splendoured Thing

NAUGHTINESS OF THE SWIFTIE: Canto 1

AFTER ALEXANDER POPE

Nolueram, Velocita, tuos violare pennae;  
Sed juvat, hoc precibus me tribuisse tuis

I was long unwilling, Swiftie, to violate your feathers  
But am pleased now that I acceded to your entreaties

(Martial, Epigrams: 12: 84)

What flighty congress rises up on rainbow wings  
What dire distress from polly-amory springs?  
May I suppress this verse though it be due  
That even Long John may forego to view:  
The subject is the Swiftie and its lays  
And If the Muse conspires, its sexy ways.

What strange motive, Polly, could compel  
A reclusive forest dweller to a polly-androus hell  
O say what stranger cause, yet unexplored  
Could make of innocence a promiscuous bird?  
And in the trees the lure of casual dalliance  
Give all but pornographic parrots deep offence?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Taipan

The taipan is an 8 foot snake  
Whose treading on is some mistake.

Deep in the Aussie Outback yonder  
If off the beaten track you wander  
You may feel an elapid mandibular crush -  
Then a shikkering neurotoxic rush  
While its haemolytics clot the blood -  
And curse the spot where once you stood.

Its coagulopathics should not be vilipended  
You may be short on time to be amended.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Tasmanian Devil

A handsome Tasmanian Devil  
Strayed from the straight and level  
He preyed on the chicks  
And tricked them for kicks  
In tandem depravity revel.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Thrymskvitha [?rymskvi?a] - In Modern Poetry

Then Thor the son of Odin and of Mother Earth  
Woke to find that his thunderous hammer  
Had been taken as he slept and that his power was gone.

And his beard and hair afire with anger  
At the loss of the moulder and melder of fates -  
He sought out his sly brother Loki

Raging that the striker down  
That grounded sky to earth  
Had been stolen by the giants.

Then Loki went to Freya the Fair  
The Mistress of the Heavens  
And asked to borrow her cloak

And fearing massive devilry  
She gave her cloak willingly  
With its silver clouds and golden dawns

And Loki flew far abroad with the sky-cape  
Coming at last to the Home of the Giants -  
Cunning and enchanted from the Elf-kingdom

There Thrym the mighty giant king hailed him,  
As he flexed the golden leashes of his hounds  
And stroked the flowing manes of his steeds.

"Ghostly one, how are the gods faring now  
Have they sent you to bring me good news? "

"Alas" said Loki, "things go badly now with us  
The hammer that anneals and tempers has been lost".

Unwisely Thrym confided to the spectre  
"I have taken the hammer and hidden it  
Eight miles deep in the heartless iron beneath

It will no longer ring for the making of things -

It will be locked within the anvil itself  
Unless Freya the Fair becomes my wife&quot;.

Then Loki returned to the realm of the gods  
Meeting Thor in the forecourt of Asgard  
Both downcast with their separate sorrows.

&quot;What news do you bring from the far realms  
Tell me truly - is there an answer for our loss?  
Quickly speak before the understanding fades&quot;.

&quot;My honest brother, the news I bring is bad -  
Thrym the king of giants has stolen the hammer  
And will not return it until Freya is his wife&quot;.

Then they went to Freya, telling her the news  
That she should bind on a bridal veil  
To safeguard the bringing together of things

But she grew angry and snorted her disgust  
At the thought of slaking the King of Giant's lust  
Bursting the Brising-elfin Necklace on her breast.

Then the far-famed gods met in counsel  
To plot for the recovery of the lightning-striker  
And its return to the hands of its wielder Thor.

And Heimdall the white - the wisest of all -  
Who foresaw the waxing and waning of fate  
Said: 'Thor must wear the bridal veil and necklace -

Dress him in a woman's pretty skirt and shift  
Let there be keys hanging from his perfumed girdle  
Gems in his hair and a fetching little cap for his head&quot;.

But Thor answered bashfully, blushing with wrath:  
&quot;It speaks badly of my honour and manhood  
That I should be brought betrothed behind a veil.&quot;

Then Loki spoke up: &quot;Thor accept your trial -  
If you can no longer temper the earth with heaven's fire  
The giants will become the rulers of Asgard&quot;.

And so they decked out Thor for the bridal feast  
With the keys to pleasure rattling from his sash  
And his beard well-hidden beneath a silken mask

And Loki went first as the bride's maid servant  
Announcing to Thrym the arrival of Freya the Fair  
Bringing the dowry demanded from the gods

And the giants made ready the beasts of sacrifice  
And as the blood ran into the altar cauldrons  
The mountains burst and earth burned with fire

Then Thrym ordered the giants to make ready:  
"Put fresh straw on the floors and benches  
Cleanse the tables and unseal the mead flagons

Now they are bringing Freya the Fair my bride -  
Beyond compare to the gold-horned cattle of my byres  
The jet-black oxen of my yards, and my gems and jewels -

She is come and with her beauty I will lack for nothing;".  
Then the feasting began - and beer and mead were served -  
And Thor ate an ox, ten swans and eight salmon

And all the dainty treats that were set for the women  
And out-drunk all the other wedding guests together  
Quaffing three tuns of mead and many horns of ale.

Then Thrym the leader of the giants became uneasy  
"Whoever saw a bride with such a bite on her  
Or a maiden who drank to the dregs of mead like this? "

But Loki the arch and artful handmaiden  
Answered convincingly for her mistress:  
"She has fasted eight days longing for Jotunheim and you".

Then Thrym lifted aside the silk - longing for a kiss  
But became fearful and leaped back in dread:  
"Why do the eyes of my beloved burn so fiercely? "

And again Loki, serving the goddess, answered:

Have no fear, her eyes are over-bright with dreaming  
She has not slept for eight nights longing for Jotunheim and you&quot;

And the giant's luckless sister asked for the bridal fee:  
&quot;Take off the rings of red gold that kept you whole  
And take up willingly the welcome of your husband&quot;.

Then Thrym set to seal the wedding with spells:  
&quot;Bring in the hammer that it may hallow the bride  
Let it lie on the maid's lap that we may be bonded&quot;.

But Thor, the hard-souled one laughed cruelly  
Seizing the fiery hammer of the heavens to beat down  
First Thrym his giant suitor and then his warriors and followers

Until finally, he slew the giant king's uncomely sister -  
And she who had demanded the bridal fee of rings  
Received scot-free a death blow from the hammer.

And the hammer Mjolnir was returned in triumph to Asgard  
The moulder and melder once more of outcomes  
The bringer of victories - the creator of lasting harmonies.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Titipounamu Or 'rifleman' Wren

Seeking escape from enslaved beguilement  
The young warrior turned against the crone  
Who had kept him in enchanted confinement  
Persuading him her love fused them to one.

But he took heart and courage, when she left  
The cave to hunt the forest floors and shades,  
And killed the trophy captures that she kept  
To celebrate her bloody sharp-toothed raids.

Fearing her wrath and reprisal, he fled  
Thinking none survived to tell the tale -  
But one small agate-jewelled wren hid  
And brought the news to her of his betrayal.

So she, tracking her mocking, faithless lover  
Found him hidden within a monstrous stone  
That shone bright with jade from core to cover -  
Seizing there a precious greenstone boon.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Tui

The Tui chortles mid the trees  
With cheerily yodelled ease -  
A ruffian with a vicar's collar  
He fluffs it up, and then lets holler:

'ck 'uk gerk garr quolla!

He flits among the flaxes  
To extract the nectary waxes  
And lodges where he pleases  
To dodge refractory squeezes

'ck 'uk gerk garr quolla!

Tuis never sing the Blues  
And almost always come in twos  
One plus Tui rare makes three  
Oh my, oh boy, how could that be?

'ck 'uk gerk garr quolla!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Wisdom In The Rending Wind - The Ruru Or Morepork

The storm is shifting rafters, lifting eves.  
It's dangerous to walk against the wind  
And black rains lash and sting the hillsides blind  
As now, so then hau puhi howls and heaves.

Those born of rutting sky and earth have sinned  
And sorrows blow against the cliffs and trees.  
The children rend the darkness, seize the light  
And grief and yearning strain the breaking seas.

Now owlsh eyes can turn from side to side  
And guard as spirits stray and wander wide.

Dark and emptiness flee before the sight  
Of warmth and wisdom as the gale retreats -  
And you my friend will croon ruru tonight  
When the waking Bush its dusky lover greets.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The Wombat

Apparently the wombat sucks its thumb  
Away from home and missing mum -  
Very sensitive and shy it seems  
It's prone to nerves and scary dreams.

Hairy bottom, hairy nose  
And none too clean between the toes -  
With hygiene less than ones desiring  
It's not surprising it's retiring.

Left without shampoo or soap  
The lovelorn then run out of rope -  
Lacking cuddles, grope or hope  
They stay at home and simply mope.

And when they seek a pal or mate  
They're oft too meek to score a date -  
Eschewing roots and fruits the while  
Neither philogynous nor androphile.

The numbers in the Warrumbungles  
Face brooder's droop and lack of bundles -  
And things are hardly fine and dandy  
In Warnambool and Dirranbandi.

Across in Broken Hill just broken hearts  
As dating agents wait for starts -  
And bunga bunga's out in Cunnamulla  
Wagga Wagga, Toowoomba, Bulla Bulla...

With baby wombats rare in Hay  
The gastronomes just stay away -  
In Gundaroo there are so few  
They're using mutton now for stew.

But veterinarians are planning scripts to suit  
With Viagra applied to stump and root -  
Plus anxiety suppressing medication  
And an social network application.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# The World It Seems Is Ending In Fire

The world it seems is ending in fire,  
As favored by the more passionate,  
Whose first thoughts are of desire  
Which kindles like the quickest element.

And whatever else comes to pass  
It consumes its three rivals indifferently  
Water and air to void and pallid gas  
Earth to ash and cinder indiscriminately.

Not with a bang nor with a whimper -  
Nor that hateful ice would ever suffice -  
We will burn baby, spark to ember  
In tender embassy of love - nice eh?

Dead water, dead sand, and burnt roses  
Are where the story's ending smolders.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# This Is How They Ara: The Tuatara

Our Te Ara  
It's the be's and he's

Our tuatara  
He's a fossil tease.

But I will bet  
Your gold tiara  
You won't find  
No three-atara.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Those Girls

I used to keep a score and tick the list  
Of names of girls who'd graced my bed  
And on command they'd keep a tryst  
And parade their beauty round my head.

It was a dream that froze and broke  
As time took down my selfish youth  
And I began to hear when women spoke  
And saw when beauty was or wasn't truth.

'I love you' were the words so lightly said  
To lively smiles and curves and curls  
Amusedly among the years that fled  
Leaving loss and wonder in their stead

Now as careless boys and older lovers will  
I set you free but hope you love me still.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Three Hares

Tell me, how can you distinguish

The male from the female hare?

Is it that the male sits on its haunches

And that the female has moist eyes?

Is it that the buck goes hoppity-skip

And the doe's eyes are misted and glazed

Or that he tucks his legs when sitting

And that she dims her gaze when he is near?

For the male has a lilted, scampering gait,

And the female's eyes become wild:

And the male's feet strike and kick

When she is fearful and at the edge of tears

But when Jack and Jill run together

How much alike they seem -

Who can see which is he and which is she

As they bound away side by side?

And when two hares are fighting, it is clear

A third, whether he or she, will refrain;

Unless perhaps in a shared innocence

That presages peace and tranquility.

Alone in likeness they have become an illusion

In fighting and pairing they become a dream

In the possibility of the third way a mirage

Nothing distinguished - impermanent, insubstantial

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Thursday Morning

BLOSSOM THROSTLE

Every morning, I say:  
"Do you want some coffee  
Blossom Throstle? "

And you say:  
"That would be great"  
Or, "Maybe"  
Or, "I have to have a shower  
Because I need to do my hair"  
Or, "I'll just do my make-up".

You like it strong with a dash of milk  
I like buckets of Trim  
But we both abjure sugar  
As it is a modern-day excess.

After my heart has stopped  
Palpitating, I settle  
In my favourite green chair  
And meditate.

I always look at the bank  
Under the mustard-coloured house  
And try to see how far  
My planting is coming along.

On Thursdays, we take out the rubbish  
In our green wheelie bins  
Because the trucks might  
Damage the road.

This morning, Joanne scurried out  
Through the morning rain  
With her bin and sprinted back -  
More of a wet chook than a thrush.

And you are taking the boys

Early for road patrol  
And then on to sort the clothes  
With Justine for the School Fair.

Now the rain has died down  
The birds are singing again.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Time, Place And Absence

As the world is closed and bounded,  
The new world beckons -  
And our place is both free and captive  
And absent.

There's a special anguish that writers have  
About where the world stops and starts  
Whether they are egoists for whom the world is small  
Or introverts shrinking from the world at large

About whether they are pushing the boundaries  
Or interrogating the encroachment of reality

And they talk into the space that stretches in front of them  
Trying to find a seam, an edge - a horizon  
That marks out their own experience or understanding  
That defines a hinterland they can claim and settle  
Or a homeland that can be made secure for sharing

This question of separation and its suffering  
Is at the heart of things - in where things find a place.

And as for time, as Anna Akhmatova has commented:

'As the future ripens in the past,  
The past rots in the future' -

And the present is both sweet and tart  
And tainted.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# To My Tart Mistress - Enough Of The Hissy Fit Storm Wellington

You were in a foul mood this morn  
Tossing your curls at every turn -  
As the sun rose, there were salt tears  
And shrill scolds and glowers fierce.

Hell hath no fury like that gale  
That puts hearts down to shrink and fail.  
Had we but world enough and time  
This temper lady were no crime

We would sit down and think which way  
To quieten and set to rights the play  
Across the storm-tossed harbour side  
Where lingers love upon the tide.

Still unchecked blasts bemoan no good  
As breakers cross the beach and flood  
And so I must forgo your praise  
As on destruction wide I gaze.

Once adored now a harpy beast  
I set you now amongst the least.  
But smiles will come on other days  
When freshling conquests test thy ways -

Lady none can with thee compare  
When skies are blue and sun is fair.  
No more complaints - I love you still  
And see it clear and always will.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# To The Objects Of Our Desires And Any Necessary Objections

Everything is talking to us - if we stop to listen.

Look out then for the notes in signs  
The sounds in the unsound and the sound  
The melodic in the iconic  
Even the symbolic in unclashed cymbals.

Take a crank shaft - it is indicative  
Or an egg tray as an ideogram  
Or a plant become a pictogram  
Or a Rubik Cube that is transformed.

Look out then for the clear notes, the strong sounds  
The signs, the symbols, the icons, the ideas - the emotions  
Picking up the rhemes, themes and memes that are fundamental  
To our own wellbeing and the safety of society  
Picking up the rhythm - letting things strike a chord.

No doubt it is easier if you are versed in Chinese writing  
Where chunks of text are sorted and arrayed and clicked into place  
And more difficult for us in that our sentences are strings  
That run on loosely - largely lacking in form -  
Depending more on punctuation and instrumentation.

But we can still listen deeply to the sounds of objects -  
To the objects of our desires and any necessary objections -  
To the essence of things - transformations and translations.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Toad Redux

If you stay still you will freeze  
Even with a blanket round your knees.  
Purposefully I search for a florin  
In my pocket seams to slot in.

The waning gas has popped  
Growing shallow, yellow ... greyed.  
Huddle still towards the fire's lattices  
Oblivion and hibernation crevices

Soaking up the last rays  
In the final passable days:  
'Girl there's a better life, can't you see  
For you and me' - you have to agree.

As the cold gathers and the coin is slotted  
Move now before the toad has squatted.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Traces

[Losses brought forward from 1970]

An image retrieved from the USB  
Shows a girl in a drill-knit turtleneck -  
High cheeks, her hair swept up. She looks at me  
She is strong, she is afraid - she turns to check.

Kindly, she has been scanned as a keepsake.  
Such likeness no longer hurts me or her:  
For goodness sake, long lost, our joy's mistake.  
But I too turn from present strength to fear.

Traces of love that didn't work out right  
Memories of guilt in bits and pieces  
Smiles that were better never brought to life  
I close my eyes until the prayer ceases.

Two score years and five and still I live  
Trusting we who failed must now forgive.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Tragic And Novel

The first of my four wives  
Once described my life  
As a Bad Russian Novel  
And this morning my  
Current and fourth wife  
Responding to my observation  
That after going Up to Cambridge  
I wore cravats and breakfasted  
On wild strawberries and pink champagne  
In the company of my teddy bear Algernon  
Said that it had been all downhill since then  
And that my life had all the bathos of a Greek Tragedy.

Australian and New Zealand girls  
Can be very cutting  
But as Ned Kelly said  
In less fortunate circumstances:

'Such is life'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Train Time

In the TV room  
Trains on the floor  
Down in the hallway  
Trains by the door

Up on the bench  
Engines galore  
Pile on the table  
More than before

Thomas is tugging  
Troublesome trucks  
Bill's in the siding  
And Douglas is stuck

Spencer needs water  
But Gordon's in luck  
Salty loves fishing  
And Percy hates muck

Daisy is smiling  
And purring around  
Settebello is cruising  
With scarcely a sound

While Diesel is plotting  
Tram Toby is found  
And Harold is whizzing  
Way off the ground

Steam in the funnel  
Down at the zoo  
Trains in the tunnel  
Got to come through.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Trucking Fatstock By Road Train From Urupunga To Katherine Meatworks In The Northern Territory

This is a country of rushes and ringing in,  
Of clean-skins and bang-tailed musters,  
Of hunting strays from the shrinking waters  
Of the smell of leather and horses and diesel  
Of yard gates closed and road trains rolling up.

This is a country of scrub bulls and trap cattle,  
Of endless plains and dead-end tracks  
Where insignificance rolls onwards and forward  
Under red dust through sparse scrub  
And the rigs will find their station late of day.

This is a country where the land falls away  
Behind the horizon as the brutal sun  
Glowes ochre-daubed and heat glimmered  
At close of play and the loading ramp goes quiet  
And the driver checks tires and couplings

This is a country where stock is broken  
And those untamed are fenced and penned  
And even the wildest from the bush runs  
Are lulled by rubbing girths and stifles  
As the road train runs on into the night

Come the deepest dark the lights shine out  
Across the red country and its dusty trails  
Into the black soil plains, fighting for the hard top,  
Culvert by culvert, marker by marker flash-lighting  
Tremors and shadows from the convoy.

Hands too tired and lips too dry to seal a roll-your-own,  
Come the dawn and the bitumen straight as a die  
Leads on to Katherine, stun gun and skinning knife:  
This is a land of small and very grudging mercies  
With no holds barred on driving hell for leather.



# Trump Koi About Muddied Waters

BIG FISH HAIKU

Orange and flaky  
Floundering the closing net  
Fishy to the gills.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Twenty-Five Degrees Celsius

... as the political temperature rises:

Can you hear a ripple of imminence?  
The sense that things are changing impalpably  
That we are being morphed to a new state  
Amused, bemused, beguiled, placated  
Locked into a soporific sauna of clammy lies  
And that those who tend the embers envision  
Our frog consciousness will slowly dwindle.

Can you feel the rise of prescience?  
A fear that rights are degrading irremediably  
Being eroded gradually without debate  
Abused, refused, reviled, negated  
As the fug stupefies and the will dies  
And those who intend to rob us of decision  
Slop the coals with a swindle ladle.

But also conceive sentience in the silence?  
The dictate that lines must be drawn finally -  
That soft-soaping set aside, it is never too late  
Awakened, goaded, riled, rededicated  
To step up, green as we are, blinking our eyes  
Rejecting the parboiled amphibian option  
To fight for truth and love as best we are able.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Two Chairs

Take a seat, let it take your weight  
And let us sit together quietly  
Setting aside stories and end-points  
For presence and being.  
Look - the space between us is open:  
An altar if it suits your purpose  
Or a surface for the prayer mat.

...

God's very own the West  
God's very own the East;  
As also the North and South  
Gathered in love and truth.

...

Set aside racing the run of day  
For the time the seconds chase  
Will never show a fairer face;  
Come close and let the stillness show  
Where we must put the world away  
To draw it closer as the silence grows:  
Let's tell unheard our secret sorrows  
To the shadows that the sundial throws,  
For what goes forward and what is past  
Will never alter time or stay its haste:  
Then let what's left unsaid in quietness strengthen  
The amity that calmly sharing space will lengthen.

...

God's very own the West  
God's very own the East;  
As also the North and South  
Gathered in love and truth.

...

So let us study distinction and its absence:  
That there is no separation  
Of what is apart and what is in contact;  
That there is no form or formlessness  
As edges and envelopes are unsealed;  
That there is no resting or resolution  
As emptiness and decay are inevitable;  
That thusness is fleeting and yet perceptible  
With reality and illusion in mutual shadow;  
That life and its converse co-arise  
The sentient born of and returning to the insentient;  
That we may distinguish the qualities of people  
All special - but then there is nothing special;  
That when we get up from the chair,  
And return to the world from the mountain,  
Or from the wilderness, it is in the natural order  
That we should recognise compassion.

...

God's very own the West  
God's very own the East;  
As also the North and South  
Gathered in love and truth.

...

The place between has now been won  
Our streams of thought together run  
And in the catchment likeness grows  
Perfect in the peace that confluence knows.  
Set down the books that mention blame  
And hear our hearts make thinking tame:  
Catch the breath and count its pulse  
Still the drives that thoughts convulse  
Quicken so the quietened revelation  
That kindness alone is ample adoration  
And togetherness itself a heavenly dedication.

...

God's very own the West  
God's very own the East;  
As also the North and South  
Gathered in love and truth.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Two Points - For Damian Mackenzie

He settles into his kicking  
Looking to convert a try.  
Just what is he thinking -  
And why is he smiling?

The heart's own quiet gathers  
Looking for the sweet spot.  
At this moment nothing matters  
Just a memory and slotting the shot.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Unconditional Acceptance

It is a fine autumn morning  
In the riverside park  
Backed by bush-clothed hills  
At the start of the trail run.

The flats are green with long-mown grass  
Specked with celandines, dandelions and daisies  
And the trees curl leaves to the retreating  
Northern sun - catching the best of the day.

There are oaks, sycamores and willows  
And plantings from North America  
Like the maple that is turning bronze  
Mimicking its forbears in the Fall.

I talk directly and tersely to God  
Offering a brusque thank you for it all.

I don't do obeisance and obedience anymore  
We have come over the years to an understanding:

When I sit and then kneel  
For a which art in heaven  
Or thy kingdom come  
I don't do reverence when I stand up

When I pay my dues  
And burn a candle  
For what I have lost  
And for those I love

I stand back determinedly  
Turning quickly on my heels  
Walking away without regret -  
After all we have come a long way together.

But I recite my prayer nonetheless:

Of those things that you forgive

But that I cannot forgive  
Of those things that I forgive  
But that I cannot forget  
Of those things that others did  
That rankle still  
Of the things I think  
But would rather have not come to mind  
Of the ending already compromised  
And the promise only part fulfilled  
Of being sometimes without skin  
And feeling the pain of others like my own  
Of being neglectful and unthinking  
Averting my eyes and shrinking back my hand.

Yet as the sun shines and the birds sing  
I know that we both mean well.

Along the river bank, the path narrows  
And there is a giant *Macrocarpa* Cypress  
Massive and magnificent (its partner stumped)  
Singled out now by a red-painted cross.

I go up and give it a hug  
Turning away determinedly.  
I don't do reverence anymore  
Only unconditional acceptance.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Unlike The Stateless

In the pitch-black of the pin-drop night  
Deep-sleep wakened to an estranged bed  
Unsure of flight or fight, or wrong and right  
I toss in nightmare of the life I led.

I am at the end of a work assignment  
In a far distant and hostile country  
Alone - trapped deep in a predicament  
Of suspended payments not knowing why.

Unable to access the funds I need,  
Packing, unpacking, missing my plane flight:  
In despair to resolve things and make speed  
Doubling-back desperate to make things right.

But I am here at home and all is well  
Unlike the stateless in this living hell.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Up Grogan's Creek

What the f\*\*k ago-go  
In the lip-trap embargo  
Secular segmented  
Variously allocated

I will outline your body  
With a terminal array  
Of schist louvres  
Claws hors d'oeuvres

Come the tessellated moments  
Pitching horseshoes and tents

the bunyip in the wadi  
camel akimbo humping lonely  
Burke and Wills upskirt queer  
Drop bear, digeridoo - dig here

Leering the taipan surviving the goanna  
A selfie-starting Pianola login or Joanna  
No more quarter or stock horse  
Neither here or there a matter of course  
A tool-scarred coolibah the last resource

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Utility And Creative Licence

And I said  
I don't see how it helps you  
To humiliate me  
And she sobbed  
I don't want to humiliate you.

And later that night after  
Grand-standing and sulks  
Thong and high heels  
We made love  
And she thought of the ironing  
And I thought  
Worriedly - hurriedly  
Of the clandestine  
And I slept that deep dark sleep  
And she tossed and turned.

So my country  
We survive  
You and I  
Utility and  
Creative Licence  
Rubbing along:

To you I am full  
Of misplaced arrogance  
Questioning everything  
Taking nothing for granted  
To me you are full  
Of misplaced ignorance  
Questioning nothing  
Taking everything for granted.

And yet you sobbed  
Deep heaving regrets  
And I offered  
To clean the bathroom  
Saying  
It's not about Tall Poppies

It's about taking stock  
And then turning the page  
And you said:

The everyday is everything  
We don't do too badly.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Wanderer

The year has drawn to a close  
And the shortest day is near -  
Another winter for the wanderer.

Just as the evening traveller  
Nears the fireside of an inn  
Only to find ruin in a cold hearth

There is no feast to enliven us -  
Not even wild grain and mallows  
For wasteland gruels and stews.

Having made haste on the highway,  
The river has swept away the ford -  
Turning back, the roads are longer.

We sleep finally under the sky  
And our solo lifetime journey  
Passes like dust from our heels.

Vitality and decay follow in season,  
Metal and stone are more enduring -  
Awareness is the only true treasure.

The muted dead have gone ahead  
The old graves have become fields -  
Rather than look west to the new sun

And set aside some time for the record.  
An archer who can pull a strong bow  
Falls short of the writer of a single character.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# War Is A Shitty Business

Hannibal traipsed thousands of men,  
Horses and mules and 37 elephants over the Alps  
At the Col de la Traversette in a brilliant ruse  
That saw a bog en route being seeded  
With the faeces of ruminants like elephantidae  
And that of their accompanying primates,  
Such that the hunt is now on for tapeworm cysts  
Which were deposited in the peat as keepsakes for posterity.

Humans create around 1.4 litres of urine a day  
And around 125 grams of faeces:  
Assuming a Punic army of 40,000 men  
This equates to 56 cubic metres of urine  
And 5 tons of human excrement a day  
[Never mind the elephants] -  
Because as we all know  
Armies march on their stomachs and like a drink or two.

And if Darius had an army of one hundred thousand  
At the Battle of Gaugamela [modern Erbil in Iraq]  
It would have been relieved of 12.5 tons of poop  
And 140 cubic metres of pee on the day  
Of his catastrophic battle against Alexander the Great -  
But you could raise that by two and half on some estimates.

And if you apply the same factors to the Battle of Waterloo  
Where there were 200,000 men [and several thousand horses]  
You come up with 25 tons of ordure and 280 cubic meters of human urine  
On the 18th of June 1815, in a close run thing.

And let's just pursue the stream to its Niagara  
In the First World War 9 million died [along with 8 million horses],  
And 22 million men were wounded  
After 70 million had been mobilized all told.  
So that if you take the last figure on 28th July 1914  
You get 8,750 tons of Number 9 and  
98,000 cubic metres of Werris Creek or Gypsy's Kiss  
From a fine bunch of lads.

So next time you see neat lines of marching men  
With stripes and lanyards, pips and even plumes  
Remember the US Marines at Iwo Jima  
A first rate body of men - semper fidelis -  
Who had to keep their heads down and defecate  
In their trousers because their foxholes were so cramped

And all the stats that show  
That war is a shitty business.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# We Are Surrounded By Ghosts – Now We Have To Live With Them

Watching you, I felt chill winds of springtime blow  
Among white cherry trees and purple sprays -  
Saw the lost gardens amid the scents of long ago  
Of the last lands whose lids are closed in final days.

Pressing flowers into the leaves and loneliness  
Kneeling to the mud or delving for the sand  
Quiet frames of countenance and loveliness  
I longed to comfort you and take your hand

And catch your eyes and gaze at you my lost girl  
In wonder at the years now left in beauty's stead  
And you would laugh and say 'Kind Sir' and twirl -  
Tossing bemusedly your wise angelic head.

Only time divides our souls – and time is on our side  
And those who went before will leave the window wide.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# We Were Together ... That Is Enough, I Tell Myself

Join the living to those who have fallen  
... te pito ora ki te pito mate

'What is it like to die? ' my young son asks?

'It is like living', I answer too quickly,

Part intuitively, partly flippantly -

Self-transparency in my response.

...

I will try harder.

I see myself as somehow the author

Of a story that is yet to find an ending:

Mysteriously entangled within the plot

As both its subject and its principal actor.

Be calm ... articulate, I tell myself.

I see myself descending a stairway

Carefully negotiating each down tread

Fearful of any dreadful tumble ahead

That might take this still living stance away.

Don't slip ... don't fall, I tell myself.

I see myself surfing probabilities

As successive treatments build and recede:

Still fortunate to be wave-riding steadily

The momentum of medical interventions.

Stand firm ... don't flinch, I tell myself.

I see myself at the helm of a crewless vessel

Trying to bring her to land, to port, to quay -

Captain of the closing of this little history

Desperate to make all good, all equal.

Be alert ... don't fail, I tell myself.

I see myself as a sad white-visaged clown

Left bobbing, waving my life's steering wheel -

Missing the bus, once the talk of the town -

My gash of a grin sometimes unnerving, unreal.

Keep smiling ... its an act, I tell myself

I see myself as a nuisance to be resolved

Commonplace evidence of half-existence:

The residue from a cup that overflowed

The ashes of some flames that fortune kissed.

Bear up ... there is love enough still.

I see myself knowing nothing of that finality -

Fearful of pain, the edging, encroaching none-self -

Not wanting to make a spectacle or a fool of myself

Hoping to redeem at the last some dignity.

No matter ... there is no place for pride.

And if I answer too carelessly and too lightly

Take no harm from my answer. It is well meant -

For a transaction where the self itself is spent

But sparks of lovingness from this glow brightly.

We were together ... that is enough, I tell myself.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Wellington's Safe Harbour

Brought together at lunchtime in Unity  
there is a kindly bonhomie of Kiwi poets  
celebrating Wellington and the creative  
life that it inspires with its Big Weather:  
voices that have been moved to 'record  
their responses to the steep streets and myriad people,  
the food and political energy, the cable car and cenotaphs,  
the wharves' - and the winds that can leave you hanging!

'I want to make people feel, cry out - for poetry  
to be a dagger brought to bone', she says in tears  
'for it to eviscerate the ordinary - for it to be real',  
she who was brought to this city from civil war:  
&quot;I was eight years old when they built the port in Novi.  
At that age most children know how to swim — I didn't know how yet.  
While playing about the harbour I fell into the sea.  
I sank.

The water buoyed me up.  
I saw the children above me on the wall  
— I extended my hands — tried to shout, — I couldn't!  
I was swallowing sea water, — I was sinking — I was lost!  
In that instant I flew through my entire life.  
All the sins of my young life appeared again before me:  
I was stealing sugar, I was beating my brother,  
I was lying, I was climbing the fruit tree

— My last thought was: &quot;I was descending into Hell! &quot;  
— and I lost consciousness.  
They got me out — and for what? &quot;  
It is not as though this doesn't happen here -  
last year a young man in his cups and overbold,  
revelling late at night on the harbourside promenade,  
climbed the iron lattice of our ancient floating crane the Hikitia  
dropped down and failed to surface.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Wharariki Dawn

The Pavilion Terrace, the Peacock and the Butterfly

The peacock is as always magnificent  
With his brightest of iridescent blues  
And tufted top-knot of feather flowers.

He is scrounging the terrace  
For crumbs from the campers.

Above the slowly subsiding flooded creek  
Flax and cabbage trees  
Fringe the driveway, and the cabins  
Where the wary and provident have taken refuge -  
As the mist and drizzle gust and billow  
Mizzling out the old hills above.

A tiny and perfect six-year old Japanese girl  
Kicks her heels against her wooden chair,  
Lost for worlds in her screen game,  
Her face framed by a cloche of blue hair with bubble-gum streaks  
Painted by her loving mums in the modern fashion -  
Her devices suddenly astart from the peacock's inquisition.

You have to smile.

I sit still longer on the communal couch  
Cradling my precious morning coffee  
Shaking off the earth's premature embrace -  
Sodden tenting and rope stumbling  
And a night-time of wails and keening.

The heavy, murky fog continues to roll in.

A brave butterfly flitters before me,  
Perfuming its wings on the droplet-dewed pathway jasmine.

Li Bai and Basho, what are you two old rascals doing here?

Have you nothing better do to do

Than hang around the Wharariki Camping Ground on a wet dawn?

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# What The World Needs Now

What the world needs now is oxytocin  
It's the main thing that there's just too little of  
What the world needs now is bubby love

No not just for some but for everyone

Lord we don't need another mountain.  
There are landscapes and hillsides  
We can strip mine.

There are oceans and tides,  
Though the fish stocks slide,  
That'll last our time

What the world needs now is snuffle love  
What we need now is snuggly inhalation  
Not just for us but for every nation.

It's the only thing that there's just too little of.

Lord we don't need another meadow  
Or corn fields and oil palms  
In irradiated afterglow.

We have sun beams and moon beams  
Above the smog it seems -  
Just listen Lord, if you want to know

What the world needs now is Agent O  
It's the only thing that there's just too little of  
And what the world needs so

No not just for some but for everyone

Lord we don't need more medication -  
There are pharmaceuticals to spare  
That blank immoderation.

But when the baby's bum is bare

Take a sniff and linger there  
In loved-up meditation.

Oxytocin - nobody can get enough  
It's the only thing that there's just too little of.  
What the world needs now is nappy-happy love

Not just for some - but for everyone.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# What's To See Has Just Begun

Do you like goldfish  
In a bubbling tank  
And a tiny diver  
With a treasure chest  
That spilled and sank?

Do you like babyish  
Picture books and puzzle tests  
On the playpen bench -  
And the battered toys -  
Which one is best?

Do you like foolish  
Adults in a tizz  
Worrying too much  
About the state you is -  
They need a rest!

Do you like unselfish  
Kindly docs and nurses'  
Gentle looks and gentle touch -  
Making better girls and boys  
So `ickness reverses?

I think I like this waiting room  
With its many little teases  
There is lots of joy and fun  
And what's to see has just begun

Even though I've got the sneezes!

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## When All That Flowers In Truth

Nightshade, bittersweet beyond concealing,  
Knows waning beauty is better if not found,  
And violets like to tears must face revealing  
Heartsease is rare - false hopes abound.

Forget-me-not the sorrow of the gathering in:  
No balm in Gilead - no laurels crowned -  
No respite for the rose, no special pleading!

Move along - nothing to see - love-lies-bleeding!  
The vacant land stands stark, the tares abound -  
With what is left to straw and dust succeeding  
When all that flowers in truth is cut to ground.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# When Last Did We Give The Earth Its Due Day?

When did we last give back without constraint?  
Let foregone beauty slip beneath the surface -  
Giving up readily without restraint -  
Surrendering to time and place?

When last did we give the earth its due day  
Recognising its grounded verity  
Gifting the sun itself in Sunday pay  
Celebrating its integrity?

Consider three thousand years have passed  
At the spring where the holy torc was laid:  
And now how we only take to the last  
Honouring nothing but what is paid?

And how that gilded gift was everything:  
Fearsome in its deftcraft intricacy  
Signifying the summer sun's rising  
And filling every hand with beauty -

Then willingly, joyfully released  
Laid down without sanction or regret,  
For unity and harmony increased,  
Acknowledging no slight, or doubt or debt.

We are a lesser people long estranged  
From heaven's heartfelt generosity  
Seizing what can only be awarded  
By gainsaying reciprocity.

We have lost the ability to gift  
Unable to dedicate or conserve  
Even though the earth cries out for uplift  
And only selflessness will truly serve.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Why I Never Visited Nz From Oz In 1970

... AND WHY I LOVE IT NOW

I wasn't thrilled at the prospect of you:  
&quot;Too many sheep and neither here nor there&quot;;

I wasn't thrilled with the promise of you  
As a Pom in the Sixties who hated square

I wasn't thrilled with the reports of you:  
'A Little England' they said: 'No Where'.

But I've come right with the wonder of you  
The shores and the greenstone crystal sprays

Yes, I've come right with the wonder of you  
The quilted hills that fray into salty bays

I've come so right with the wonder of you  
And the mountains that sing at the end of the days

I am bright with the wonder of you.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Why I Write

I can assure you that I have no wish to annoy you.  
I write because I have no option - it is my only recourse.  
If my writing irritates you, kindly ignore it - I am not  
Seeking vengeance and my delusions of recognition  
Are admitted cloud-capped towers of baseless fabric.

I write for myself because it is my better self that writes -  
A self I need to hear interspersed with white page silences.  
And I write for one who follows, one who is curious  
About this man and of what and where he dreamed -  
This being whose insubstantial pageant has melted into thin air.

Forty years past, I sat in a compound of mud houses  
In the Nigerian town of Bauchi asking questions  
About how people's lives could be improved by better  
This and better that, and a most beautiful dusky child  
Sidled up to listen to the interpreter, deep brown eyes in wonder.

Four or five years old, she smiled shyly and held my gaze.  
Lost in the wonder, I said to her father, "she is so beautiful".  
"If you like her, take her - she is better off with you", he said.  
But I made my excuses, lacking a wife and home for her -  
But perhaps now she is grown, she wants to read of me.

And five years earlier on the corniche in Zamalek, Cairo  
A little girl of similar age twirled on the pavement,  
Her dance betraying that she was naked beneath her shift -  
But taken like a leaf by a casual eddy of wind  
She skipped into the street only to fall limp and lifeless.

At this, the bus driver stopped and picked up the child  
And I, in dreadful nightmare dreams that return,  
Ran into an apartment block and hammered at a door  
Seeking fruitlessly to call an ambulance in execrable Arabic.  
Possibly she survived, and now she wants to read of this.

And then there was the little girl that I loved  
My almost daughter, with whom a friend said  
I was so very caring - who when her mother broke with me,

I used to go to see at lunch times at her school  
Talking to her through the yard railings, bringing sweets.

Years later, I went to see her and she told me:  
'I do remember you - and the time you broke my arm  
When I fell off the swing in the park and you dropped me'.  
But I replied 'That was not me, it was another of  
Your mother's friends' - and I write for our severance.

And somewhere in the future, there may be others  
Who are related or bonded in some manner -  
A future grand-daughter or great niece perhaps -  
Who sees something in my writing that catches them,  
Lifts them up, and for a moment holds them.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Why This Age Is Even Worse

Forget stupor and dread, hope is dead.

Those unhealed wounds that we touched

Do not suppurate - 'you are mistaken:

You are wrong to believe that they ever existed'.

This is an age in which truth is erased -

The bully smacking your head against the wall

Of the schoolyard - 'it didn't happen

There is nobody to tell, they won't believe you'.

And death again chalks the doors with crosses,

As the ravens are gathering and wheeling,

But there will be nothing to be seen

Hope and truth have been back-slash deleted.

This is an age when all decency is ended.

The little boy assaulted and soiled but rewarded

With a broken toy soldier - 'best not to mention this:

It is too out of line - can it be substantiated? '

This is an age of contempt for the disadvantaged -  
Like the little girl who is abused for her disability,  
The butt of mimed mimicry - 'facts contended,  
Cruelty easily become ambiguity - easily contained'.

This is an age without heroes, honour, and quests  
Where a new race of sardonic rats prepare their feasts,  
But there will be nothing to be seen  
When the junk files of decency and compassion are cleaned.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Winnin' Streak

But Strewth, the winnin'! Ow they loves this 'frill  
Scrabblin' with the kids at Bondi on the beach  
When a 'wowsers' gets yous double-word  
And Strine is spelt as well as heard:  
Fer Auntie Lil is on the plonk and puzzlin' still  
And Uncle Norm is lost for words until  
He pulls a double-zed he's hidden out of reach  
In his togs like a nipper with a purloined peach -  
At which Dad squares up Norm for biffos  
If he dirty-deals with budgie-smugglin' lingo  
But Mum is equal to this shonky deal  
And puts down 'prezzie' with a bonza squeal  
At which Cutie Tiffany comes right  
And ends it all without a fight  
With another dinkum straya noun  
By crossing prezzie with her cozzie down.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Winter Lighthouse Rainbow

They've done some very fancy planting  
Outside the Marine Research Centre  
And though it was cold in the shadows  
That slanted down from the north -  
In the sun it was glorious and there were flowers.

Midway through my walk, I stopped to talk  
To a young American from Wisconsin  
Who was learning Japanese from  
Notes that kept blowing away - with him  
Complaining justifiably about arcane complexity.

Later, a girl was riding along the beach shingle  
On her pebbled-back half-stock horse  
Half appaloosa pony, testing the shallows  
Sitting back deep, straight and prim  
On her English saddle, English-style.

And earlier, on my walk from the park  
Westwards along the sandy pavement,  
I had sat on a memorial wooden seat,  
Dedicated to Martha Dunn who died aged 30 -  
Me pondering poetically about ephemerality.

But don't let me forget the rainbow  
On Baring Head that was my first impression  
Of the bay, the harbour entrance and the Strait -  
Taking it as a propitious portent or good omen  
That despite everything, the covenant was still honoured.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

## Wisdom In Slices

Sophie I talked to your sister in Whanaurua Bay.

She has lost her teeth but her smile is beautiful.

She makes the most wonderful apple pie

Mounding and smothering it in cream from a squirty tube.

I asked her: 'Can I take a photograph? '

She was shy about her teeth but appreciative

Of my attention and half-agreed that she should

Treat herself to a set of dentures that she could enjoy.

I added kindly, like a Pakeha gentleman:

'I have reached the stage in life where

I appreciate women of character'.

There is no doubt there Sophie of the Mana that you both share -

It would have animated Jung archetypically

If either of you had served him a tan slice or a custard square.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Wonder Woman

Once a sweet little girl in a white toga  
An innocent among the denizens  
Your adolescence on Themyscira  
Aroused bare-thigh but leathered Amazons

Whose patriarchy-upending mayhem,  
Disturbed by a DV Fokker nose-dive,  
Planted the seed of what you became  
When you brought the pilot ashore alive -

Diana the kick-ass demi-goddess  
Daughter of Hippolyta and Zeus  
Laced in a boob-hugging bodice,  
The War God's micro-skirted nemesis -

A Wonder Woman who stayed fate's hand  
To save mankind - but stole a kiss in no-man's land.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Yearloss

In the deep days, death was a bountiful land  
Of meadows and pastures and fat cattle  
Of evergreen plains, brooks and willow stands  
Of wildfowl, teeming fish, and game aplenty

Its waters were not below nor the land above  
For both were of one substance in form and flow  
With rain and mist and ebb and flood and tide  
Inherent, translucent, awash and without surface

And the souls that journeyed there were adrift -  
Always seeking out landings within and beneath,  
Ever driven to coming at last to the water margins  
To finding safety under open skies with fast footholds.

Then fearful of firm standing and curious of its nature  
Its inconstant ruler stole a child from the over-world  
With this boy being the tenth son of his adversary  
Who ruled the heavens with severances of lightening

But growing in love and awe of the watery dominions  
Though grieving for the bright sun and pitch-black night  
The child became a young warrior torn in understanding  
Between what was ever-shifting and what was ever-fixed

Troubled, he found his way to the edge of the underworld  
Breaking back once more into the distinct firmament  
In rainbow iridescence, casting wide his cape of green  
That rising mists and falling rain might nourish nature.

At which time and place became both separate and apart  
Surfacing - and the seasons were set in motion and sequence,  
With the great world turning, wrapping itself in his cloak  
In the winter and setting it aside in the warmth of summer

But come the half-year's end, the youth was set lose his life  
To reconcile the obligations that each court demanded

Returning the ransom and paying homage to his sky-father  
To be reunited with his guardian to enjoy death's plenty

And each year mankind marked the journey from the deep realm  
Rejoicing in the glory of the summer solstice and its champion  
But with the autumn darkness came unease as the sun wavered  
And the twice-lost son was drawn again to what was concealed.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# Year's End 2019

Like us the year had life, was born and dies:  
Its immediacy did not exist  
Before we were born to sentience -  
And all too soon will be dismissed.

Departure always asks us what was done -  
And what's revealed - and what you cannot tell -  
And now the year itself is passing on  
Its muted questions mar farewell.

Looking forward, looking back - stand steady  
On how time turns and takes back what it gives  
But mark its profligacy make ready  
A promised newness that revivifies.

As our past lives become the tales of old  
For youth, a new day breaks whose dawns are gold.

Maori Proverb:

Maku te ra e to ana;  
kei a koe te urunga ake o te ra.

Let mine be the setting sun  
Yours is the dawning of a new day.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# You Can'T Kill Squitch

SWARD

Her father died when she was three years old  
Beached and bloated in his sea captain's coat

Her mother made a poor job of widowhood  
Taking to dark colours and languishing.

Lacking attention and prone to tempers  
She grew, ache hurt wounded and wilful.

As a child I was always under her feet  
Too much seen but scarcely heard

A boy of few words who slipped away to read  
Or took the dog over the fields for long walks

And dreaded coming back to tirades  
Lashing the farmhouse beams with fury.

But I used to love to hear her laugh  
Telling or savouring a naughty tale

And waited so eagerly for letters  
In her bold strong hand on Basildon Bond

Telling of wet harvests and point to points  
Hatching, matching and dispatching.

We never got on well though I tried hard  
She always looked for openings to weakness

I was too soft and never stood up to her  
Easily persuaded I was wrong and she supreme

Afraid to have it out once and for all  
In case she burst into ragged, raging tears.

I wanted to go beyond and share her fear  
But she was too sly and proud to come clean

And I was left never having known the girl  
Who played and swam from the riverside

In distant summers late evenings  
Baked as brown as a hawthorn berry.

These are the clumps that grow wherever my land  
Hard to uproot and quick to break and bind

If you want me again look deep and delve  
Take the stem and trace the broken ends

Though the rough grass still strikes and tangles  
As she would say: 'You can't kill squitch'.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# You Must Believe In Life

Beneath the summer skies  
The rose its secrets keeps  
But its perfume still betrays  
The essence springtime steep.

And in the mid-year's glow,  
When skies are fierce and dry,  
Fresh blooms wilt bye-and-bye -  
And winter longings know.

Each season changes state,  
And as the Winter ends,  
The chill of Autumn waits  
For snows the next year sends.

The mountain streams will thin  
As drought and ice take hold  
The one from shrinking in  
The next from love grown cold.

You must accept life goes  
Through ever constant change  
And that each dying rose  
Will scent a time-pressed page.

Spring is everlasting  
And so is Autumn too -  
And in their kindness bring  
The truths the moments choose  
As life itself renews.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson

# ???????? - ???????? ?????????????? [a Translation Of Natalia Evstigneeva's Poem]

LET US

Let us be careful with each other:  
Avoid harsh words  
Or 'petit point' needling  
And cut out invoicing for good behaviour.

Let us do without slights and snubs  
And slapping sore spots  
Like meddling clowns  
Who flatter, jostle and deceive.

Let us be honest with each other  
And stop bamboozling with confetti -  
Putting the brake on being  
A nose ahead, one-up and on-top.

Let us care for each other's time  
And not leave things hanging -  
Respecting others' rights to have their say  
Without being judged in advance.

Let us be careful in endorsing opinions  
There is no need to label everything  
Remember it is so easy to hurt -  
There are gossips enough already.

Let us avoid the suffering and misery  
We create by holding back  
And muttering 'Hi' through clenched teeth  
To lace welcome with bad intentions.

Let us always try to be a little kinder,  
A little easier, more straightforward and careful  
And the world will become more beautiful and brighter  
So that it is born again with love.



# ????????? ? ?????????? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????????? [[Piglets and Bears can't be friends? ]

The Russian bear so huge and wild  
Will so devour a piglet mild  
The porky child is scarce aware  
It's been chewed on by the bear.

The bear loves berries, fat and honey  
Rolling itself in oil and money -  
And prone to ripping fences down  
To raid the farms that border town.

Chasing wild pigs through the trees  
Is sore paw work like robbing bees -  
Better ransack farmyard trash and grease  
And hope the peasants opt for peace -

If not trapped and staked and chained  
Defanged, declawed - its ambit waned.  
So it fears the hunters and the net  
Yet dreams of powers it can't forget.

Pity then a stuffed bear toy named Pooh  
Is happier by far than you  
And Piglet is his greatest friend  
Among the firs where rainbows end

There the forest creatures live in peace  
In quiet joys that never cease.  
Cares and tears cannot taint the years

That bears and piglets claim as peers.

Keith Shorrocks Johnson