

Classic Poetry Series

Ross Clark
- poems -

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Ross Clark(30 August 1953 -)

Ross Clark is an award-winning Australian poet. His poems often use strongly physical imagery and he is a strong exponent of haiku poetry.

Life

Born in Toowoomba, Clark attended Mt Gravatt High School and the University of Queensland. He spent over a decade teaching in rural and regional communities. In recent years he has specialized in teaching poetry and creative writing at Queensland University of Technology, as well as performing as a musician.

Critical recognition

In 1990 Clark was an inaugural member of the Queensland Writers Train; in 2003 he was recipient of the Centenary of Federation Medal, otherwise known as the Centenary Medal, for "contribution to poetry"; in 2004 he was recipient of the Queensland Writers' Centre Johnno Award, "for outstanding contribution to Queensland writers and writing"; and in 2008 he was recipient of the Australian Book Review Poetry Prize.

A Hempen Helix

The landlord's men have cut my rope
and flung it far from me;
there's barely now three feet of it
still hanging from my tree –

I cannot lash, I cannot bind,
and I cannot take my life:
the landlord's men have severed hope
with their indentured knife.

Ross Clark

Avuncular Play

My four uncles took their turns
in the harbouring of me;
they stepped up to my boyish needs,
whatever they might be.

Uncle Four was quick and rude,
full of laughter and of schemes;
he did not stoop his heart too far
to join me in my dreams.

Uncle One was big and loud,
a man of doing and of jokes;
I was the young off-sider
in a pair of raucous blokes.

Uncle Two was kindly rough,
pursuit of women on his mind,
and I was at the age right then
to discover all their kind.

Uncle Three showed quiet resolve
and cared not to compete,
but chuckled low when random life
threw puzzles at his feet.

Your four uncles took their turns
in the growing up of you;
they protected all your boyish deeds,
whatever you might do.

Ross Clark

Improbable Event #1

for Jessica Stone

Halfway up the mountain
to my friend's place, the road
a decade unfamiliar to me
and darkness already cloaking
its curves and drops, I chanced
upon them, hazard lights blinking,
stopped ahead at the intersection.
Someone in trouble, or more likely
lost and I probably could not help,
map-bound myself and grateful
there was only one road up, but aware
that the turn-off might elude me yet.
I drew past, pulled up, walked back.
Young tourist or student gets out
and inquires of me, we are looking
for the glow-worm farm, and I wonder
who is playing a trick on eager Japanese;
but he hauls a lap-top, glowing green,
from the car and shows its location
on the map he scrolls up and down.
They also cannot find their turn-off.
In their headlights I search
my fold-out map, compare it with
their screen, declare we both should
keep going, they may follow till I
turn off. (Why here, this husbandry
of glow-worms? And do they need
Minutes later I find my turn-off,
and several hands wave from
the hired Japanese car, now
just a few minutes from
their own destination.
Half-way up a mountain,
the lights of the coast behind them,
their tail-lights flickering,
their lap-top radiant,
they had waited in hope of

glow-worms. They were young,
and their map had promised them.

Ross Clark

In Focus

the zen photographer
travelled the world's four seasons
without his camera
 when he returned home
 he drew these nine pictures
 we see here
 he never left his village again

Ross Clark

Just After Rain

just after rain
when the water lies hesitant and pure
on the roads and footpaths
and a few cars still have their lights on

just after rain
when the frontyard trees sweat the last drops
from their chlorophyll brows
and the air is promise-crammed and light
and there are apparently more towers
in the distant city-centre than before

just after rain
when the pets emerge from under houses
and overlong browsers from within shops...

just after rain
we breathe in deeply and effortlessly
we enjoy watching where we put our feet
as we jaunt home

just after rain
there is no other time that is not
just after rain

Ross Clark

Second Names

for Christobal Columb 23rd

the white, black, grey ones of magpie, crow or galah,
the oil-pastel spectrum of lorikeet or budgerigar,
a kookaburra's henna and ochre brown.

I find them all by looking down,
though the discourse of birds is surely overhead
amongst the branches and wires and posts.

And amongst the birdsong, I hear it said
that I pursue this mania so one day I may boast
the colours of heaven on my lap,
the feather of an angel in my cap.

Ross Clark

Seven Wishbones

Yes, I have sent three crows
to crenellate your guttering,
to stave your powerlines:
 muttering their rosaries,□
 they will watch over you.□

Yes, I have sent two magpies
to swoop in your yard,
to carol in your mornings:
 they are our morsebirds,
 our speaking in their songs.

But also I have sent a single
rainbow lorikeet, whose work
is just to play, whose charge
 is to show you colour,
 to make you smile.

In my own far paddock□
I wear dark feathers in my coat
and await my winged day.

(for Sharon)

Ross Clark

Sleeping On The Brine

Midnight pilots the mind to miracles□
or mirages. Thought lies anchored□
with its crew at rest and no lookout□
to warn of the interloper boarding□
from the longboat: madness needs□
no moonlight, stealths its way to□
the wheelhouse, grapples every degree□
of wind, every tackle of tide, sounds□
every watch with leaden tongue,□
marks every depth beyond despair,□
resounds its victory in every quarter,□
giving none.

Ross Clark

The Naked Eye

Men look at her naked, when she
does not know they are watching;
they can look at her naked even
when she is dressed and far away,
long after the painting is done.
One man looks at her naked, and
buys her for his coffee-shop wall,
where other men will see her naked,
day after night after day. One day,
walking by the coffee-shop, she sees
last year's nakedness on the far wall,
through the window's reflection of
this year's clothed body. Several
months later she walks past again
and sees men, young men, still
looking at her naked. She smiles
to think how long it will be before
her oily skin cracks and splotches.
She does not return to observe
the men looking at her naked.

Ross Clark