

Four Poems by John C. Eustace

Mangosteen

this predilection
for purple fruit
and sweet white flesh
is Victoria's fault

sponsor a contest
for geography and physics:
collapse six thousand miles
bringing a fragile fruit of empire
the Queen's favourite
no lowly apple, peach or pear
branch ripened in native soil
unspoiled to a royal mouth

science stokes the furnace
steamships and locomotives
coal, hand dug, pried with pickaxe
from a deep and growing emptiness
to pluck a purple globe

today, plucking one from the crisper
beside star-apple, mango, avocado
oblivious to the crude stain
I crush it between my palms
stuffing the sweet oily wedge
fruit of the Gods
into my mouth

Globalisation

they are refashioning the science
of space and time
these new geographers
collapsing the distance
between ravaged continents
outstripping tectonic intimacies
in the nocturnal
meeting of digits
from opposite sides of the bed
globalisation in the technology of fingers and toes

Crossing the line (For Christopher Ricks)

*A grasshopper walks into a bar and sits down. The bartender says to him,
"Hey, we have a drink named after you." The grasshopper responds,
"You have a drink named Bob?"*

Jokes relieve tension
says an authority
he then proceeds
to prove the point
relieving himself
with a one
about a grasshopper
named bob
and a bartender
who doesn't discriminate

laughter follows
his
ours
but how much relief?

I imagine that bartender

an affable man with a minor weakness
he can't
individuate

yet he's clever enough
he knows his place
and feels
grasshoppers should know theirs too
he's behind the bar
 (with the cashbox)
and grasshoppers should be where they belong
 (on the cocktail menu)

now imagine his shock
seeing a bartender-sized talking grasshopper
on the other side of that bar
 (his dividing line)

what's to stop it from taking over the bar
and serving other grasshoppers cocktail bartenders

bob has changed everything

every evening now
a nightmarish sweat
interrupts the luxury of sleep

he wakes
 (relieved)

once more to find
that the ghetto of grasshoppers
troubling his dreams
have not yet crossed the tremulous line

Your world's antipodes

Here, I sit
in isolated Perth
your world's antipodes
where it is mid-morning
where Maggies have gone quiet
(Rainbows taking up the din)
where Stringybarks
spill summer's light
upon a skulking Dugite

while I wrap my tongue
around new names
and test in verse
new words
shared by new friends
who speak to me
life's rhythms here
who beat them with their tongues
as through this puerile drill of lines
I seek to beat them too

but it strikes me
that these names do not beat
for you in the heart
of that other place
where you sit
where it is mid-evening
and there is no birdsong
and the leaves I know well
have long since lost their colour
and fallen
perhaps with so much snow
and where you wait
as your children
(whose naming I recall
whose speech
is often in my mouth)
prepare for bed
as you for peace
of winter's dark

I measure the softer
rhythms of that imagined life
against new ones I am proving
the former reckoned with names
the latter with their needlessness
and while I worry
that the space between us
grows with each new line
because of late
we share few words
yet I know
we are bound
by something we need not name
nor sound out childishly
whose beat I can tell
even in this land

of new friends
and words
your world's antipodes