



TOM NOLAN

Antipodes

For my sister, Sara Nolan

You made your misery evaporate;
You seized the melancholy that had chilled you
And cast it off like bed-sheets wet with mildew;
You tore away the dreams you'd smothered in
And freed yourself before it was too late;
You let the sunlight disinfect your skin.

That village on the shore was perfect for you,
Although in truth it never did for me:
The grey-green scrub, the salt-lakes and the sea,
A summer sun that struck with all its might
The sullen dune-scapes stretching out before you,
The night horizons nebulous with light.

Our lesser, meaner homeland might have caught you
And limited the scope of your ambitions,
Provoking you with feeble prohibitions,
Disgusting you with mediocre praise
Until its subtle discipline had taught you
To count your blessings and to count the days.

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But continental silences, the smoke
That rose from bushfires to pollute with strange
New colours those within the normal range,
The glaring atmosphere's aridity
That sucked dry every sentence when you spoke
Were no match for your generosity.

While I, who feared the life that you elected
Would waste my thoughts before they could be stated
And waste a soul no more than adumbrated,
Regretted our old nursery because
Its close frustrations had at least protected
The sort of being that I sort of was.

Returning after twenty years I find you
As ready in this little inland town
To greet adversity and face it down
As in your first antipodean summers,
Still able, with your past interred behind you,
To battle till you win against all comers.

And though things look a little different here –
A tainted river pouring brown like tea,
And hilltop boulders pale with *vert-de-gris* –
The sun is just as distant and immense,

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The drop into the star-field just as sheer,
The cold of rushing clouds just as intense

As when our ways were sundered by them, Sara:
I try to hold my own, I do my best,
But can't survive for long outside my nest,
My prison of restriction and compliance,
Yet count myself among the blessed to share a
Brief moment of a life lived in defiance.