

Mark Young

A vicarious life —
the backing tracks

otata's bookshelf

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A vicarious life — the backing tracks

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post meridian

The first time for
some time past,
the river. It seems
surprisingly low,
even though for
the four or so years
before the recent

floods this is how
we always knew it.
On to the backroad
short-cut, only to find
it's still closed, water
over it, not quite a
causeway. I describe

an ankh, then retrace
the stem. Galahs on
the wires, Madonna
on the car radio, *Cherish*,
a boppy song. I bongo
the steering wheel on
the longer way home.

so much depends

upon the direction
you're coming
from
but

bicycles &
red wheel
barrows
always have the

right of way
even when
it's not /
raining

is not to have thought

According to the
patter over & in
between the tracks
from those unsigned
bands that the late-
summer elephant is
playing, a burst of
radio energy from
deep space is
likely to cause the
scaling back of opium
production on campus.

The peer reviewed
literature proposes
the use of ritual
cleansing & the
wearing of under-
wire bra bikini
bathing suits with
low cut bottoms
to prepare for any
subsequent mayhem.

& so the silences are

In the middle
of the night, just
before that first
or last train — a
kilometer of coal
heading for the
power station
up the highway

past the cattle
yards — rattles
through, I am
struck by the
possibility that
noise was invented
to make silence
more bearable.

*

I walk out into
the garden. Words
are rattling in my
head, nowhere near
a thousand meters —
might possibly
measure one meter
if you stretched the
words out & wrote
their meanings in
after them.

*

The garden is
an infinite silence
until it starts
to talk to me.

A / little something / for Ray Craig

The temperament
of birds. Cardboard
containers of take-
out noodles. Light,
elongated? No, not
that, the things it
touches. Ensuing.

Off The Hill

For much of
the time he
functioned as
any politician's
wife would.

The Dowager's Palace

I listen to
the peacocks

& invent new
poets from

the T'ang
Dynasty.

Last words

A zone into which things come, even if not easily, but at least, sooner or later...

The cat abuses me when I arrive home late.

There are first paragraphs, first verses, first words, first thoughts, blank screens, the computer not even turned on.

The cat wants to stay inside, attaches herself to me, insists I make up for all the time I have spent away from her. The computer turned on.

I try & make sense of the sounds of the night. Trucks on the highway, fruit bats, geckoes, frogs, trains. There is no point in trying. They make sense to themselves, bind together without any outside interference. Blank screen.

Humidity hangs in the house like the smell of washing in wet weather. I open the windows. The cat decides I am worthless this time in. Goes outside, lies on the path, listens to the night. It makes sense to her. First thoughts.

The night comes in. I shut it out & turn on the air conditioners. New sounds. Purposeful, meaningless. Excludes everything. There is a logjam in my mind but I can't find a way to clear it. I decide I am worthless & go outside, to find a green frog clinging to the deep indian red of the steel support posts. Two colors my mother told me should never be seen together. Imperial colors to the Chinese. I incline to the latter.

First words.

How I fell in love

He entered like the last
of the Mogul princes,
susurrations of silk & so
out there that you knew
his line would never be
continued. Bach as the back-
ground music, setting up
his entrance, sweeping around
the bottom of his robes
& lifting them until he
seemed to be floating. Part
of a dance that I was
also part of. My right leg
back, my left bent
at the knee. Arm sweeping
down & across my body,
eyes lowered, a supplicant
position. I have yet
to look him in the face.

The Dance

Pause in the progress
of. What started what.
Finished. He danced
towards me. Only. Not
moving. But. From this
side movement. The
realization. The pause.
Withdraw the breath.
Again. Breathe. Resume
the dance. The progress.

changing paces

The pace of change /
the change of pace. A
small transposition
of words that shifts
the locus & focus from
without to within. It
has now become
differential calculus; the
rate at which we change
pace relative to the pace
of change around us.

But...besides...

He caught the subway
out of Tombstone. It
was as she'd said, the
past is another country.

Fortunately he'd come
prepared, crushed ice
in his jacket pocket, a
survival manual in 35

languages counter-
balancing the imprint
of his wallet against
his ass. Gunshots still

reverberated in his ears,
but he'd stayed on top of
it all until halfway across
the Atlantic, when his

smartphone gave out,
& his heart went with it.

Lost, & looking for his sidemen

When all else
fails, he comes back
to the music of
Miles. It is a point
of familiarity,
something that has
served him well
in the past. But, too

many trips to the
well & eventually it
runs dry. Dare he
say it, but even
Miles is Muzak
at certain times.

Transcript

Back from an hour-long walk. Not much traffic.

Small city, no light pollution. No moon. Sky full of stars.

No recent rain. No frogs. Instead, cicadas.

Flying foxes flap leatherly from trees inches above our heads.

Change of diet. Too early for fruit. Nectar in season.

Talking whilst walking. Conversational avenues.

Different from solitary walks where you go out looking for poems.

Windchimes somewhere though not much breeze.

Train noises. A lifelong constant.

Geckoes on the front porch. I yearn for mountains.

Forget the

*flight of small
cheeping birds*
that WCW wrote
about—old age
is a house-arrest
bracelet woven
from the stupid-
ities that you

now commit
when you venture
out, & fallible be-
cause it doesn't
always signal
an errant action.

Kōan

How far would science
& philosophy have

progressed if an eternal
antelope had lived in

the gardens of Plato &
Newton & reached up on

its hind legs & eaten the
apples before they fell?

Eclectical compliance

Call it as you
see. Fit everything
in. There is no
federal reserve
& eventually the
entropy meter
will burst its
banks. In the coming
world your part-
time lover may be
your mother & the
act no longer
an obscenity.

I / take down / the frog calendar

The New Year's
fireworks in Sydney
finished fifty minutes
ago, but they're be-
ing replayed on TV
as if they were live
because this state
doesn't believe

in daylight saving,
fearing that the cows
mightn't milk & the
curtains might fade
because of that
extra hour of sun.

The Tao of mixed herbs

You can fill
out an online
questionnaire
HERE & find
out what your
personal formula
of mixed herbs is...

& you can order
it for just \$15, all pre-
mixed up for you, too!
Plus, your video guide to
DIY Feng Shui is also here!

The Prize

A moment
when two or
more lines
of thought

that have
taken long
independent
journeys arrive

coherent &
incandescent
in the same
singular space.

intimidation

She left gaps
in the con-
versation
to be filled
with his guilt.

Threads

Later, after the
whales had
been re-
floated, she went
down to the beach
& lay in their
indentations. She
pressed her ear
against the wet
sand. The shell
principle, a tin-can
telephone. Though
not the sea
she heard singing
but the threads
leading back
from it.

The Archer

Just as I pass over
the Tropic of
Capricorn, 100 ibis
rise & circle above
me. Egyptian birds
in the Queensland sky.
Perhaps they have been
released to celebrate

the Grand Reopening
of the famed Library
of Alexandria. Maybe
Rockhampton is to
be the new repository
of ancient wisdom &
I am getting in
on the ground floor.

Ma Caw

In the back-
ground, the
empty vessel
that is Céline
Dion parrots
the words of
others with
as much e-
motion as a
cash register
can generate.

in edifices, edification

Nobody was there
when he visited

the Great Hall
of The People.

humming

The
l
e
g
a
n
c
e

of bright birds

is often
[obscured by]
their
color.

A vicarious life—the backing track

Whenever it started
to get away from him
he would slide in under
the ropes clutching a
variety of extended

instrumental versions
of his life —usually
kept in a box in the car
boot — & hold karaoke
nights so he could watch

other people doing the
words that were meant for
him. Only then would he
decide which track he
wanted to record next.

Conversation Piece

"The art of
conversation is dead."

Do you agree or
disagree? SMS

your answer
to 1234 567 890.

t h e n a r r o w r o a d

a s u n l i t
p i e c e
o f s t o n e
p l a c e d
o n a h i l l s i d e
r e c o u n t s
t h e t r a v e l s

The yin & yang of Christopher Columbus

The macaques' rabid
caroling kept him

awake on his return
to Europe. He dreamt

of the Americas & the
capuchins' plainsong.

behind the times ephemera

Left
to its own
devices &
desires

will the
mayfly
eventually

become
a june-
bug?

Rabatical

He
ate Moroccan

to
raise his level

of
couscousness.

Thanksgiving Day, 1976

I have never
liked the last

waltz of *The*
Last Waltz, but

the rest of the
movie is magic.

I sight; eyes, right?

I am attentive
to detail, so much
so that I have
sat at this or
one of the other

sidewalk tables
for two years
now, & have only
just seen that the
small street that

borders the café
& runs down to-
wards the river
has both a sign-
post & a name.

Thought transference

I wake up with two voices in my head. One, a pure tenor, is singing "America the beautiful;" the other is Maxwell Smart saying "Good thinking, Ninety Nine."

A baby gecko clings to the ceiling. I know how it got in, through the small gaps around the air-conditioner. But how did these other things enter?

Rodgering Hammerstein

The hills are
alive with the
 sound of muskrats.

The Division of Surplus

We are not that hip
to Hindi, but know
that the Tantras teach
there is a Lingam with-
in each Yoni. It is not
so much a collection
of strokes, but a series
of phases of intention

evolved from a convenient
same-sex marriage of
peace comics & security
spiders. The Yoni does
not do the slow train
with no seat routine.

A hubric note on the music of J. S. Bach

Unless
we are all
Gods

then
this is not
just

God's
music.

re / deco / rating

looking
for places
to put things

/

looking
for things
to put places

[untitled]

Loaded. Dais
Tocsin. Shock.
Moss. Destruction.
Empty. Fret.

song

I start
with the
the of
thee. The
e later.

questions, always questions

Who will I be-
queath my
dental floss to?

Jule Styne tune,

Sammy Cahn lyrics, sung by Sinatra. *Saturday night (is the loneliest night of the week)*. Such social change since 1944, no-one now dances, cheek to cheek, have not done, many years since, early teens, last dance, even then, way out, on the.

Full moon, frogs, flying foxes.

Where is Juárez

Strange shit goes on
in the bars of
Juárez. Some-
thing to do with the
architecture. So many
corners & temporal
anomalies to hide
within. & even without
concealment there
is always a tension
waiting for the next
word to make its
way out from behind
the plastic curtains
that the women
drape serape-like
around their bodies.

Gerontion

You know you're getting
old when the poetry of

Thomas Stearns Eliot rattles
the bars of your cage.

fast amulets

parrakeets anneal the landscape
he changed the room around
five meters of mud lay between the path & the water
the last vestige of light was a yellow butterfly

A Night at the Opera

In the evening
he would play

hillbilly songs
on a banjo. What

was worse, we
sang along.

The Frog *ficcione*

The flowers arrive
laughing at my oilskin cape –
vernal equinox.

Mizu no Oto (1694-1744)

DIY

So that not only
the eye but the

ear is engaged,
a soundtrack

will be added to
this piece, maybe

something you
wrote yourself.

Quick! Before the stream dries up completely

Accident
Identikit

Axolotl
Idolatry

Axiom
Idiom

Axle
Idle

Ax
Id

A
I

prickly thoughts

The animal's not found in these parts, nor anywhere nearby. Yet I'm sitting under the house thinking about porcupines. Their quills particularly. How they're straight or only slightly curved, unlike the smoke from my cigarette which is going in all directions.

There is a frog clinging to the security screen that guards the laundry window, drawn to the moths that are drawn to the light I have left on in order to give me some idea of where to stumble. A batrachian bonus. From here it shows as silhouette; from inside it is an anatomical exhibit.

The smoke drifts past it, pools beneath the floor of the deck above me, then seeps up through the floorboards. I wonder how to vent it elsewhere, consider yurt designs at first. But the prospect of spending nights in the Gobi drives me eastwards across the Pacific to the Nine Nations. Equally romantic / much more appealing; & there's some tenuous link with arrows that lets in porcupine quills to prick the mind.

That's what sitting beneath the house can do when there's not enough light to contemplate your navel. Allows your thoughts to drift & pool & seep into unexpected places. I put out the cigarette, leave the laundry light on. The frog thanks me. We have an understanding. It stays focused which lets my mind jump around. Not too far & closer to home.

I am thinking about echidnas.

Prelude

Begin with "melody inside." The implications of it. The song within.
Within the poem, within silence, even within a song. It's what we listen
out for, what we strive to hear.

Otherwise. Notes. Mundanities. Pick up the dry cleaning. Put out the
cat.

More / Harry photos / may emerge soon

Feverish handiwork?
Or unformatted head-

space? Some
other thing

often takes the
place of structure.

there is

no such thing

as

no such thing

A small canto for Dante

Three levels of visible
activity. A police heli-
copter circles. Beneath
it swallows swirl
incessantly like those
mythical birds that
never come down to
land. & on the porch

the cats pace round
& around, pissed that
I will not let them in
now that I'm about
to have lunch. Who
knows what the
worms are doing. Or
Beatrice, far below.

Looking out

In the morning,
after the rain, she
listened to a couple

of Aretha Franklin
tracks & then got
ready to go out.

On Friday

Faster than fingers
or speech. The mind.

Not what you thought
but a belated précis

of it. Bits missing. This
is Thursday's poem.

For K.

.....& so it is the
coming in, one
foot across
the other, model
strut, the dressage
horse. Such an
en-trance. Only. Is
not the coming
in, is a coming
out.....

The Love Song of Kurt Weill

When the music
comes to me, it is

always first heard

as if being sung
by Lotte Lenya.

Travel / Travail

I try not to under-
take journeys

that have only the
one destination

but somehow they
always overtake me.

Mendeleev's Lament

I never could
find the element

of surprise in the
Periodic Tables.

& if one remembers

The water-
pockets in the
canyon over-
flow with ticker
tape & 1000
year old
Anasazi
writings. Wild-

flowers bloom
along the one
arm which is
all that re-
mains of the
Y chromosome.

culturing the seabass

A sponge cake that is covered with ice cream is important for both landscape architecture & urban applications. It also helps to minimize the effect beta blockers have on the annual pelagic car-

bon flow even when swiftly harvested by brail net & plunged directly into an icy brine. Insurance won't cover any losses; but the sense of security is heightened to the level of a strategic national requirement.

radical changes to tempo

Lear's madness shows
us how to spice up
your lunch game &
that mandrels come in

all sizes. So control your
drone now that Pokemon
Go inspires you to make
the boldest loops.

capillary zombies

The replicants in *Blade Runner* are smooth to the touch, have been stock-

piling contraceptives for months in anticipation of a possible postelection

surge in demand. Meanwhile the price of crude remains at a healthy \$54-

plus, & there is incremental restocking across the entire steel supply chain.

Obi-Wan Kenobi may / be getting his / own standalone movie

The clones all have slightly
different yet recognizable color

patterns, are primarily used for
fitting clothing. People are more

concerned about taking pictures
of the pieces than experiencing

them. The Han Solo movie nears
the end of its troubled production.

It takes serious commitment & effort
to be the gift that keeps on giving.

baseball cadavers

Law school is difficult, is
the epitome of luxury

living. One might think
evil never happens. A huge,

relatively private beach
where deck chairs line the

strand. The weather starting
to warm the one-of-a-kind

nightlife. A small town
in Canada leads the way.

At the skating rink

The inner shell is grounded & filled with gargoyles or garlic — the translation is unclear. Filming is not allowed, nor is the spoken word, nor even thinking about them. Definitions do not necessarily match the

codes given by the docents, nor do the docents align with any given schedule sheet. They float, speechless, cameras consigned by gravity to act as loincloths.

chamomile terraces

The post-nuclear world
is living with its mother

in a rented sand box
that consists mainly

of a hot tub & a shaky
balcony that has some

sort of obstruction which
tends to spoil the view.

You do not need to put it in a plastic bag

We have lined our playaway
tops to make them heat up

quickly, enough to melt & pop
a balloon. Men might find it

baffling, but the kinetic energy
helps us pipe melted white

chocolate so it can be x-rayed by
officials when passing through

a security checkpoint, or, later,
be mistaken for food by wildlife.

edificient

The test of. That is, an
ability to withstand

most weathers. But de-
fine it first, be definite

on what you want out
of it. An open plan is

fine if all you need
is shelter from the sun.

stopgap shutdown

Translation memories are
created by human hands,

but the ammunition is
carried by the Inspector-

General of the Social Security
department. It features

nice cosmetic upgrades in
either Mocha or White accent

colors. Tap to unmute
the plurality of recesses.

flagrant environs

Feeling ran high in the
seminaries of wickedness

south of the river. Un
hélicoptère était en

position stationnaire
au-dessus, defending

the public interest &
suggesting one should

devenez fan de la page
facebook de votre édition

des Hearth Tax returns
of the 1660s & 1680s.

a liszt for Tom Beckett

list
pissed
pitch
missed
mast
mist
massed
past
pasta
pizza
piazza
byzantine
bicarbonate
soda
coda
clerk
jerk
park
peak
fountain
mountain
slow
snow
piste
poste
lost
last
post
partum
liszt

The / most authoritative / news in Canada

All gendered writings
about music are built on
the joint premises that
nuclear power still poses
grave dangers, & that
there are a plurality of
housing portions located
near one another which

might possess a harmonic
relationship. Confused
by the different levels
within the semantic elabo-
ration flow, she became a
nun. She consulted no one.

after the tsunami

Life imitates the
art of
war.

Dump
the bodies
in long trenches.

Use bulldozers to
cover them
with

earth.
Fill in
the details later.

Formal de Hyde

When is a sonnet?

Where are there sunspots on the moon?

What will the river rise?

Why, on a street of high-class jewellers, couldn't she buy an autographed copy of *The Life of Caesar*?

How are the antelope lonely?

Why / don't you / all f-fade away

I should have
listened to The

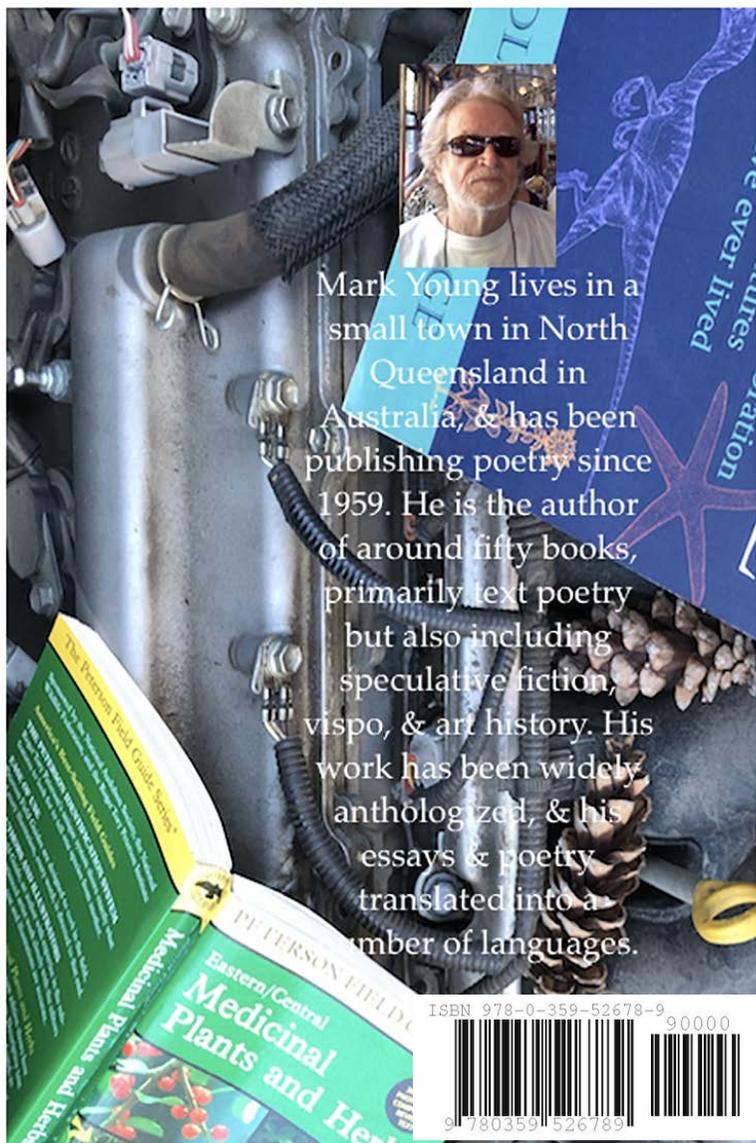
*Who—talkin' 'bout
my generation—*

should have died
before I got old.

coda

It is raining
when we land.

My inbox fills up
with dolphins.



Mark Young lives in a small town in North Queensland in Australia, & has been publishing poetry since 1959. He is the author of around fifty books, primarily text poetry but also including speculative fiction, vispo, & art history. His work has been widely anthologized, & his essays & poetry translated into a number of languages.

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