

COREY WAKELING

Duncan Bruce Hose, *One Under Bacchus*

inken publish, 2011, pbk, 68pp

ISBN 9780987142306 RRP \$25

Ted Berrigan's late poem "3 Pages" has been discussed on *Jacket2*'s podcast program as, if there were to be one, "the sum" of the poet's poetic in general. I urge the early reader of Duncan Bruce Hose's poetry to consider the opening poem "lyrebird" to his second book, *One Under Bacchus*, in a similar light. This is a little premature, is it not, to speak as such of a poet who has just published his second book? But, the sum or summary of what has been is not how I wish to read "lyrebird", but rather as a presentiment of a poetic manifold begun and to come. "lyrebird" is a poem of numerous latent poetic modes. The list itself is a map of the Australian cultural topos Ned Kelly in the plural, Ned Kelly a lyrebird manifold and shape shifter, mythic and meta-mythic, and slippery. Ned Kelly is at once "landscape", "member of the family", "bully", "softy / keeper of peacocks" (the *OED* has an early version of "peacock" pronounced thusly as quote from Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*; has Hose really read this? Hose replies cryptically in email correspondence "BONDI BEACH"), "ploughshare", "Rosella can of condensed", "the auld Surfer's Paradise", "a green Ribbon – twenty years in yr. / pocket", "in drag", "the October mow", "old scotch foreskin jokes", "lunatic fringe of desert spring", "Meaghan Morris / Leaving Tenterfield in her teens", "bushel of Tasmanian heads", "Mentone Bookie in suede / Fletcher Jones Jeans", "Melton junkie", "Bon Scott's / Letters to Adelaide & sister Irene", "TV celebrity /'s dog wading the scum at St. Kilda", "Melbourne shamrockery / conspiracy of clover", "De Tird Oiye", and,

finally, “little jar of bones we’d worship if / we c’ld find it if / we c’ld find it”. This is a list poem, forte of modern experimental poets, but also a spun yarn, just like “3 Pages” by Berrigan. Each indice in this index of Aussie ephemera is both nebula and passage, destination and point of departure. If I may pursue this line of argument, what kinds of poetic modes are implied in these lines?

Each version of Ned Kelly is true in this poem, but at the same time a con; a lyrebird. To begin with, “Ned Kelly as landscape”, brings us to that Modernist masterpiece by Sid Nolan. Thus, as mode of poetry, an ekphrastic cubist Modernism, also to be found in *The Sonnets* period Ted Berrigan-ish “Swish Swish”, or Hose’s “Sonnet for Ted”, which to me is like a series of sketches as titles of poems as sketches. As “member of the family” our picture turns from polygon head to sentimental portraiture, a luscious and weird sentimentality akin to one irrefutable inspiration of Hose’s, Frank O’Hara. Hose is just as sentimental in poems like “Blue Hills 3065”, “Left-Handed Hummingbird”, and “IRELAND AS A FISH FARM”, faithful to the roving Petrarch called Poetry. As “ploughshare”, the bucolic and working class milieu emblematic of Kelly opens, as with the Rosella can of condensed, Mentone bookie in suede Fletcher Jones jeans, and Melton junkie, albeit modernised, skewed, and stretched to the fringes of this weird old city. The ploughshare mode of Hose’s sees John Forbes certainly, Baudelairean skewed, Gig Ryan shotgun driven, and maybe even like Kenneth Patchen in Marxist mode, effulgently sentimental. “Bon Scott’s letter to ‘Rene’”, as with Kelly, another icon dead young but alive in letters exemplifies the importance the found phrase and the promiscuous epigram hold for Hose. Then, finally, the Irish settler history of Victoria and its entailed superstitions with “conspiracy of clover”. A putative enchantment is assumed interred in those bones of Kelly’s which at the time of writing we can guess hadn’t been found as they have now, but the line is no less pertinent: whether or not what we think are the bones of Ned Kelly are in private or public possession, the true Ned Kelly, in plural,

persists beyond the trace. Poetry, then, might be seen for Hose as the belabouring and prospecting of that lay, “if / we c’ld find it if / we c’ld find it.” Myth is not a lineage of tropes but a speculative thrust in another language.

Yarn-spinning as presaged in “lyrebird” continues across *Bacchus*. False knowledge and apocrypha are a forte. In the titular poem, for example, “j’arrive” of course not French, “for folding / The sheets together in perfect eights” (“One Under Bacchus”) This collection of Hose’s best poems from the past couple of years talks glorious, shining, alchemical bullshit. And moreover, and whether or not it is true, *dreiblattbogen* – a bounty of a word to have found, even if neologism – this translation of three-leaf clover into German is miraculous and entirely a Hose thing: the word’s suffix being bogen, or bogan, that favourite title of judgement we place on the putative Australian philistine whose provenance is in fact an Irish surname. But, *dreiblattbogen* is probably just a word the poet has made up.

His allegorical work of character Edward Trouble from the Newcastle Poetry Prize winning poem is another lyrebird con. This is Ned Kelly again but recharacterised, with Ed, as in Ned, obviously, and Trouble, which, on an etymological chain is the source of the Celtic name Ceallach, the original form of the surname Kelly. The penchant for tangential narratives finds its fullest affirmation in this, a wondrous panoply of images from Kelly’s rise and fall, but more importantly also constituted for the most part by divergences. The constables that attack the Kellys: Mick Jagger, even though Jagger plays Kelly in the 1970 film, Keith Richards, “Constables Stuyvesant, Benson Hedges / and Scanlon”, and then poets (Charles) Harpur, (bp, Jal?) Nichol, (Michael) Farrell. Edward Trouble is more like Tulse Luper, then, of Peter Greenaway’s film series, than versions of Ned Kelly. Character, as in the oral transmission of myth, becomes instead vector between which milieux and event appear, rather than character role. Ned, or Ed, makes love to different women, wants to join the

military, appears in Rome, writes to his lovers, speaks for himself, and is spoken for. There is an Ezra Pound *Cantos* aspect to this poem, and others also, with the poem as private archive:

Edward plans Trouble in a slab hut
Overlooked by a poster of Anna Karina
That was once folded in eight
Watched through a peep-hole by Constable
Fitzpatrick

Ned stuffs his cap w/ camphor and Shamrock
Applies muck to his knuckles and face
Knowing
Australia has the heart for a grubby pistolier
Streaky Edward Ceallach, bright headed
Strife
Favourite of the box-gums who maintain
A scented crush
The dimensions of night in his noggin
At first repellent to, then much sought by
Public Taste
("An allegory of Edward Trouble")

This is like Frank O'Hara nesting his lyric in the lives of public figures and featuring them in his variant and nascent myths. Hose however is less obsessed with glamour and rather more with the nascency of myth or myth flash flood or bushfire style. It is myth's excreta or "spunk" that he's particularly interested in: the celebrity's dog at St Kilda beach, the dusty drapes of Jim Morrison, "the Queen's / fragile brain – offaly..." ("A wedding party"). And his ideal milieu? "My dream a drink with Alice / Notley we Discuss the code of the west" ("Sonnet for Ted").

Hose intends to "re-name every / creek The Clyde" ("Anglo but Cosmic"). It seems he does not so much want to make myth but tug at the tassels of its fringes, watch what filigrees

form of the fray. He seems less to be making love to the figures of the portraits of his private archive, and instead investigating the limits of his archive's possible future rendezvous. An archive that roams then, especially interested in errata, the obscure, and the obsolete. We cannot see the lyrebirds, but through the forest floor of the Dandenongs we trail their luscious and polyvocal song.

Cons aside, Hose loves often but he also loves most seriously, with a heightened affection for words and etymology, travelling on foot or in dream or through another, ever inviting peers of intellect and sensibility, especially with a taste for minor history, landscapes, yarns, and characters of a mad Australia. The poem in myth and the myth in poetry. It is literarily promiscuous in the way all of Pound's epigrams and images seem to come from elsewhere. It is very much in love with you, reader. Your presence, to quote "Having a Coke With You" by O'Hara, is "not going to go wasted on me which is why I'm telling you about it." And this collection far from settles on a settling Australian identity, it is Chinese Australia and Little Napoleon, Cornish and Irish and Scottish, Tasmanian, below ground, above ground, and not particularly anxious either way, or at least "NO HELP WANTED" ("3 Pages"). Instead, along with Hose, "We make short heritage play by attaching our own spigot / Th'ancestors come out biting" ("Lubricity"). This might be a hard book to find for those not living in Melbourne since distribution is limited to small press inken publish. However, hard to find means little these days since "hard to find" does not mean "hard to search for online", the book purchasable at the press's homepage. After *One Under Bacchus*, I do not imagine Hose will be hard to find in print much longer.