

Wonderland

I wonder if I shall fall right 'through' the earth...but I shall have to ask them what the name of the country is. Please, Ma'am, is this... Australia?

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

1. At the springs, the sky is reflex blue in a rim of rock.
Women from the fringe camp shuffle red earth
dance the Mulga Ant story, amaze the drop-in tourists.
Another details her birth in the shade of stringy leaves.
A desert oak inches its way in iron heat.

The Yeperenye caterpillar moves across the land
his spiky backbone folds, softens in Namatjira sunlight.
At the Sheraton hotel, he goes under drinks the river dry.
Kadaji men are singing in the sandy bed. They look down
avoiding scrutiny: pale eyes, the twittering voice.

Out at the airport white heat bounces off galvanized tin
a pink cloud stretches over the bitumen. Bulldozers
crumble the last hump of the caterpillar man.
Roads intersect, wipe out the path of the honey-ant
The CIA builds a new runway, seals the road to Pine Gap.

Wherever they go sticky tar binds the dust of their shadows.

2. Yulara has its own airport: planes bump in on the hour.
Sails float on a stony sea, fountains bubble on red dust.
In early light, the coaches leave. Convoys buzz and brim
hitting the bitumen on Lasseter's highway, tracking
the spirit snake Kunija. His epic journey.

Below *the Rock*, the Mala men sign and whisper.
Streams of 'white ants' queue to climb the summit.
Climbing boots wear out the prints of the sacred wallaby.
Clothes flap and flag, a sky writer trails *Joy Rides Are Us*.
Visitors scream: conquer the world 'down under'.

Some take souvenirs, send them back, complain of bad luck
the Python's grief weighs down the stones in their pockets.
A dingo steals a camper's baby. The Mala woman sighs.
At the base of the rock, her pouch shapes a cave:
a city museum stores her stolen tchurunga, for posterity.

Curiosity stains like bleach on this rusty landscape.

3. Kata-Tjuta Men race across the sky. The women flee.
Seeds drop from their dilly-bags, swell where they fall.
Great mounds of solid heat blur the horizon.
Heads turn to stone. In sacred women's places
men have been known to lose their bearings.

Walking tours file through the 'Valley of the Wind'
Coaches line up to capture the magic sunset:
boulder hills in silhouette, the sky on fire.
Champagne flutes salute the *Desert Dreaming*.
Postcards from the 'never never' fly through the air.

In a land where time is constant everything is possible.

43 lines

Kadaji: spirit men (Pitjantjatjara)

Mala: Wallaby spirit.

tchurunga: Aboriginal sacred objects.

Kata-Tjuta: Place of many heads (Arrendte)