

Poems by Giles Pickford

www.gilespickford.net

Published by the ANU Poets' Lunch and some unpublished poems

Paroo, Bokhara, Warrego, Irrara

Green flash of parrots through the gidgee,
Red glare of sun off the claypan floor,
Cold stars shine, night sounds quiver,
fire in the grate at the homestead door.

Dusty-breasted and perilous her loves
On the long rubble of the Yantabulla Road.

Lousy Jacks whoop on the Yellow Box twig
While red fox slinks below.
Wild boar roots near twenty-mile drain
Out back in the Brigalow.

Loving and dangerous she combs her hair
On the long dust of the Yantabulla Road.

Smoke in the eye, dew on the nose,
The sun rises slow on the edge of the world.
Ring around the Moon, rain on the gilgai,
These are the gifts of her love unfurled.

Patient, all-knowing, lonely she waits
On the long mud of the Yantabulla Road.

Bleached skull winks and willy willy laughs
In the barbed wire heat of the furnace days.
Iron lunged wind from the Bulloo overflow
Dries blood spit and tears in the noon day haze.

Lose her, and she will never find you
On the long dust of the Yantabulla Road.

Paroo, Bokhara, Warrego, Irrara,
On the long straight curve of the Yantabulla Road.

Giles Pickford, 1988

Winner of the Traditional Bush Verse section 1990 Binalong Banjo Paterson Poetry Prize

17 Questions without Answers

Who allows those two addicts to have
that bright-eyed unwanted child? Who permits

the child's teacher to abuse a position
of trust? Did both create the arsonist?
And was his hangman duly licenced?

Who licences Scrooge to grind the faces of
the poor? By what right does the Warder
curtail the liberty of the oppressed?
Who authorises the purblind torturer?
What principle permits the just war?

By what authority does the polyp
make a reef? What guides the rambling vine?
What force informs unravelling history?
What anvil forges the incandescent Tiger?
Is blind nature licenced or unlicenced?

Who licences Poets, who are "the mirrors
of the gigantic shadows which futurity
casts upon the present"? Was it Shelley?
Who licences the giver of licences?

All poets are licenced; but, are some
more licentiously licenced than others?

Read at the 2008 ANU Poets' Lunch which had the theme "Poetic Licence"

Haiku for Eve and Pandora

According to the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur'an, Eve was the first woman created by Yahweh, God, and Allah. According to the Greek Myths Pandora was the first woman on earth. Both women were set up to take the blame for everything that has ever gone wrong: an idea which is rebarbative in the present age. My mother was born in 1907 and was one of the first feminists. She gave me a point of view which is expressed here.

Eve in the Garden
First woman, primordial one
She the innocent

Pandora, doomed one
Intellectual enquiry
Curiosity

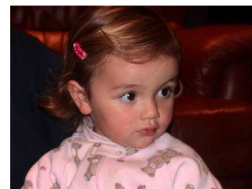
Pandora and Eve
Spirit of discovery
Both wanting to know

Eve and Pandora
Both born in the human spring
Scapegoats framed for us

Both take all the blame



Pandora with three
boxes



Defiant Eve

The evil that from them came
Allocated shame

My wife rails at me
"It's your fault all this went wrong!"
Eve takes her just revenge



Sad Pandora or Eve

Written for the 2009 ANU Poets' Lunch which had the theme "Pandora's Box"

Pictures printed with the permission of the Author's granddaughter, Madeline Gass, who is now a charming young woman of nine and likely to take after her great grandmother Rosamond from what I have seen so far.

Faith Hope and Love

There are faith hope and love
Love is the greatest of these.
There are love hope and faith
In faith we face the unknown.
There are hope faith and love
Without all three we're alone.

But hope must be the stone
On which the foundations rest.
Bereft of hope, love and faith
Are birds without a nest.

Easter 2010

On the Unlikely Possibility that there are First Causes in the Universe

If something has no end, then can one suppose that it has no beginning?

If there is no beginning
Then ending is done
A circle is endless
Beginning is none

Eternal desire precedes
Cause and effect
It yearns for our love
Which we dare not reject

We are its reflection
It is our perfection
It reaches far back

Before the first night

Before the first light
Before the first sin
A world without end
Has no origin

On the Unlikely Possibility that there are First and Last in People

Some people see themselves as first and some as last. But there is no difference. Money distorts their perceptions, acting like a curved mirror.

First will be last
And last will be first
An atom divides
A drink from a thirst

What is the difference
Between tycoon and bum?
One takes Gin, the other Rum
One a loaf, the other, crumb

The rich and the poor
Are joined at the hip
There's interdependence
In the rise and the dip

Wealthy and prisoner
Suffer rigidity
Both have to live in
Gated aridity

Given at the 2007 ANU Poets' Lunch

JUST AS WELL

It's just as well the sea
Will not rise over me;
Though myriads will flee
Poor Bangladesh and Zuyder Zee

It's just as well the drought
Won't see the winter out
At our resort-strewn coast;
But burn wheat farms to toast.

It's just as well pestilence
Will meet with much resistance
From our well-fed immunity;

But smite the poor community.

It's just as well the quake
Won't shake us all awake
Though mothers' hearts may ache
In Bam and Sharm el-Sheikh

It's surely just as well.
But is it just, as well?

Given at the 2005 ANU Poets' Lunch

Leviathan, Ziz and Behemoth

The waxing waning wayward moon looks back from the horizon
Her shining path sprinkles across the vast gulf of water.
Two eyes are shining like arc welders. See, it is Leviathan
Glaring back from the edge of the globe intent on slaughter

His bowels house his motive force fed by the yellow rock whose
Hideous strength knows no containment. High on his shining back
He carries the many manifestations of Ziz: awaiting their cues
A buzzing fury of wasps and hornets impatient to attack

On the distant shore the massed herds of Behemoth graze and sleep
A dispersed force of a trillion parts driven by one mind
Whose piercing eye is aware of what approaches from the deep
Whose spies watch every street, whose hidden hands touch every kind.

We sacrificed to them; we gave them our gold and our young ones
We poor weak creatures who scurried around their legs fed this fear
The feverish nightmare has persisted down through all the aeons
Existing now in the massed military demigods of land, sea and air

The writer acknowledges the author of *The Book of Job 41:1-34* for the inspiration.

Given at the 2010 ANU Poets' Lunch



Leviathan



Ziz



Behemoth

SEDITION IS CURVED

The trial of Charles I (1649) was a momentous event, and not only for Britain. After thirty years of continental war, the kingdoms of Europe had, by the Treaty of Westphalia in October 1648, given some guarantee of the rights of religious and ethnic minorities within their domains, but as sovereign states that would police themselves. It was fundamental to this treaty, the foundation of international law, that a prince could not be overthrown for violating the liberties of his own subjects. But the most important thing about the Treaty of Westphalia was that England was not party to it. Just a few months later, John Cooke (the Prosecutor of Charles I) devised a way of ending the impunity it guaranteed to sovereigns, crafting out of the common law and the law of nations and the Bible a theory which could bring hereditary dictatorship to an end. This message, filtered through the philosophy of Locke and Montesquieu, provided inspiration for the French Revolution and the War of American Independence: we can see it now as the precursor of a much more recent development which began at Nuremberg, namely the use of criminal law to punish heads of state and political and military leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Cooke's charge began with a fundamental proposition: the King of England was not a person, but an office whose every occupant was entrusted with a limited power to govern 'by and according to the laws of the land and not otherwise'. It had been with the criminal object of securing unlimited and tyrannical power that Charles I had levied war against Parliament and had set out to destroy the very people whose life and liberty he was obliged to preserve. To bring home his guilt for the crippling loss of English life on both sides in the war he had started in 1642, Cooke invoked the doctrine which is called, in modern war-crimes courts, 'command responsibility':

"By which it appears that he, the said Charles Stuart, has been and is the occasioner, author and continuer of the said unnatural, cruel and bloody wars and therefore guilty of all the treasons, murders, rapines, burnings, spoils, desolations, damages and mischiefs to the nation acted and committed in the said wars or occasioned thereby."

From *The Tyrannicide Brief* by Geoffrey Robertson Q.C. ISBN: 0701176024

The universe is curved and so is endless time.
The Earth's road is curved and all creatures walk this way.
There is something in it which hates a dead straight line.
So nature's lovely, curly, random shapes hold sway.

But there is one deadly straight unnatural force
Which shows its hatred for the universal curve.
Tyranny drives with great speed in linear course,
Piercing the rib cage of freedom. It does not swerve.

Sedition bows humbly to unnatural power.
Appearing bent, recalcitrant, with curled lip; it would
Resist tyranny at every turn, hour by hour
Until the universal arc of all that's good

Bends arrow, spear, sword, cannon, each linear thing
Into a rounder shape. Thus the great circle of time
Completes its perennial quest, eradicating
Old tyranny, the most unnatural crime.

PS. John Cooke was executed after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, proving that all straight Tyrants will never learn from curvaceous History.

Given at the 2006 ANU Poet's Lunch

Things you will never ever know

Inspired by Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty

The moment you are born and first see your mother
The moment when you die and last see your lover
The moment when sleep shuts the curtains of your mind
These are the moments you will never ever find

Nor will you ever know the nature of time
Nor the depth of space, nor the number nine
The Quark and the Lepton will not be understood
Nor will you comprehend the nature of The Good

Some people know that they are always right
That certainty is real does not cause them fright
But some are relaxed to know it is also true
The sum of one and one is approximately two

*Giles Pickford
St George's Day 2010*

Two Sonnets

Dedicated to the members of the ANU Emeritus Faculty

The first sonnet depicts age as it is seen by the young.
The second is the view from an old person looking inwards.

Age observed from without

Derelict age with mottled scaly skin
With fading rheumy eyes, limping and thin
Unsteady of stance with balance denied
An open mouth with dribble at the side
Colourless thinning out of falling hair
The day-long occupancy of the chair
Aching joint, gnarled knuckle and tired bone
The vacant stare of one all ways alone
Listless, joyless, poverty-stricken age
With random outbursts of impotent rage
Breathless, toothless, pointless, quiet despair
Prosthetic, pathetic, going nowhere
The musty rancid smell and rattling breath
Marks the long lonely intercept with death

Age seen from within

The shimmering view from the mountain peak,
The immensity of past time loved and lost,
Such abundance of memory must speak
From its great fullness. Love won at such cost,
The brawling careless days of long ago,
The sappy happy rambling days of old,
The rise of love and children that follow;
Then that fever called work: which the honest hold
Hard, but is held easy by the hollow.
At last when the harvest is in and done
Debts are paid, children grown, working no more
He moves quietly by the sea in the sun.
He hears the curved waves drumming down the shore
And treasures the beauty while his time is run

February 2009