

HIGH COUNTRY DREAMING

*For A.D.Hope
A Man from the Monaro*

Here, in the vast intensity of silence,
while planets circle in the twofold void
and midnight stars bless these weathered slopes,
the primal pulse of granite sings with light.
A sacred kingfisher, sensing purer paths
of air, glides across this radiance
towards the dark surrounding hills, seeking
in summer-scented love, a termite nest
in which to peck a hollow for its eggs.

Beneath soft-shadowed mountain ash, brumbies
rest flank to flank, a herd of flesh;
their veins are taut and full, their long manes matted.
Led by a white stallion, the black, chestnut,
dappled, blue roans and the red, the mares
with foals, know each sheltered valley, the peaks
and high plains.

Suddenly, with thrusting hoofs,
flying sphagnum moss and a striped frenzy
of corroboree frogs, the horses leap
as one, out over deep rock gullies where rising
mists protect their wildness. The stallion dances,
frolics, twisting then kicking at the moonlight
on his upwards course, while icy creeks
splash stars over ochre pebbles, rushing down
past stringybarks and bony eucalypts.

Up, the white horse leads them, up to that place
where poets always wander in their dreams,
fired by the night-sky's blazing plenitude.
From this summit ridges fall away
towards a holy union of earth and sky,
where ribboned clouds draw blood from the coming day.
As slow light floods the mountain flanks, the stallion
rears above the dawn, searching our fading
southern heavens for his star-winged sign.
Here he makes the elements his own,
claiming in airy altitude, the sun.

High Country Dreaming (contd.)

Rutting and posing, splendid in his pride,
his sharp, high-stepping hoofs awake a spring.
The muse smiles and poets' voices rise,
free in spirit as this roaming herd,
to hail our mountain's lucent, brimming source.
Yet in the sunlight as I kneel to drink
and look towards the clear, blue-ranged distance,
a sense of trespass quietly clouds my joy.
I see wreathing trails of bitter smoke
drifting through time from bogong feasts and hear
hollow click-sticks echoing despair,
within the troubled darkness of remorse.

* * *

Through noon's brooding silence, while the brumbies
graze in stoney herbfields of heath and feldmark,
alpine butterflies weave the finespun air,
wildflowers nod assent to honeyeaters
and wonga pigeons preen in tufted snowgrass.
The eternal dreaming here is spirit-flowing
making whole. Once more I kneel at the spring
to drink, purest water and the light.
I am this earth, these rocks, this day, this night.

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When evening's far-rimmed West receives the sun,
draining summer colour from this day,
the stallion turns his horses towards the slopes.
Breaking away, he soars over cliffs and chasms,
flying down through the golden dusk, leading
his herd to their hidden valley, where, beneath
the naked stars, he rests in shadowed dreaming.

Anne Fairbairn

Anne Fairbairn's paternal grandmother, Dame Florence Reid, (nee Brumby), was a direct descendant of James Brumby who came to Australia as a soldier with the NSW Corps in 1794. He was granted a block of land West of Sydney, where he grazed stock. When he sailed to Van dieman's Land to settle in the bush, he left the horses he was unable to muster and they became known as Brumby's horses. There are brumbies still running wild in many parts of Australia, including the southern Australian Alps.

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