

The Long Paddock
A haiku series

JOHN BIRD

1. 50,000 Years

desert rockhole~
they sit down to listen
to her story

bush medicine~
he shows the spear wound
to aunty

digging honey ants~
children's laughter
from the billabong

canvas on red earth,
she paints the yam dreaming~
a tea billy boils

Koori mother and son
Sit with their interpreter –
Breeze stirs the dust

a murri boy
presses his face to the bars~
scent of coolibah

royal visit~
the smallest piece of damper,
no goanna

1. Outback Selection

westerly~
The duststorm's shadow
reaches them

she fans herself
with a city catalogue`
beach fashions

shoulders his swag,
thanks her for the scones ~
the long paddock

kitchen flyscreens ~
the sheep farmer's wife
still flicks her hand

first school day ~
at the train station a boy
comforts mum

cutting out the cheque ~
she meets the last train
he might be on

wool slump ~
she fetches the radio

and two cold beers

Outback Selection

she straightens up
from docking lambs ~
the kelpie wags his tail

the river comes down ~
in bright sunshine she watches
fences go under

Christmas drought ~
bird shadows criss-cross
a fallen lamb

earth trickles
through her fingers ~
a far train whistle

2. A Cocky's Life

morning mist ~
listening for the cows
she hears the creek

spring morning ~
the plop of tennis balls
on an antbed court

ladies' foursome ~
she kicks cow pats
off the first tee

radio music ~
footprints of a fox-trot
in the dust

dandelion ball ~
her daughter's breath
sows a paddock

flooded farm ~
bellow of the house cow
at dusk

hailstorm ~
half their tomato crop

intact

A Cocky's Life

city guests gone
she lets the old dog in ~
glowing embers

a shadow cast
by the boarded-up bank ~
on the wallaby

3. City Visits

spring morning ~
unsmiling
faces on the street

autumn dusk ~
terracotta rooftops
sink into smoke

breast clinic ~
she parks their 4WD
between two jags

oncology ~
reception room flowers
still plastic

the dress shop
stocks all shades of black ~
endless smiles

blues festival ~
sharing summer twilight
with new sisters

cloudbanks
on the sea horizon ~
her tight bathers

City Visits

city bus ~
such skill in avoiding
eye contact

the subway train
surfaces in the sunlight ~
no one else smiles

her plane
climbs into the clear skies ~
that shrinking city

4. Timber Town

Mill whistle ~
 she resists the urge
 to count fingers

forest blockade ~
 she shares her thermos
 with protesters

bush track ~
 she overtakes
 a magpie

old growth forest ~
 her dog
 runs through the silence

woodsmoke
 on the evening air ~
 a mother's call

crack
 crack of a whipbird's call ~
 the stillness

she picks her way
 through smoking tree trunks ~
 a chimney

husband away ~
 their bedroom full
 of one mosquito

6 A Chat with Friends

still digging, wombat?
 you too
 should lose weight

crossing this field,
 I pause to salute you ~
 bravo! dung beetle

white cockatoo
 I do not have the tongue
 to hear your news

pheasant
 why do you strut so?
 ah, a new mate

a bittern's cry ~
 come, brave dog,
 let's watch for bunyips

so, dingo,
 who cast the first stone
 at you?

shy, echidna ~
 only the ants know
 your face

a bone
 and winter sunshine ~
 you lucky dog

cane toad,
 you too, are ugly ~

let's jump on our reflections

7 Western Suburbs

pre-school playground
the sparrows listen
in many languages

shirt factory ~
she explains trade unionism
to an Arab seamstress

trying to decide:
mini-skirt or business suit ~
first day as CEO

paling fence ~
her pumpkins flourish
on the neighbour's side

Anzac eve ~
sewing up her medal bar
she pricks her finger

after their quarrel
she goes to water
her nodding violets

spring sunshine ~
the boom of her crane
sweeps the skyline

Western Suburbs

sunny verandah ~
grandma's wheelchair
beside baby's pram

spring races ~
explaining the cup sweep
to her Greek neighbour

shoots sprouting
on the old lemon tree ~
this long life

END