

Death of a colleague

It was the manner of your passing that is the shock;
the cosy symmetry of State, into which the agitation
of daily life so often seeps. And weeps the congregation,
for a life parted, fallen and severed from its flock.

No-one knew the secret – effortlessly, generously
you could enter a room. A wind. A gust. A breath?
Yet strangely felt. But now the final thwack of death
cuts through the silent thoughts of mourners, so relentlessly.

Even those who cannot share eternal hope
or vigilant prayer, give heed upon a father's words
a mother's smile, a husband's care. Willow bends ...

The tumult of a nation, it is past, beyond your call.
Of 'people helped', there is no score. But we all see
that in the manner of your life, you balanced all.

Ian Campbell

Sydney, November 1997

Byzantium

Shrouded in space, the scaffolding walks seemingly skywards,
beneath arc of glistening gold, the unspeaking artists' brushes
exude soft water music, and lacquered reflections are poured
with Bosphorus-duluxed twirls, whilst rippling silence hushes

the ill-lit glow, as trains hurtle west; auburn shades seeping
by twilight's mosque, a swirling symmetry of foam
of Suleimanyie's craft, of Marmora's dolphins leaping,
to dance, like Thais, across the vast sea-dome.

Byzantium, our crossroads, by quay light; we, too, wander
within the zone of Cameraigal, dark spirit-cry,
with poets of a far-flung sceptred isle, huddled yonder.

Beside harbour sail, beside mosque dome - Yeats never knew.
But now our Song of the Earth, is born. Will live, will die.
Will tread time's mists. Will seek the morning's worldly dew.

Ian Campbell

Sydney, April 1993

(influenced by the famous W. B. Yeats poem, but written after
a visit to the Turkish mosque in Auburn, Sydney, when the
interior was being decorated in 1993. The poem counter-poses
images of the Opera House sails and mosque dome, and
meditates upon the nature of cities and civilization.)

Leaving Beirut

One day, one summer's day, she locked the door, and walked
away.

Lord, Lord, the price of hell, it's too high for her alone, to pay.

The silver of her life had gone – and now she, too, must go,
leaving him, her beloved, to watch over their dwelling from this
day.

The chair where he sat, his favourite clothes, the portrait of
father's
were all that she saw – and the dust on the floor where she once
used to pray.

The roar of the shells does not cease when the guns, the guns,
they have died;
glasses still tinkle and chatter as if in harm's way.

And when the smoke of the battle had cleared, the suitcases of
their lives stood ready,
that day, that summer's day, when she closed the door, and
walked away.

Ian Campbell

Sydney, 1990