

**BAR-
BAR-
IAN
VERSE**

Karin Gottschalk

BARBARIAN VERSE

© 2003 Karin Gottschalk.
All rights reserved.

Editor: Kerry Prato
Author: Karin Gottschalk

E-mail: karinangelika@mac.com

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	iii
<i>Perth's Blue Skies</i>	I
<i>We Who Must Not Be Seen As We Are</i>	2
<i>Your Northern Underclass</i>	4
<i>My Public Fruit</i>	6
<i>A Question</i>	7
<i>Daily Newspaper</i>	8
<i>The Men in Beige Try Blue</i>	9
<i>Fawn: The Third Colour</i>	10
<i>Nylon</i>	11
<i>The Men in Grey</i>	12
<i>The Machine Gun Yeppers</i>	13
<i>The Many-Coloured Suits</i>	15
<i>Where is Home?</i>	16
<i>Ethnic Pride</i>	17

Introduction

I know nothing about poetry. Hardly surprising, given the approach to literature found in the rural Western Australian high schools of my youth.

The Lakes poets, *I Love a Sunburnt Country*, and that was about it. Long days dozing off in hot and badly-lit demountable classrooms somewhere out in the sticks.

Big contrast to the Greater Public Schools association inner-city institution I had attended in an eastern states city for the first three months of my secondary school career.

That too-short season proved crucial as a reminder in later years that there was more to life than the AFL football, hard drugs and alcohol so popular in the place my father's employer had consigned us to.

I discovered Shakespeare on my own, in an anthology found beneath a pile of secondhand books on a table in a hardware store.

Walt Whitman came later, through a facsimile edition of the *Leaves of Grass* that

Edward Weston illustrated so well with his magnificent American photographs for the Limited Editions Club of New York.

Then Les Murray, through his verse novel *Fredy Neptune*. I can really identify with Fredy Boettcher. But why is the world's finest poet in the English language so neglected by bookstores in his homeland?

I've reserved William Blake for when I can find a decent edition of his life's works.

So, back to me knowing nothing about poetry. Despite the reading in recent years, I still barely understand anything. I doubt if I ever will.

But what I do know is that verse can be used as a kind of writing in shorthand. Especially about things sharply seen and emotions keenly felt, jotted down when the experience is still in the process of being played out.

In my barbaric manner, that is the only way I know how to do it.

Karin Gottschalk
Perth, Western Australia, 2003.

Perth's Blue Skies

Like a blue tongue
flicking in and out
across the width
of the whole wide world.

We Who Must Not Be Seen As We Are

The Wise Men have decided:

How we are is not how
we are permitted to be seen.

Our image is predetermined:

This city is no city but vacancy,
a flatness, red dust devoid of green.

We are the termite hill people:

Our towers are chewed into shape.
No builders built them,
no architects overseen.

Our betters have depicted us:

*Rustics we are, rednecks,
slab hut dwellers,
impoverished, in-bred, petty, mean.*

Time/Life, Weldon, A Day in the Life of:

*They've shown us who we are;
They KNOW, those all-wise, fly-in,
fly-out men all-seein'.*

Your Northern Underclass

*W*e were your other underclass, we folk
from the high culture
northern countries.

*Just one notch above the lowest of the low,
though not quite so outré as suntanned
peasant Mezzogiorno Italians.*

*We formed a colony of sorts, unwillingly,
in your redneck town deep down south.
Shunned for our sausage-eating,
and over-blondness, and our names
that you could not, would not
pronounce.*

*We disturbed your fine-tuned
nationalist sensibilities,
with our booklearning, and music,
and handicraft.*

*So we withdrew into ourselves,
a mixed bunch of Czech, Finn,
and German,
Latvian, Lett and Pole.*

*We had Ammon Düül, Can, Faust
and Popol Vuh,
while you had Ballroom Blitz,
and you treated us to a high school
playground massacre,
all shins and elbows and fists.*

My Public Fruit

In some cities *where* clime
is lush and blood-warm and green
orange trees line every street
and passersby are invited to eat.

In other towns *where* earth
is bare and hardened and sere
olive trees are grown clipped neat
to provide the public its fruit.

In East Perth, *where* my home
is vacancy tarmac-covered
and oil-dripped,
my own personal public fruit
was a fig – neglected, unloved,
still left.

A Question

Are the Old Men
with tiny jawbones,
who constantly chew,
doing it to mark
the passage of time?
Or are they eating
themselves away?

Daily Newspaper

Oily nose pipe!

Oily nose pipe!

*Cried the elderly red-capped boy
in a quivering, broken voice,
hawking the afternoon's edition.*

The Men in Beige Try Blue

*C*lothes faded by age, even straight
out of the shop,
the Men in Beige essay a bit of blue
from time to time.

*But the blue they choose
always takes on the aspect
of their more favoured colour,
and ends up looking pre-owned,
watery, and dusty,
the pale blue of eyes about to shed
bitter tears for some
half-remembered tragedy
that occurred long, long ago.*

Fawn: The Third Colour

F*awn, faun, for-r'n.*

*Yairs, it's next best to Beige
and not so loud as Dusty Blue.*

*I'll try it this once,
just to be brave.*

Nylon

There's a kind of nylon
only the Men in Beige
manage to find and wear,
as thin and crepey as
the curtains that twitch
in front of fearful
suburban watchers.

The Men in Grey

A *Generation of Grey*
succeeded the Men in Beige.
Grey suits, grey hats, grey cardigans;
their mission: to avoid detection.
Their war was fought on ice
and mountain pass.
They hid by feigning rock.
The Grey Men longed for long grey
lives.
Reeling from the clash of white
with black,
they sought grey and got it.

The Machine Gun Yeppers

I passed three Men in Grey
while walking my way into the city,
down the far straight road
from the North.

They were circled, on a corner,
each facing inwards, multinational
students flowing through and around
them.

As I came closer, I began hearing loudening
source of the eye-crinkling, big-grinning
amusement on all three faces.

*Each was triggering the other two off
into cascades of machine gun yepping.*

*Yep yep, yep yep, yep yep, yep yep,
yep yep.*

Yep yep yep yep yep.

*The yepping flew behind me along the street,
past the sunburnt aborigine park,
and far beyond it.*

The Many- Coloured Suits

When dominance of the Men in Grey
was slowly fading off
into its inevitable end,
other colours began appearing.

Blue, green, brown, and sometimes,
sometimes, black.

There was a kind of jumbled stepladder to it.

Blue suits were the common worker ants.

Black was for lawyers and CEOs.

The other two entered middle management,
where grey still held its place.

I ordered a bespoke black suit,
and wore it to upset hierarchy,
confusing all the professional
suit-wearers in the process.

Where is Home?

*C*an we ever go home again?
It's the question I've been
trying to answer
after returning from the east,
and the rest of the world.

I think, sometimes, that my sojourns
have carried me to a place
that lies beyond the plane
that might contain
something that's called Home.

Maybe home is all the people you've loved,
and of them there is little trace left.

Ethnic Pride

A flood of quiet pride,
watching a coal black,
beautiful, African
open her mouth
and the purest sounds
of Standard Australian
spring forth.

