

Classic Poetry Series

Chris Edwards
- poems -

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Chris Edwards(-)

Chris Edwards is the Sydney-based author of *utensils in a landscape* (Vagabond Press, 2001) and *A Fluke: A mistranslation of Stéphane Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés S¹/₄"* (Monogene, 2005). He has published poetry in a variety of Australian journals and at Jacket Magazine and Poetry International. He edited Robert Adamson's *Mulberry Leaves: Selected Poems 1970-2001* and *Inside Out: An Autobiography* and is an associate editor of *Boxkite*.

"©"

Albeit my god-given property rights
extend no further than the offices of Lord Fogg,
dispenser of paralysis gas – who owns
everything I have to say
the way Canada owns the muskrat –
I'm nonetheless prone to purveying things,
ideas you might call them if you'd care to be polite,
without much fear of reclamation. Who'd
want them? After all, I'm an individual
invented in the likeness of a living creature –
any points of view that may afflict my features,
in so far as they are true, denote
science, doxa, reality, reason,
this is the amen. I "recognise"
the other's voice, my habit
of hallucinating filled with the odour of roses –
yet immediately afterwards, he dives into the
it said in a form which is as affirmative,
as articulated as I have a tale to tell you about
"bubbles, muddy and scorching,"
where we wander, "a forehead of ash."

Long after the amorous relation is allayed,
colours they will not permit, the most
manifest improprieties, viz., "that they themselves
are beasts and shall beget an hundred children," still
permeate the view and take up postures
of interpretation in the host's own compartment.
They spread out into all four corners of his well-
appointed complex, treating him like some
quantity, a solar myth or irrational echo
that after a moment's anxiety over
"please, I'm on the phone,"
might imagine I'm de-fascinated, left without a missing leg
to madden myself and stand on, my POV
now that of a professor
as he weaves his way
through corridors made redundant
by his passage. Good riddance, I say
to the winds that whip about me. And if you too

should come stumbling forward, and if you too
should come tumbling by through space,
get ready, extinction is upon us.

I hope this doesn't sound overly dramatic,
but as Menon was by Socrates, I am electrified, stunned,
shaken, or – like Kirchner's hypnotised chook
entranced by a chalkline
here on the road to Damascus –
"done for," perhaps twice over, by this echoing
"steady beat of drums and banana leaves
woven into arches" – and I must confess
I'm not quite sure whether to consult someone about it
or just blend into the background, which is glass
windows glowering over a brightly lit
inner well – I'd say "sanctum," but it isn't.
I tell myself nothing of the hesitant letters that,
filled with the heavy breathing of strangers,
arrive without name or title –
they're like dark deeds exchanging the hands
that signed them, with such savoir faire, in a foreign
language long ago.

Chris Edwards

A Marvel

Five months after being mauled by
his illusionist, Bernard J. Ebber reported
the scheme he'd devised. "I can gaze
out my window and see 10
people who look like stars: they build
a great part of my remote personality and make
life bearable on Mars for example – the last resort of
our cosmopolitan lifestyle. Successful applicants,
they play a key role, utilising the latest
scenes, mismanaging the lost, solo."

A few grey hairs sprouted
casually through a tattoo as he spoke
and beamed at them from billboards
over the weeks that followed. How words
beat against the pane was his subject – and how,
when sidling up to the bar, he'd hitch his briefs,
screen his soliloquies and pass the legal
tender where they'd kicked him. But
the show he put on, though true, was
convincing. People marvelled
at the way he insisted on flickering
on and off he'd go, developing black
hole technology, keeping in touch
with old friends.

Chris Edwards

Anthropomorphics

Having been struck and left outside
the violence of serious cartoons,
life is a sad animal
hunting. We know it's mostly shopping,
for the great bull, mounting, has said so: his
expression, if anything, speaks packages
about it. True, his saliva
grows less cute, but Tom keeps
his appealing intent
even with sex, the symbolic,
and the raised head end still bleats
I praise, nonetheless.

Chris Edwards

Away Someplace

I'm a big noise in the wheel world, truly,
and go around making choices an issue
so people can while away time considering
how much there is of it: what they no longer
care for would fill a small chook raffle
hobbyist with expertise – it's that sort of
black-and-white world, so I'm told. The
girls around here are bewigged and
big-bottomed, but I've prolonged
so many missed opportunities
that I've already forgotten about
the insistent homily I am these days
on how to avoid what I'd do
given a similar quote and
budget – I'd put the boot in,
but I'm not you, unless, of course,
looked at through your eyes, in which case
what goes rolling skyward's the attention
span deficit we're both intent on
totting up. The boys, however, are spokes-
people and sounds that suggest solutions:
I've been bludgeoned at many a front door
by attendant ghosts bearing consolation
prizes – these 'things' we
put here and there in our homes
like, I dunno, hair products, are often
the foul precursors to this – and much
indecision's been spent on my footwear,
the same that treads warily round the
worst of my mistakes. But in
this one, I'm away someplace, ridding
myself of shades of grey, haunting
some colourist's nightmare.

Chris Edwards

Bio

Many of you out there
will have encountered a world of calamity and ruin
with one last gasp at the end of it
and clearly labelled the instructions:
 "this Day the Surprise Transport"
 "port Sailed from this"
and so on.
Not on our planet
yet still
that destination lingers –
terminus,
"animae viles, a sort of
excrementitious mass, that could be projected,
and accordingly was projected – "
 as detritus, cast "from the depth of a shipwreck"
floundering in the blast of an abandoned broadcast –
"Sudden effluvial aftermath here. Have encountered
daze without number..." – doomed
 emission, vast dump "which departs from itself"
 as a wheezed, unavoidable, looming
 exhalation – insidious galactic bloom
whose drift is a swift mutation aboard that
soundtrack lumbering in the background,
 strange clank or muffled boom
heralding a dank impending cloudbank possibly
or black-and-white photograph taken on the moon,
 featuring I, quaint blip,
 fainted relic 'mid dim reverberations
 e.g. ghost in portalled tomb
whose blundered destination
plunges on – old death throes
 rattle in the deep,
where the dice cup heaves up sleep I'm leaving.

Denizens, sensitive as always, I remain
captain of the spaceship

"Isle of Destolation"
creepily dotted about my photo – where it roams,

approximations of despair breathing malice
pass by in the wake of an interest
I no longer maintain, who fondly recall
how to comb myself and shave my hair
and park my coat and hat in the hall.

Sincerely I resemble all those
who have written to me with letters of condolence,
whether edifice or orifice, bit or whole.

"Though alien drones and foreign hums
within me thrive... "

strange feeling of sudden distinction was creeping upon me
convinced of its authenticity,

spurting up like a hideous gas
and the whole mass imploding
into its own brief fumes.

Oddly,
I began my radio career
as a swarm of bees.

Some still speak of it
and I go on and on about it,
as befits my condition.
For example, this transmission explains
why someone of approximately my own
age and intelligence suddenly
led me across the large laboratory,
Firkon, Zuhl and the others all following.
Frankly I could have disintegrated
in a pilot's suit of the same style
"whereby hangs
an immense bridge"
chomping away at the background

as we reached the platform.
Firkon suggested looking down into the elevator shaft
"Notice anything? "
and when I did, saw three
more floors or deck
levels below.
"At each level

a bridge or balcony..."

projected into the shaft contra-indicating the gap
dome of saucer
between

"analogy of the abyss"

and his tautology

hovered outrageously above it.

"We use rudder-post technology to detach the post and
reinsert it on a short staff carried by a frame –
Welcome, 260 thousand cubic centimetres."

At once, I clambered aboard and found
that taste of his buttohole strangely hypnotic
whine of the motor gained in pitch like a twanging 'cello string.

Spike took up the "How long must I wait? I mean – "

...

A tremor ran through the hull of the Moonraker...
A pencil fell from the instrument ta...

"I – I'm not sure..."

Always together in this darned silence,
midground hard to determine between

both and neither,
column and house."

(I could see right away what these things had in common:
they were all crap. I decided to demonstrate this
by tying strings between various objects.)

"My first
close-up
shot of the moon
filled me with cold foreboding"
– i.e.
stillness, a lack
of "Thank you"

amid the harsh glare of remnants,
bright greys and sooty
blacks,

the jagged,
razor-sharp outlines of the crags –

and no living thing but me,
crater.

"I? But I am an expert! I have so much to discover!
My 'shallow cell' theory – "

a twelve-foot cylinder mounted on two
pairs of caterpillar tracks

glanced to the left, in the direction of the pit.
From this I could disappear into a narrow, walled valley several miles away.
Suddenly,

there I was, ethereal vapour
trails cut deep between the intermittent static
dispatched amid stygian fumes
his only glue
then split.

Chris Edwards

Dear Sir Madam,

It has been drawn to our attention that Oskar Panizza, the manifest content of the dream so ignominiously mistreated by that Viennese doctor, may in fact have been a glorified houseboy known to his peers as "swine", "sow" or "hog". In this topsy-turvy world announced daily by your own dead father to his kingdom, he has been selected as the recipient of your secret wish, and it is our duty to inform you that he now longs for release from limbo.

Please return immediately
was the best way to describe my response
as the ground rushed steadily toward me. I felt
drawn to the thought of withholding the key
to this mystery they wanted, but it was far too
late, according to the experts: the solution to the
puzzle had by then passed on, like pictographs
parsed through a plughole. Like what?
You heard me. Indeed I did.

"It was clearly intended as some kind of punishment
aimed at his mother's penis. There was this woman, see,
only she was me," squealed the good doctor, who'd berate
me giddily, whereupon Oskar, receiver of stolen kicks, would
"mistranslate" and "disseminate" the fabled lingo of entrapment
and arrest. Who was he? I wondered, not without wanting
to hold him in my arms and give him a damn good thrashing.
Threshing machines would start up and I'd go
pondering the mist or something.

This continued for several cycles, then Irma dropped by,
wanting to know how things were coming along.
I showed her the letter and for this
paid dearly: before long she'd guessed
that the missing words were "broom" and
"bucket". That's how Oskar remained latent,
his code uncracked, his secret intact,
his trap shut, placated.

Chris Edwards

Gorgeous

Behind the bridge of the human nose
one often strikes the eerie pose
of Ferdinand Flocon, nineteenth century pen-
pusher, who rendered the entire civil code of his country
into an epic poem. How interesting and helpful
his contemporaries were, who now knows?
On Flocon we have enough data to say
tokens of alarm, tidbits.

I offer you a psychic spanking:
be a friend or a loved one or a hero who has died,
see if I care. I've been forced to resort to some rough stuff –
lipstick and eyeshadow,
you and your evil Siamese twin –
and pray that in coming weeks
you'll be exposed as stressful fantasies
in piranha-infested tributaries
in 100-degree heat.

Meanwhile, simply repeat after me
the supposed main feature of the human face – you
may decide to put a helmet on it, or a name to wave
happily at passing strangers. They'll taunt you for its various
defects, but their taunts will trigger a homing device
in the gorgeous monarch or white admiral
bursting from its cocoon
into this weird miracle of days ahead –
deep-sea diving, coalmining, the forty-nine
elevated levels of torment, Freud,
Persephone, Pluto.

Chris Edwards

Nicked

'Tis in vain to counterfeit
stolen goods, just as Addition
with another. Pulse, the innocent
The Experiment
that is not injurious to itself
would always feel stupid, uh
basis of the gardener who cares
usually a chirpy
pay the bills. "We were standing
there with everything set out
for correction, yet I have never
next to a letterbox painted white
not stolen. Anything, even
a pen or two, an anodised
green necklace." It was
toilet paper and false Tongues
and yards and yards of gilt-edged
Truly – thirty crates of "What's
in your pocket?" weren't ever
enough, they knew my mother
had proof drugs aimed at the
tremors and the Evidence
told them stuff about why
I bolted and continued.

Chris Edwards

No Bid

In the beginning he'd herd people
clocking up the hours in apartments
above and below him but they heard sink
and shower sounds and turned on washing
machines that spurted later while he was
on the job he'd reconsider part one of
his partner's apparent lack of funding
proposal paperwork a black mark
to be sure though in fact heartless
people too have thoughts important
hats hover over that imported people
wore down their opponents making
and are therefore more to the point
than for example alarmist neoism
now to the next part I will devote
the best portion of an hour dear god
you have allotted me extra I know
not where the stink comes from or what
nosy questions they will ask but hey
on with the slide show he thought
for it was all public comment
passed him by and he developed
the grim creeping for which he later
became known as fatty of the car keys
and mobile phone companies
keen to make your acquaintance
roamed his networking skills
would like to thank you

Chris Edwards

On The Turn

Like the twang of an old complaint, the pong
of decomposing swan songs hit him
as a jangle rose

from the dee-jay equipment
and the gates groaned open on Hullabaloo. The threshold
yawned like something out of Jaws. "Je t'adore, flophead.
Jette this way, s'il vous plait."

She didn't actually say
she was charmed, but he knew she was. They all were.
Adjusting his tie in a mirror, the old goat
stared fixedly ahead.

Just then a knock
knock joke surfaced and submerged him, Eurydice
felt, in a funk
band fantasy — part enactment, part cow.
Then without warning a ding-a-ling
effect.

"Hello? Yes, it's true
Riff-Raff, I'm a virgin. When the black priest comes
for eight days I will offer you a candle."

Muttering

"Attaboy" intermittently, the big-eared gimmick
held out his hands to Chaste Lily
for example.

"Swiftly,
I've been a swine too long. To change ..." is what
he thought they might have wanted him to say —
tingling, softly, in a flutter.

He was a bit of a looker
into dark places and the artless. He often
plucked arrangements people

up to their old tricks
pulled apart and attached strings to. Later he'd
call them names of course — Chouchou,
Oh Rarefied, Nix.

Chris Edwards

Patient Consent

To all you people running loose
on this planet: though each must date
their own signature in this world, I hereby
indicate agreement and understand
that I can withdraw if I choose
and if you have questions
I give my permission. Don't we
all stand "poised at the brink"
of teeth, lips, feet, hands
and veins checked regularly
to determine suitability? Sometimes
a catheter (tube) is inserted and notes
croaking in the groin or neck. In other
words, maybe I should ring someone. But
then I remember that each season, Fairy
Sparkle got better and better, thanks to trans-
mental medication and irregular effusions
coupled with flits in the garden, to which
I develop an immune response that passes
'by' or 'through' or 'on' or 'out' off
as some sort of laughing gas disease,
and can send people out please, for
foreign proteins and endless tests, my
wand more glittery, its ping more dramatic.
And then I go getting these pangs of good
bye and good luck, redemption. That's
when I give 'em the distinguished
pong, my true consolation
against the dark.

Chris Edwards

Peanuts

"Correct! The photo is important! I say, Listen, they have nothing
When I get an idea. Then sit down and I make
Peanuts – meaning that every time I open my mouth,
one blank turn of events
after the next bends cunningly toward me
as I go twirling
my baton toward the future –
I personally, I impersonally, I personified and so on, lurching
querulously across each brief tableau
begat by scarecrows
in this wilderness of thorns. You get the picture
framed and mounted and all that patching
starts to make a kind of sense."

A hush fell over the locker room
is one way to describe it. Another way, my way,
is a warm gap between bleachers
"Like to earn a hundred dollars? "
took two loads of an astonishment. There were big deals
just beyond me, zooming in then out then in again
in a mad giddy rush while I
let a guy rope down from the scaffolding I'd
constructed as a kind of house. But it was him again,
deserted. Terrifying
soul of our surroundings, how innumerable your ripples,
to which my glances corresponded, pocketing
what they'd find!

Chris Edwards

People Of Earth

Whenever I discover what an idiot I've been,
I turn to television — "Oh screen of wonders, flick me
on and off like an appliance," I implore it
and it answers back
and I cackle away in the aftermath
of its buckets of canned laughter.
I lie on my little raft wondering
whose abduction is this
anyway? "People of Earth, I have
no intention." Damned alien, chronic
master-plan — part of some system. I try
to asphyxiate one last program, switch
to the contactees. Seems that in 1981 Debbie
divorced and went to live with her parents
@ 32,000 kilometres per hour
happy to show off,
push buttons, poke around
the house for a while, hatching her evil plot.
She spoke, when she talked at all, Phooey.
Most witnesses have the wit, but Debbie
received the phone call. "Hello, I'm Mrs
Cleaveland." It was a small, large-headed,
grey-skinned entity — guided, she said,
by remote control by her little Maude, who,
once dead, made it safely to Mars. "My stars,
they tell me, predict the weather" — but nothing
predicted whether or not she truly spoke
the Martian language, a propellor-driven vessel
featuring flapping, inflatable wings that,
suspiciously, Maude had taken off in.
"There's this big ball of light," she said.
Did you believe her? Debbie did — she'd seen
the torted-up guests and reporters being fed
to the startled backdrop: it was aquamarine, like
Maude. But as this realisation dawned then bored her,
whaddaya know, she remembered her plot —
and boy did that buck everybody up,
bucked 'em up real good.

Perhaps

Perhaps I need a normaliser.
Would you like one? Now?
The moods induced
by a drunken sun
thumping the rooftops
pose questions too abstruse,
odd friend, for my gentle ears.
I just amble along sideways,
pretending not to notice.
Perhaps I need to be in orbit,
or in the obit pages — though
only in a supporting role,
like sole conniving
heir to a vast fortune
telling racket. First this,
then that. Reporters flopping
about in my wake, can you hear
what I'm dictating to you? It was all
very exciting people talked about
for weeks, though they all had
sons and daughters. First
these, then those.

Chris Edwards

The Awful Truth

Despite the vast data at hand
pertaining to his belief
in the charm and ease of exposure,
not much is known about Cary
beyond the simple decency
and consular good manners
his roles only occasionally
allowed him to exhibit.
The outbreak of war
had offered him boy scouts
on the docks, followed by a few
last letters to post, about which he was
curious but remained none the wiser.
Still, a pattern began to emerge
as if from the wallpaper
of his bedroom — a patter
too, like roaches. Formidable
omens? Probably not. Probably
just roaches.

Chris Edwards

Time On Their Hands

Codswallop as we know it was first invented by simple people with time on their hands to pass it around in: they could see it there, criss-crossing the land of give and take. They wanted plenty, and got it too. For years it proved a subtle itch, but just as one thing leads to the next, irrevocably speaking, so it eventually came to pass that an ache developed and a cry went up: "Which way now, boss?" And so it has gone ever since: your guess is good, like mine, yet both bear the imprint of imaginary outcomes – promises, if not signed undertakings, that the rash passed between us will, in hindsight, signal an agreement. It's the fine lines between things that count. Palms! Eternal repayment's upon us, deduced but never deducted from sums that cause the far-flung stars to twinkle and villagers to wink okay. But this leads on to a future more sophisticated and gay than any I'm likely to gad about in. Hence the twin horns of the dilemma.

Chris Edwards

Untitled

"Arrest me aura who is it
who goads there? Who sends
shadows up m' deep end?
Tweety? Pooh pooh
not, friend — not
knowing where the bodies get ferried
disturbs me sometimes. Oh, it's you lot."

Out here on the symbolic prong
there's a bar with loud music
burying beef, lettuce, pickles, mayo
and hundreds of miles of fried bread.
"You can dance attendance if you
want to, old salt," cajoles
egghead.

Chris Edwards

Untroubled

Behold, I bring you a straw to hang onto,
for it is cocktail hour and you are clearly drowning,
untroubled by many things. Perhaps
dishing out cigars etc.
to scores of fat old roosters
isn't quite your idea of visiting Uncle.
Perhaps it isn't mine either. Maybe
we both got here by mistake.
Whatever. After taking a bath
in your opinions, a feeling
of distant calm emerges
refreshed, albeit defeated by you,
long-legged attendant. Why shoot silent
bullets at me as the last man standing
comes out with his hands up?
Soon you'll be an old rooster too,
offering a claw to hang onto.

Chris Edwards

Whisky Poet

Whisky poet! After eating a cold supper,
the crowd Pat used to associate with
when she was still at high school
no longer want to hear you read your poems — it's after
eleven o'clock on a hot December evening, and you
are a little sore-head. Yet from Vegas
I finally came to your rescue.

I hadn't slept long when I
awoke, a few miles under the table, sinking
slowly into everything had come down
with a faint crash. I'd make up my
mind later, I thought, should there prove
to be a reason to do so. Meanwhile I had plans
to get laid, as in plots to hatch, so I bestirred
myself from the futile picnic and rang
to be continued. Mr Penny, who lived in
my pocket, had a chute I used to slide down
while fishing for odd jobs: wherever it led to
told me what I wanted. I didn't want
whisky, but I did want the whisky poet
to read me one of his poems. I'd step
to the edge of the precipice and signal. Sometimes
I'd see Pat and her school friends signalling back
to thank me — clearly they thought I too was
untanked — as I entered the back of the ambulance
and the whisky poet began declaiming, and his name
went up in lights, and I blanked out
as we left the kerb.

Chris Edwards