

# **Emu Eats the Future**

## **(Dark Dreaming in the City of Light)**

*King Island Emu, Grande Galerie de l'Evolution, Paris 2013*

**We have crossed vast realms,  
me, alive, and this dainty tracery  
brought here, a study in gloom,**

**to lodge in the Hall of Extinction.**

**He is perfect and small, his neck reptilian,  
a boned fluff of tail, all osseous delicacy.**

**He might be strolling his island's wind-tilted grasslands,  
bereft of care, an eye, perhaps, to the storm  
rolling over the relentless Strait.**

**But he is not. Released by Baudin's francs  
from the sealers' easy carnage,  
he fetched here to live within elms and glades and groves  
under the chuckle of Josephine's imperial eye.**

**It is a dubious fortune.**

**He will die in the *Jardin des Plantes*,  
the last of his kind, another notch for our species' belt.**

**Tides of shapeless grief flood the *Galerie*.**

**A thought takes tenacious hold:**

**we are joined at the hip,**

**we doomed two.**

*Thylacine, Grande Galerie de l'Evolution, Paris 2013*

**How young she is. How soft.**

**How fresh her coat.**

**She slips from the night of her ever-after.**

**Why is she here?**

**She is the absence that marks my island,  
an island difficult, at this remove, even to imagine –  
yet she is here in this cave of extravagant death,  
in Paris.**

**Her eye is huge and brown.**

**It locks onto mine.**

**I do not know how to leave.**

*Place du Parvis Notre Dame, Paris 1447-50, Paris 2013*

In the great square, the great Cathedral's forecourt,  
students on gap years throng, light innocence,  
in bejeaned, blonde cavort.

Stars&stripes are stitched to backpacks, stylishly slung.  
They strike huggy poses of cute, hygienic perfection,  
wide-eyed, careless, unknowing.

A busker Chaplin-walks through trills of mirth.

This is a space blessed for culture.

Mere minutes downriver is the Louvre,  
revered epicentre of high western art.  
'Louvre'. 'Wolf den'.

In the year of his *gran batteu*,  
Sir Hubert's black hounds, his *piquers*,  
sweep life from the Ardennes forest,  
render it desert.

Cut-tail's pack moves south,  
shadow-slips into a jumbled fastness of rock  
guarding the way to a great, walled city.

The wild place has a human name.

Montmartre.

It is 1447.

I climb a cascade of steps to the summit of the hill;  
to the Basilica with its chaotic command of Paris.  
Montmartre seems ancient, its history vast.

**Below is the temple of sex – Pigalle, New Athens,  
the Moulin Rouge with its inner spread of thigh.  
On the western slopes Zola, Degas, Nijinsky, Truffaut  
slumber eternally on.**

**There is a soft carpet of sound, a pleasant whirr of summer,  
not insects, but the constant song of cameras on automatic focus.  
A gypsy girl sells me a friendship band, cheap-woven,  
but its guarantee ironclad.**

**It is hot. It is 2013.**

**I turn abruptly, look back up the hill.  
Two wild golden eyes flare in the sun,  
and are gone.**

**Cut-tail's hungry pack ghosts from the caves of Montmartre,  
probes the crumbling walls,  
slides through the tangled ways of the great city.**

**With souls newly scrubbed, the faithful of Notre Dame  
emerge from piety  
into the killing field of the Place du Parvis.**

**They enter into the eternal life that is surely theirs,  
forty of them,  
ripped apart, gorged upon,  
feast-fare for Cut-tail's wolfpack.**

**It is the summer of 1450, and the great square,  
the forecourt of the great Cathedral,  
is a space damned and wild.**

**Summer becomes winter; the grip of hunger tightens.  
Cut-tail returns to the Parvis,**

**to a memory of feast and plenty.**

**Into ambush.**

**From the ramparts of the great House of God  
a fierce bowstrung rain pelts down.**

**Blood and butchery returns to the square,  
without outrage, without violation, now,  
of the ordained order of things.**

**It is the winter of 1450, and the wolves are dead.**

**That, at least, is the glib and easy take.**

**From the North Tower the Cathedral's old chimerae  
look down, keep their counsel.**

**Bide their time.**

*Emu Eats the Future, Hobart 2013*

**In the eternity of oblivion emu evolves,  
grows teeth.**

**In life the savage other  
could never be borne,  
and primal fear does not vanish  
with extinction.**

**The cavalcade of banished life,  
our summary executions,  
fixes upon us, stalks through our dreams,  
through the ravaged chains of our being.**

**The emu is at the door.  
It grinds new teeth.**

**Fills its belly.**