A sense of faith: Nature and negativity in Robert Adamson’s Waving to Hart Crane

Michael Brennan*

this poetry which cannot grasp presence, dispossessed of all other good, will be in anguished proximity to the great accomplished act, as its negative theology in authentic poetry nothing remains but those wanderers of the real, those categories of possibility, those elements without past or future, never entirely involved in the existing situation ... They appear on the confines of the negativity of language, like angels telling of a still unknown god.1)

Robert Adamson’s Waving to Hart Crane a katabasis from the initial poems of the first two sections which give a further re-writing of the Hawkesbury, through the gradual urban and urbane-isation of the voice in the third and fourth sections, back to a poetry which is finally highly self-reflexive, a poetry on poetry in the final two sections. These last sections (the first a long poem responsive to Michael Palmer, the second a sequence that previously appeared as a pamphlet titled ‘The Brutality of Fact’2), gauge poetry in terms of its literary antecedents, creating two adept, cunning and amusing pieces of intertextual play and parody. The first four sections are of particular interest here, however, as they perform a descent wherein poetry is subject to an anxious and desultory examination, as the natural landscape is gradually stripped back not simply to an awareness of language’s inability to represent the presence of the landscape but to a bleak sense of futility of the attempt. The malaise that effects much of the poetry in Waving to Hart Crane is not simply a recognition of the abyss language presents, but of individual mortality and the absence of God: the ‘modern death’ Adamson discussed in his statement of poetics.3) These poems perform Adamson’s dark night of the soul through the gradual erosion of hope. While he does not abandon poetry (rather he ends by returning to his earlier talent for parody and lampoon) Adamson engages in a profound labour of mourning for the loss of poetry’s possibility.

Waving to Hart Crane

The first two sections of Waving to Hart Crane explore a pervasive sense of death, developing a sense of ritual and resignation to death’s inevitability. In ‘Folk Song’4) Adamson reintroduces the river as a site of dwelling in relation to death. ‘Folk Song’ underscores the mythological character of the natural environment; it is an address to another poet (Kevin Hart) detailing the speaker’s sense of ritual and finally sanctity drawn from a proximity to death arrived at through the art of fishing. The river is very much an interior landscape, a metaphor for death and impermanence, and a site of communication between the inner and outer worlds, between the real and imagined. The river becomes a symbol not simply of erasure but of nourishment. ‘Folk Song’ begins with a fairly straightforward observation of the two poets’ relation to the river and its changing nature, followed by the introduction of the kingfisher. The kingfisher is a recurrent image in Adamson’s work, and comes

* Faculty of Policy Studies, Chuo University, Tokyo

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to be a metonym for the poet's identification with the river and its life:

We live here by this
sliding water, brown by day
black at night

flecked with bats
and the blue powdery stars.
Morning, a kingfisher

sits, an indigo rock
knife-shaped, winking
sun-speckled.

There is a strong sense of community, of an organic unity and order which identifies the poets' belonging to the landscape. This sense of belonging develops into a sense of malaise as the collection progresses. As the landscape becomes further related to poetry it appears to be erased by the preoccupation with language. This recalls Bonnefoy's comments on 'l'arrière pays,' and an aspect of the landscape Adamson draws from Bonnefoy (and Hart's reading of Bonnefoy): 'There's another thing that Bonnefoy mentions, not heaven, not hell, almost an Eden, a place that you imagine, it's just across the river. If you live there though, if you imagine it into being, it dissolves.' (5) Where Adamson stressed the function of the imagination in The Clean Dark (6), and perhaps over determined it in Cross the Border (7), Waving to Hart Crane presents a more subdued, if not withdrawn, faith in the powers of the imagination and poetry to transfigure existence. The development of the river as a mythological site in Adamson's most recent work draws us back to his earlier encounter with Bonnefoy in Theatre I-XIX (8), and to David Brooks's observation that the issue in Adamson's relationship to Symbolist poetry is the mediation of presence. (9)

Waving to Hart Crane presents a gradual sense of the erosion of poetry's possibility, a sense that poetry is unable adequately to mediate presence. In 'Folk Song' Adamson develops the kinetic energy of the river through the observation of the natural order, and the poets' interaction with that order through hunting. This draws the scene away from the initial observation that 'there are too many of us here' and the subsequent reference to the world of 'rockets and landmines.' Adamson conjures the river scene as a site of both exile and sanctuary, where the 'dreams' of 'rockets and landmines' have nothing to do with the everyday and commonplace slaughter of the river. Adamson is withdrawing his world of the Hawkesbury from the world of political and all too human violence, celebrating a sense of the river as a spiritual site vested in an openness to mutability. The final image of the poet eating 'rich cream-coloured flesh' figures the mulloway kill and the eating of the flesh as a sacrament (the Christian resonance with the Eucharist is explicit):

We sing

of the mulloway, our
mauve-scaled river cod. They
rise breaking the surface.
our songs mention
mulloway kills and at night
we eat the rich cream-coloured flesh.

This act is as natural an aspect of the landscape as the kingfisher and royal spoonbills. The wars that exist on the periphery of the scene, on the other hand, are as violent and out of place as the 'long-billed ibis' which 'go savage/in the mangroves.' Adamson fosters a sense of the sacred by offering song as a celebration of the impossible nature of presence: it appears within in its disappearance, is made whole through consumption and sacrifice.

'Rock Carving with Kevin Gilbert' (10) is remarkable for the skill with which it maintains a fluctuating mediation of absence and presence in terms of an absolute past. The 'rock-mulloway' represents this absolute past, while the actions of the fishermen, the fishing itself, play out the mulloway's re-presentation. In a most complicated but subtly rendered scene, Adamson develops an exacting cosmology, not simply rendering natural order but examining the re-presentation of that order, and the poet's place in a history of re-presentations. Bonnefoy comments on the mediation of presence in art, drawing its determination out in terms of an awareness of temporality which always places poetry in an elsewhere:

envisaging the future of poetry, seeing speech as invention or recovery, and pursuing the path which is the only possible one, to affirm passionately this here and now which, indeed, are already an elsewhere and a past, which no longer exist, which have been stolen from us but which, eternally in their temporal finitude, universally in their spatial limitation, are the only conceivable good. (11)

It is this process of separation and disappearance, recovery and presence which Adamson addresses in 'Rock Carving with Kevin Gilbert.' The poem is itself a kind of still-life, as the title suggests, which comments upon the art of the still-life. This is performed through the numerous representations in the poem, most pointedly that of the mulloway and the rock-mulloway. The mulloway is for Adamson totemic of the mystery and irreducibility of death, and in the inner landscape he creates it is his connection to death. Fishing becomes a sacrament, a point of communion (frequently shared) with the inner-world, a metaphor for writing and for drawing the self into relation with negation. 'Rock Carving with Kevin Gilbert' starts simply enough, observing the rock carving and going on to give it a sense of presence if not life through the 'fine yellow rain' that pours from its side. In the landscape Adamson imagines, the natural world is this communion of life and death, its indivisibility:

The fish outlined on the rock
is the shape of a mulloway, we are moving
here under a fine yellow rain
pouring from the spear-wound
in its side.
The mulloway becomes a Christ-like symbol of redemption through the association with the stigmata, and the Christian symbolism of the fish itself as a sign for Christ. He continues, introducing a 'lyre-bird,' a recurrent figure in Adamson's work representative of the collusion of poetry and parody. Brutality is integral to Adamson's vision of this inner-world. Not simply seen as an inevitable aspect of the natural world, brutality becomes a part of the communion with that world, a violence and sacrifice through which the presence of the scene is extracted from the universal and eternal to become the here and now of the poem. The passion Bonnefoy speaks of shares some part of this violence. Adamson presents this through the identification with the 'swamp harriers':

We fish with two swamp harriers,
sweet whistling killers like us, who cut
fish throats and clasp up
bunches of silver nerves—
calling under stars convicts
hacked in cliff face.

By linking the swamp harriers' call to the fishermen's whistling, the rock-mulloway to the convict stars, and then the perception of the berley (of oysters crushed with rocks) to the Milky Way, Adamson is very deftly forming a thoroughgoing sense of unity through the web of metaphor. Towards the end of the poem, the fishermen hook mulloway, draw them to the surface where they rest on their image carved into the rock. This, coupled with the concluding observation of the erosion of the carving, offers a remarkable and profound meditation on presence in art and the real:

We crush oysters with rocks
and throw them as berley into the tide
we call our Milky Way,
after a while stingrays
come on the bite, then one after another, brown-winged,
hump-backed, yellow-bellied
bull-ray, fights to its death?
then we cut some free to watch slide
over carvings of themselves,
back into the drink, as the rock-mulloway
moves its shallowing grooves.

The final image is brutal, if ambiguous, drawing out the mediation of absence and presence in art. The fishermen release the mulloway simply to watch them slide over their image. The rock-mulloway forms an archetype, possibly a Platonic Ideal to which the newly dead fish are given as comparison. There is a subdued black humour in the comparison, and a clear brutality in the meaninglessness of the sacrifice and the absence of transcendence. The final image may suggest an affirmation of the archetype as a transcendental as it continues to move in 'its shallowing grooves' in contrast to the dead fish. It is, however, the process of erosion which is affirmed since the rock-mulloway's movement
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is a function of its ongoing attrition. In the end, both the fish caught and killed and the rock carving suffer the same fate. Adamson conjures in the metaphor that even ideals are not eternal, but thrive and only exist through their negation. In the context of the developed community of the scene, the observation must be self-reflexive, so that the poem is finally a meditation on the universality of death, from rock oysters to fishermen. This recalls Bonnefoy’s comment (quoted in Hart’s essay) that ‘Nothing exists except through death. And nothing is true that does not prove itself through death.’

Adamson responds to the sacred in terms of the presence and not the nature of things. This is precisely the import of a poem such as ‘Rock Carving with Kevin Gilbert,’ in which it is the immediacy of the event that is sacred as it comes to present the passing away of immediacy and the relation of the present to impermanence, the ongoing absence of the real. Bonnefoy gives this as a wondering at chance which, unlike Mallarméan poetics, is not desultory, but answers to the mystery of the impossible. This understanding occurs in Adamson’s most recent work. It is through ‘the first stage of this groping knowledge, recognizing the death, the anonymity, the finitude,’ presented in many of the poems of Waving to Hart Crane, that Adamson arrives at the threshold upon which Bonnefoy comments in the following:

I suggest today that we should once more follow Baudelaire in his love for what is mortal, stand once again on the threshold he thought was closed, facing the most distressing of proofs of darkness. Here all thoughts about the future, all projects vanish. Nothingness consumes the object; we are caught up in the winds of that shadowless flame. And we no longer have any faith to sustain us, any formula, any myth; our most intense gaze ends in despair. Yet let us not abandon this blank and empty horizon; let us hold our ground, le pas gangné, so to speak. For it is true that already a change is taking place. The mournful star of existence, the elementary Janus, turning slowly—but at this instant—on itself, reveals its face. A possibility appears on the wreck of all possibilities.

Having already set Mallarmé to one side, Bonnefoy recalls Rimbaud’s claim to be in possession of the formula, the key to existence, and turns to Bataille’s comment on inner-experience as the end of projects. He steps back to the beginning of much of this thought on modernity, the revelation of nothingness, and stands with Baudelaire. The difference is that where Baudelaire saw a closed threshold and blank horizon, Bonnefoy exhorts the poet to attend and to await a radical reversal. This is the impossible gaze through which, as Bonnefoy asserts, ‘[a] possibility appears on the wreck of all possibilities.’

Poems such as ‘Ambivalence,’ ‘Cornflowers’ and ‘The Kingfisher’ set out this first groping toward the sacred, toward the threshold of the here and now, immediate presence. ‘Ambivalence’ responds to finitude and death, stripping the poem to the immediacy of the experience and the experience of language. Sharp, short lines and simple phrases reduce signification to onomatopoeia:

Winter afternoon
an hour before

low tide,
two fishermen
are meshing
for the mullet
they net all
the way around
an oyster lease.
One coughs
his death rattle
drifts across
the flat dark
surface. The light
fades and they
bash the bottom
of their boat
with an oar
and a wooden club.
thud, thud, cough
cough.

Adamson concludes this poem with a reference to the mesh net under which the schools of fish are caught as 'serifs of death.' He is careful not to extend the metaphor beyond the limit of the scene’s presence.

'The Kingfisher' (16) turns to finitude once again, drawing out the individual's relation to the natural and offering the perception of closed horizons. The kingfisher becomes a symbol for the unknowable, which 'hunts/for souls.' Adamson blackly reduces the soul to a questionable, if not anachronistic, possibility:

It hunts
for souls, he said
as I watched
it dive
from a wire
into
a mudflat
one second
then flash

—52—
indigo
between
leaves in
a mangrove tree,
its life's
an edge
you can't
measure,
it's an arrow
that goes
home unaimed.
These days
the weekend
fishermen
with their
depth-sounders
hardly
know what
a soul
might be
and yet they
are frightened
they might
somehow lose them.

The speakers afford themselves a privileged relationship to the landscape and to spirituality in contrast to the 'weekend fishermen.' The initial statement illustrates the brutal aspect of spirituality recurrent in Adamson's work and goes on to develop a sense of possibility in terms of the impossible: the edge that cannot be measured, the unaimed arrow that hits its mark. The final sentence reduces the confluence of modernity and the spiritual to a black and acutely observed absurdity. In this, Adamson marks out a turning away from the modern response to the abyssal (wryly caught in the weekend fishermen's 'depth-sounders') towards the presence of the natural. This turning is, however, not away from the awareness of the abyss but further into it, towards the reversal Bonnefoy speaks of and which recalls Blanchot's treatment of Rilke.

In 'Cornflowers' (17) Adamson returns to the Hawkesbury and elegy alike, this time offering a work of mourning for his friend the poet Robert Harris while recounting an ars poetica that privileges presence, albeit abstracted in the final form of a still life (the black humour of which is no doubt intended). In the recollection of the poet's conversation, poetry is perceived as song, in which the presence of 'our bright life' may be given and where the poet invests in the belief that poetry makes things 'glow, sing or die.' There is a sense that Adamson is communing with the dead poet through the poem, through its ability to recollect the conversation and the understanding of poetry as this internalised conversation of a here and now with an elsewhere and otherwise. Again, Adamson places the scene in the Hawkesbury, pointedly anchored to one side:
In a skiff, anchored
on the edge of a mangrove
swamp, he gave me
a version,
an unpolished song,
something that might have
gone unspoken
in our bright life;
and there is no dark side
he told me: things
will glow, sing or die
though if we want them to.

it's all alive.]

As Adamson then returns to the metaphor of fishing, it is apparent that, between the imagery of the fishing and the statement of the unpolished song as 'something that might have / gone unspoken,' he is developing an understanding of the poet as a caretaker of and witness to chance and contingency. It is through the song itself that 'there is no dark side' and that this communion with absence (not least, that of the poet) may take place. By the end of the poem it is indeterminable who is the speaker, whether it is the initial speaker or the one he introduces.

This erasure of the speaking position recurs in 'Through the Coddling Night,' (18) a poem which in turn recalls 'What's Slaughtered's Gone' and the impersonality Blanchot speaks of in regard to Orpheus. This absenting of the subject answers the question as to ownership raised in the poem.
The speaker asks:

who
owns the conversation
we may have some day.]

The answer is only given in the allocution of the response, the paraphrasing of the question so that the 'conversation' becomes 'dialogue,' emphasising a dualism:

who
owns the dialogue
he repeated.

Origin is once again in question, and the perception of it is as a future, as the future of the present to be written. It is a future not simply contingent on the act of writing, but a present (or presence) contingent on the present where the future has already disappeared. The flight / down a cadence of
dancing / particles' captures the presence and impermanence of the 'bright life' Adamson considers, the one where 'there is no dark side.' Adamson draws pathos into the poem, turning more closely towards elegy in the final three stanzas:

our
hearts locked in their

cages of singing muscle:

it was concerning
this theme, he continued,
that I composed a tune

for the cornflowers
to sing, cut, sitting
on my table in an indigo jar.

The pathos is drawn in reference to the heart's singing muscle and the sense of imprisonment the image renders. Harris had previously commented in a review of The Clean Dark: 'Adamson tends to mistrust relating experiences of imprisonment or other relatively extreme happenings that accrue to anyone who has an active life. It's not only a drag, the danger is also of reifying actuality behind the tale, of causing more, not less prison.' (19) There is irony in Adamson's choice of image which allows for the poem to conclude its *ars poetica* with what might be seen as the opposition of Romanticism and Classicism. Harris commented upon the Hawkesbury as Adamson's 'ideal locus,' continuing: 'The Hawkesbury has become interpretable, and alive, not by a fiat of will but by the action and process of art.' Harris read The Clean Dark as 'decidedly classical in spirit' and removed from Romanticism. 'Cornflowers' responds to Harris' view, addressing art as a methodical process of refinement and not the working of a Romantic (visionary) will. The opposition of the 'cages of singing muscle' with the final image of the flower arrangement bears this out: the passion and the intensity of the one giving way to the composition of the other. There is certainly a Classical restraint in the last 'tune' which appears to symbolise the polished (as opposed to 'unpolished') song. Adamson exhibits a more subdued lack of ease with the elegy in 'Cornflowers' than he did in 'The Thoughtless Shore' since his *in memoriam* for Harris answers Harris and poetry alike, recognising the community of language with death and affirming its possibility. Rather than the early abashed lack of belief presented in 'The Thoughtless Shore,' this later poetry acknowledges 'things / will glow, sing or die / though if we want them to,' concluding 'it's all alive.' The irony of this possibility is not lost on Adamson. It is, however, treated with less scorn, revealing the gradual shift in his response to death and to spirituality.

'Autumn Highway' (20) is an elegy written in memory of Brett Whiteley. This poem prefigures the subsequent elegies for Whiteley in Black Water and is useful in gauging the gradual shift in Adamson's response to death across the two volumes. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Whiteley for Adamson, both as a friend and a fellow artist. Whiteley collaborated with Adamson and Shead in Cross the Border, began a further collaboration with Adamson to translate and illustrate Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer*, introduced Adamson to heroin, and perhaps most importantly introduced him to new possibilities of painting and so art. Adamson recalls the important influence Whiteley's painting
Alchemy had upon him when he first saw it in the 1970s:

Before I met Brett in 1972. I don't think I'd even seen a real painting. I mean I might have looked at a few paintings but they didn't really affect me much. I'd look at art books, and I loved Mondrian, Van Gogh and Max Ernst. I was walking along the street in Paddington, and I walked into an art gallery, and I didn't really even know what was on—and there was his painting Alchemy on the wall. Again, it was like one of those things that gave me permission to continue in an area that I wasn't sure would be accepted. There was just that element to it ... It was a triumphant thing ... It was really a revelation to me. (21)

He goes on to compare Whiteley's influence on him to that of Robert Duncan's and Bob Dylan's and states that after seeing Alchemy, he began to write 'The Rumour,' 'Autumn Highway' presents a self-referential plaint for the ageing and evisceration of art: 'Our poems / become thinner, / sadder, less / intense.' The manner in which the poem evades Whiteley's death by recalling 1965 as a time of intensity is in sharp contrast to the poems collected in the 'Creon's Dream' section of Black Water. The later elegies become broader and more penetrative responses to (Whiteley's) death, revivified by a combination of anger and acceptance.

'A Black Crucifix,’ (22) dedicated to Gary Shead, traces out the erasure of difference between Adamson's and Shead's art-forms. It is also a complex and fluid meditation on the artists' relationship to belief (both in art and in a transcendent) which is finally rested in the ambiguous expunction of a 'black crucifix.' This last image is perceived as 'a dead tree' in contrast to the living tree with which the poem (and painting) begins:

A tree shoots
into existence
made of words[.]

Poetry and painting are dialectically bound in 'A Black Crucifix': each is constituted through the difference of the other reduced to the same. For example, the transformation of the tree of words to 'an icon / made of / flaky paint' which then opens out to temporality, connecting the tree to one:

put down

by a monk
two thousand
years ago[.]

The painter's brush is seen to be made from a branch of the tree, while the words of the conversation recalled early in the poem are painted. These same words are in turn given as poetry. Again, Adamson is creating a sense of unity by giving free reign to his use and synthesis of metaphor. This continues up until it arrives at the artist's gaze. At this point, the poem commences a process of erasure which ends with the expunging of the crucifix:

your gaze
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crosses out
the new philosophy
of doubt

you paint icons
for believers
in love

your creatures
walk out
onto a field

of language
the grass
strokes

lines of praise
and near
the fence

a dead tree
a black crucifix
money has paid for

you take
an oily rag
and expunge it.

There is little ambivalence or ambiguity in this portrayal of the painter-poet's understanding of art. The artist's gaze unifies, it brings things into existence (as 'Cornflowers' also illustrated), as it gives praise. The final erasure of the crucifix and the curious comment that it has been paid for resonate with the earlier rejection of 'the new philosophy / of doubt.' The poem follows the relentless demand of the painter-poet's faith in art: in the transfigurative space of art, belief as much as doubt ceases to be of meaning. This is akin to Bonnefoy's understanding of poetry as a negative theology. By presenting the here and now of the poem, the poem affirms absence apophatically as it bears witness to the erasure of the cross as it enters art. Belief and doubt merge as devotion and love. It is not simply that poetry replaces God as Mallarmé suggested. Art is a means (and Bonnefoy stresses 'not an end') to transfigure existence, not so that it hands over godhead or reifies things or offers consolation for the absence of godhead, or converts existence into myth, but so that poetry 'offers the legacy of an empty world' and the longing for a 'true place.' This longing reflects an illimitable exile from presence. Rather than turn simply towards materialism, Bonnefoy affirms this exile as a promise of hope in the 'grace of the future' where 'reality and language have united their powers.'

Throughout Waving to Hart Crane, Adamson questions the possibility of such hope, gradually
producing a bleak and bitter faith in poetry, which affirms itself through recurrent denials and the ongoing vivisection of poetry and the poet’s past. The title poem (26) of the collection presents the confrontation of twentieth-century modernity and poetry, appropriating aspects of technology to view the changes and the gradual erosion of poetry’s possibility, a possibility suggested in the last line by ‘praise.’ Adamson farewells Crane as much as he appears to abandon the modernity which funnels poetry ‘out of existence’:

Farewell to the wire,  
the voices on  
the line. Goodbye  
switchboard rider, my  
American friend.  
We enter the new  
century through glass,  
black oceans  
and black winds.  
thin fibre funnelling  
poetry out  
of existence.

Adamson performs his own ‘Adieu,’ recalling the complaint of ‘Folk Song’ in ‘that hash / of voices slung up / / from the cable.’ He may be performing a parodic critique of Crane, abandoning the polysemy and ‘clever gaps’ of Crane’s work as he searches for a more finite and ‘real’ voice with which to work. Poems such as ‘Looking out Sideways,’ ‘Outside Delacroix,’ ‘Addiction,’ ‘Alcohol,’ ‘The Written Moon’ and ‘Love on Ice’ focus upon experience, privileging the immediacy of experiences (such as lost love, friendship, addiction and alcoholism) rather than drawing the poetry away from experience toward broader symbolic or conceptual value.

Many of the poems in the third and fourth sections of Waving to Hart Crane are short lyrics. The majority of these lyrics turn in toward the ‘blank and empty horizon’ of modern existence where, by holding the *pas gagné* as this turning inwards, possibility appears. ‘What I Have of Faith’ (27) presents this moment in all its bleak and unambiguous brutality. Where, however, Bonnefoy works towards a sense of mourning Adamson develops the brutality of the present. This is perhaps a residual of his long devotion to Mallarmé (a devotion he opens to question in Black Water), to the nihilism at the heart of Mallarméan thought and his poetic’s emphasis upon art as a fiction. Adamson begins with this awareness of the *néant*, and develops a blackly humorous affirmation of poetry’s possibility:

If you look out  
the window, you will see nothing  
the willow is flowing nicely  
you will be blind

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and hear the sound of poetry
read by a woman

who reviews owls, like an owl
split in two by a cat, flying off
in two directions

on this side, a sprig of inkweed
the other, Tasmanian kelp.
Here language comes out

at night and mixes
with the locals, who knows what
is getting done

aside from the talking.
The serious tone is more assuring
well, more than laughter—

for some reason things
change tonight, we hear a muted
thudding, a good night

for the litter of kittens.
Hawks circle the kitchen light.
moths with beaks

come flying out, nothing
surreal. The lawn man walks in
with a glad-bag

dropping feathers:
you must reassemble the goldfinch
before the refreshments.

Opposed to many of the other poems in the collection, 'What I Have of Faith' develops along conceptual lines, recalling Mallarmé’s poem 'Les Fenêtres' in the first stanza and responding to an overarching sense of nothingness. Poetry becomes a process of violent dissection and transfiguration as Adamson presents a glimpse of a world where the serious and the humorous mix in the absence of meaning. The poem is built upon images of predacity, dissection, abandonment, and brutal, meaningless death, the better part of which are inflicted upon the natural world by the human. Adamson is scathing and finally urbane in his treatment of the human lack of care (if not faith) in the natural realm. In a collection which follows The Clean Dark’s celebration of the communion of poetry.
language and the natural world and that begins with a similar sense of awe in poems such as 'Folk Song' and 'Rock Carving with Kevin Gilbert.' 'What I Have of Faith' presents another side to the sense of despair expressed in Waving to Hart Crane. At the same time, the shift to a 'serious tone' and the final assertion of the possibility of reassembling the natural from its wreckage tender a sense of faith.

Robert Adamson『ハート・クレインに手を振って』

岩の影刻をケヴィン・ギルバートと Rock carving with Kevin Gilbert (5)
その魚は岩の裏に刻まれ
マルウェイの形をしている、俺たちは
その脳腹の槍あとから
降りそそぐ細かな黄色い雨の
すぐ下を進んでいく。コトドリが頭上で舞い、
朝の空の大気を震わせる。
俺たちは二羽のヌマチュウヒといっしょに釣りをする、
妙なる口笛を吹く、俺たちと同じく飼し屋だ、
魚のノドを切り裂き、銀の神経を
束に絞り上げる——
崖の面に囚人たちが
刻んだ星々の下で呼び声をあげ。
石で砕いた牡蠣を揚げ餌として
俺たちはミルクの道と呼ぶ
潮の流れに投げ入れる、
少し諦めとアカエイの群れが
食いついてくる、それから、
茶色のヒレで、背を丸めた、
黄色い腹のウシエイが次から
次へと、死の戦いを挑んでくる——
何匹かの糸を切ってやって、
自分たちを象った形刻の上を滑って
海水へ戻ってゆくのを眺める、岩のマルウェイは
浅くなりゆっくり描線を動かす。

＊ケヴィン・ギルバート：オーストラリア・アボリジニの詩人・戯曲家 (1933-1993)。政治運動家として、「アボリジニ大使館」設立メンバーでもある。
マルウェイ：ニベ科の大型の食用魚（=jawfish）
ヌマチュウヒ：小型のタカ

Waving to Hart Crane (27)
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声たちに、さようなら
交換機にまたがった、私の

アメリカの友たち。
私たちはガラスを抜けて
新しい世紀へ、
黒い海

と黒い風、
詩を消失させてしまう
細いファイバーへと
入っていく。

熱狂したFAXを
ソネットは生きのびられない、
ケーブルが放り出す
声のこた混ぜのあの沈黙に

打ち消されてしまう。
帽子を傾けて
無声映画からの煙と
ともにちらつくのがよいよ、

フィルム編集者が
仕事場の床の上に残した
抜け目のない切れ目は
もう無いのだ。

メッセージはここでは
抹消される、無の
賞賛だ。生花が生まれても
フェードアウトにへたり込んで。
*ハート・クレイン：米国の詩人（1899-1932）。代表作にブルックリン橋をテーマにした長詩Bridge (1930)がある。

かわせみ The Kingfisher (44)

それが狩るのは
魂だ、と彼は言った
それが
電線から
干潟へ
とダイブする

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のを
私が目にしたとき
一秒
ののち
インディゴ色が
マングローブの木の
葉のあいだに
きらめき、
その生は
測ることが
できない
切っ先、
狙うことなく
的を射抜く
矢だ。
近頃では
週末の
釣人たちは
音響測深機
などさげて
魂が何であるか
などとは
知りもしない
それでも彼らだって
怖れているのだ
どうかして
魂を失うことを。

私が信念として抱いているもの  What I have of faith (66)

窓から外を
見て、何も見えはしないだろう
ヤナギが素敵に流れている

盲いとなって
一人の女の読む詩の音を
聴くだろう

女は見つめる、フクロウたちがまるで
猫にまったたつにされた一羽のフクロウのように、
二手にわかれて飛び去っていくを

こちら側には、インクウィードの小枝

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もう一方は、タスマニアのケルブ。
ここでは言語は夜に

姿を見せて、住民たちと
交わる、彼らは知っているのだ
おしゃべりとは別に

何が果たされていくのかを。
真面目な調子は、まあ確かに
笑い声よりは安心させてくれる——

何故かは分からないけれど物ことが
今夜は変わって、抑えた
どんという音を、猫の

腹を虫が一腹仔たちへのお休みが聴こえる。
翼は台所の灯りをめぐり、
くちばしのある娘が

飛び出していく、非現実的なことは
ない。芝刈り夫が入ってくる
ポリ袋をさげ

羽根を落としながら。
休憩の前にゴールドフィンチを
組み直さなければならない。

※ インクウィード：オーストラリア原産の 1 m ほどの高さになる雑草
ケルブ：コンブ目の漆着性の大型褐藻

[Notes]
(10) Adamson. ‘Rock Carving with Kevin Gilbert,’ Waving to Hart Crane, 5.


Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry,’ 111.

Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry,’ 111.

Adamson, ‘Ambivalence,’ Waving to Hart Crane, 12.

Adamson, ‘The Kingfisher,’ Waving to Hart Crane, 44.

Adamson, ‘Cornflowers,’ Waving to Hart Crane, 20.


Bonnefoy, ‘The Act and the Place of Poetry,’ 116

Adamson, ‘Waving to Hart Crane,’ Waving to Hart Crane, 27.


[Works Cited]


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SUMMARY

A sense of faith: Nature and negativity in Robert Adamson’s Waving to Hart Crane

Michael Brennan
[Faculty of Policy Studies, Chuo University, Tokyo]

Born in 1943, Robert Adamson is one of Australia’s leading contemporary poets. Since the late 1960s, Adamson has published more than fifteen collections of poetry and has been the recipient of many awards and prizes - including the National Book Council’s Banjo Award, the New South Wales Literary Awards’ Kenneth Slessor Prize and the Victorian Premier’s Literary Award for poetry, and the F.A.W. Christopher Brennan prize in 1994, for lifetime achievement in literature. This essay examines Adamson’s twelfth collection of poetry, Waving to Hart Crane in light of the influence of French poet Yves Bonnefoy’s examination of poetics and negativity on Adamson’s poetics. Proceeding through close readings of individual poems and reference to secondary critical material and interviews, this essay examines the development of Adamson’s poetic following the naturalism of the award-winning collection The Clean Dark to a more troubled interrogation with the negativity of poetic language and the representation of the natural world.