

Swimeroonie

for and after Harry Mathews

Ken Bolton

I had always wanted to be 'the Swimmer' (de Chirico's "Swimmer") &
Pleased with the morning weather, dove—
I would cross the Pacific by myself. Neither she,
nor I, nor the Williamstown refineries, minded.

Still so near. *Must swim harder*. Love's birthday (& here
Her form is recollected: *gold* on sheets of *red*), a day on which
Are nullified all crimes of the then future.
(And the now past's? Forgotten.)
In this striking out—for clarity, for definition—
momentary innocence is corseted.

To not be blamed, be guiltless, *have*, at least,
Occupation. Yet the swimmer's back, though it signals
"No can answer!", does presuppose
a querying of purpose: responsibilities,
dart-like, find it,

Its attractive liberty. To continue or return!
To succeed—or *not to fail*? Is that a question?
& all is invalidated. Think? Or swim?
On the pier figures wonder. *Or*,
perhaps, don't (spit, buy sandwiches, smoke, feed gulls).

A useful violence strengthens shoulders, back, biceps.
With no gift to beguile, I must exhaust them or me,
Float in the shadows of waves, spouting—
thinking thoughts of a 'pissed-off' nature,
committed, now, to arrival.

What was I committed to before? 'Leaving'?
I'm not leaving again!—*I will have just got here!*
Thoughts like these do that beguiling
 I could not imagine: *I dream idly*, for example,
 of the Futurist paintings—
"Those Who Leave", "Those Who Stay", by Boccioni—
& plough the waves, arms forgotten, a leaver.

“One false moof & I die you,” I cry, “you bunth
Of bathtards!”, combining *i scrittori* Koch & Kerouac—
Bitterly, manic—laughing, at the very inappropriateness.
 A gull passes—rude
 & abstract, limbs fatten, &

Winsome with particularity, a gulp of brine
Crudely drives me on, an old car made sound—
By virtue of panic—speaking loudly to my knees, my arms, &
 Shoulders, which recombine in darkness—
To smite with iron the iron sea. (To not drown!)
 (To not go under!) And,
 voluptuous pronouncements of decease behind,
I swim, a swimmer, a swimmeroonie! Yet arrival

Comes to seem like 'No Departure'.
My companions, the sky & whitecaps, 'are mine', familiar. And brine.
 The sand is mine.
 And understanding of my life
... shrinks, wrong, to the merely handiest
 What, me worry? "Shall I sit over here?"
 & a towel is handed ... "Well swum,

Whacker!"—the conductor, a bit-part player
From *Lucky Jim* (busless, I see
But fully in uniform,
 down to money-pouch, tickets...)—
 speaking, thrusts a towel at me.

I take it.

That is how I left Sydney for Adelaide,
& started over.

Ken Bolton, who lives in Adelaide, edited the magazine *Otis Rush*, which may have carried Harry Mathews' first Australian publication. They met, once only, in Siena. Mathews was associated with the New York School of poets and the French group, Ou Li Po. Among his close friends was the author Georges Perec. Bolton's *Selected Poems* were published by Penguin and, more recently, in the UK by Shearsman Press.