
A Burning Fiery Furnace

Peter Porter

Born to a seamless ordinance of heat,
Small wonder I remember best Indoors,
The too-small carpets slipping round the floors
And 'Under the house', a region to retreat

To for the many guilty dreams of peace,
An 'enfer' where the sherds of poetry
Shared a complicit afterlife with me —
The Rome of Brisbane, the Annerley of Greece.

But classicism isn't quite the point.
I was in a crucible, I know it now
And can't regret it — will God speed the plough
To bring my Father to the Sunday joint?

Henry Ford was right: what's history,
Why do Australians wonder who they are?
Infinite stars in heaven — your one star
Is your own life — the millions don't agree,

They sulk in digits and symposia
And measure muscle-tone and their synapses.
Childhood's Tower (not Ivory) collapses.
Eucalyptus is a plain ambrosia.

I write this down I'm sure because I'm old;
The country of my birth's become hot news
And selfishness would always take short views —
My ancestors came out and found no gold.

The world is made again in each of us.
Australian homes are dark to help the sun
Lure children out for democratic fun.
The myopic boy's gazetted an Odysseus.

Not Greece, though; trust the Bible. Weatherboard
And louvres bank the fire. But is it light
Not heat which terrifies? Ahead, the night
Says 'State your preference, the stake or sword'.