

## **2 Poems: An Accidental Ape, First Watch**

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Roderick Marsh lives in Melbourne and occasionally moonlights as an ecological economist and management consultant. He also writes poetry—often in an apron.

## An Accidental Ape

Armed with finches and iguanas, Darwin  
And Wallace revealed a simple truth:  
Kalimantan's old man of the forest  
Is family. His auburn beard and piercing  
Eyes remind me of my Caledonian  
Forebears—a solitary pict, whose powerful  
Arms spin the world on its axis so we  
Can witness the vast tree bud again, in

Rwanda, where silverbacked cloud-forest  
Dwellers, abide in a deep meditation  
On digestion. Powerful chests spread over  
Broad bellies, they gesture to lower lands, where

The great river Congo splits love's  
Dominions from those of war—vicious gangs  
Roam the north, young warriors prove themselves  
By murdering unwary travellers  
In lopsided battles, ten against one;  
South of the river, young satyrs fence with  
Penis swords and caress buttocks as balm  
For wounded pride, while crotch-locked nymphs  
Rise to orgasmic crescendos.

We are north and south, made with rips and tears,  
Ecstatic rage, blood and death, tender pleasure too,  
Face-to-face, eyes joining with lips and tongue.

Wilberforce thought our simian ties an  
Insult; they terrified him by day,  
At night he dreamt a college of grinning  
Primates in purple socks leading him to  
Overlook the wild abyss where twin loops  
Of stardust spun down a kalpa, a dance  
For five elements; he woke, drenched,  
Divine order swamped by contingency.  
*There was* the vast topography—a  
Bestiary of earth, of air, and sea.

Greater in number were dead ends. A dread  
Came upon him, Man was absent almost  
Everywhere; no crown of creation, not  
Inevitable—an accidental ape.

## First Watch

Begin when you can no longer see  
the lines on your palm held at arm's length.  
In summer, it is time when the black ants  
at your feet have melted into the dirt's twilight.

Forget your watch. Its sterile march  
cannot keep time held in sun, eye, body.  
Its stone heart and constant hands dissect  
the world, winding withered facets of cut  
certainty, flickering shadows behind glass.

Trust your eye, your calluses, the dirt under  
each fingernail, the beetle's stifled tick—  
carnal echoes to till the soil's hours  
as the earth spins seasons and settling  
blood washes wrongs away.

Begin when the black ants march across  
your swollen palms. Each carrying a small  
piece of the carrion beetle stuck in  
your throat.

Line 11 of the poem intentionally misquotes Keats's *Endymion*, book IV, lines 529–31.