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AUDREY MOLLOY A DAWN CHORUS OF AUSTRALIAN POETRY

COVER ARTWORK TITLED 'EARTHBOUND' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor
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Audrey Molloy is an Irish poet living in Sydney on Gadigal land. Her debut collection, *The Important Things* (Gallery Press, 2021), won the Anne Elder Award and was shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney First Collection Poetry Prize. *Ordinary Time* (Pitt Street Poetry, 2022), a collaboration with Australian poet Anthony Lawrence, was one of Australian Book Review's 'Books of the Year'. Her second solo collection, *The Blue Cocktail*, will be published in late 2023 in Ireland and Australia. She has an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry) from Manchester Metropolitan University. Her work has appeared in *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *Island*, *Best of Australian Poems*, *The Stinging Fly*, *The Moth*, *Magma*, *The North*, and *Poetry Ireland Review*. She was awarded a Varuna Residential Fellowship in 2020, and was shortlisted for the Red Room Poetry Fellowship in 2022. She is the grateful recipient of a Literature Bursary Award from the Arts Council of Ireland. <http://audreymolloy.com/>



AUDREY MOLLOY

A DAWN CHORUS OF AUSTRALIAN POETRY

When *Live Encounters* editor, Mark Ulyseas, invited me to reach out to thirty poets for their contributions to a special Australian Edition of the journal, I knew I had my work cut out. *Live Encounters* has long been recognised and appreciated for taking a spirit-level to the joists and beams of poetry journal publication by featuring new and emerging voices next to the work of poets with international reputations.

What I've tried to do is showcase just how rich the poetry scene is in Australia – rich in technique and subject matter, in voice and style, in aesthetic and perspective. I've selected a small but by no means narrow sample of this richness. There are easily another thirty names I could have added. I invited poets whose work has moved me, either on the page – in collections, journals and anthologies – or, when read aloud in the small back rooms of the vibrant local poetry scene. Here are poets just starting out on their journey; to quote a line from C.P. Cavafy's 'Ithaca', *Hope your road is a long one*¹. Here also are poets at the height of their considerable powers. And here is everything in between.

I'm grateful to Mark for trusting me to invite the Australian poets included (among other marvellous poets) in this edition. And I'm indebted to the poets from across this vast continent who have been generous in their willingness to share their work, on a tight deadline, for an international audience. I hope these poems will bring as much joy to their readers as they did to me, and that this publication will continue to extend the reach of Australian poetry across the globe.

Audrey Molloy

I was also reminded of Mark Tredinnick's poetry masterclass, and his now-famous suggestion for poets to *put a bird in it*. Mark knows that poems are all the better for having birds in them.

As I began to compile a list of the bird species in this issue alone, I was reminded of waking at dawn in a strange bed in a holiday rental someplace far from the city where I live. Kookaburras tune up first, then magpies, butcherbirds, currawongs, wrens and parrots and so on. I was also reminded of Mark Tredinnick's poetry masterclass, and his now-famous suggestion for poets to *put a bird in it*. Mark knows that poems are all the better for having birds in them.

There are birds in these poems. The poets, too, are birds, with their rich variety of voices – neither a choir nor a cacophony; not even an orchestra. With no conductor but nature herself, their voices spar and marry. To misquote Raymond Carver, this is what I'm talking about when I talk about Australian poetry.

Just like the giraffes in Gary Fincke's 'Upon the Death of Sons', humming to each other, at night, below the frequencies audible to the human ear, there is an undercurrent of conversation between the Australian poets featured in this issue, and others, alive and dead. When Anthony Lawrence writes of a fox on the flats, or Alison Gorman of a newborn calf, they could be in long-range string-and-tin-can conversation with Ted Hughes or Dylan Thomas. Direct attributions abound (John Keats, Sharon Olds, Ada Limón, Denise Levertov, Sylvia Plath, etc.) as do allusions (to William Carlos Williams, W.B. Yeats, Edna St. Vincent Millay among others).

Uncannily, there are poems by Australian poets that closely resonate with the previously-unpublished work of other poets in the issue: Tricia Dearborn's 'The Long Miles' and Richard W. Halperin's 'A Thing of Beauty' surely vibrate to the same struck tuning fork. Daragh Byrne's 'The Decision' could be a response to Halperin's 'The Book of Ruth'. And Bibo and Jakov in Judith Beveridge's 'Two Brothers' could be the tragic brothers mentioned in Edward Caruso's 'Towards Duino'. All this is a reminder that poets don't exist in isolation, regardless of where they are writing from. Poetry has always been a lively chattering across countries, cultures, and even centuries.

*

While there is not a lot of sex in this issue (my gratitude to Scott-Patrick Mitchell, Geoff Callard and LaWanda Walters for addressing this) there is great love – romantic, as well as deep love for one's children, notably sons.

Diaspora. Even the word itself conjures the air currents that blew migrants across the seas and airways to the world's largest island continent. Almost half of Australians have at least one parent who was born in another country.ⁱⁱ For many newcomers to Australia, life here can be at odds with their early experiences. The 'Two Brothers' of Judith Beveridge's poem 'express a longing for spruce and birch forests, the scent / of orange bellflowers, the taste of bramble gin, the calls // of the marsh tit, the river warbler, and nuthatches that build / mud nests and climb down trees head-first...'

There is a sense of displacement in many of these poems. Gary Fincke's 'Upon the Death of Sons' gives us '*Tesknota*, "the pain of distance" in Polish, a longing, beyond nostalgia, for more than the past' – a word that would resonate with diasporas the world over. Paris Rosemont writes of a grandfather who 'woke up to the wassail of a koel each dawn.' And there is discomfort here too. The sense of 'otherness' is palpable in several poems, and no more strangely and beautifully than in Debbie Lim's work, with its promenading jellyfish and giant, colonizing fungus.

*

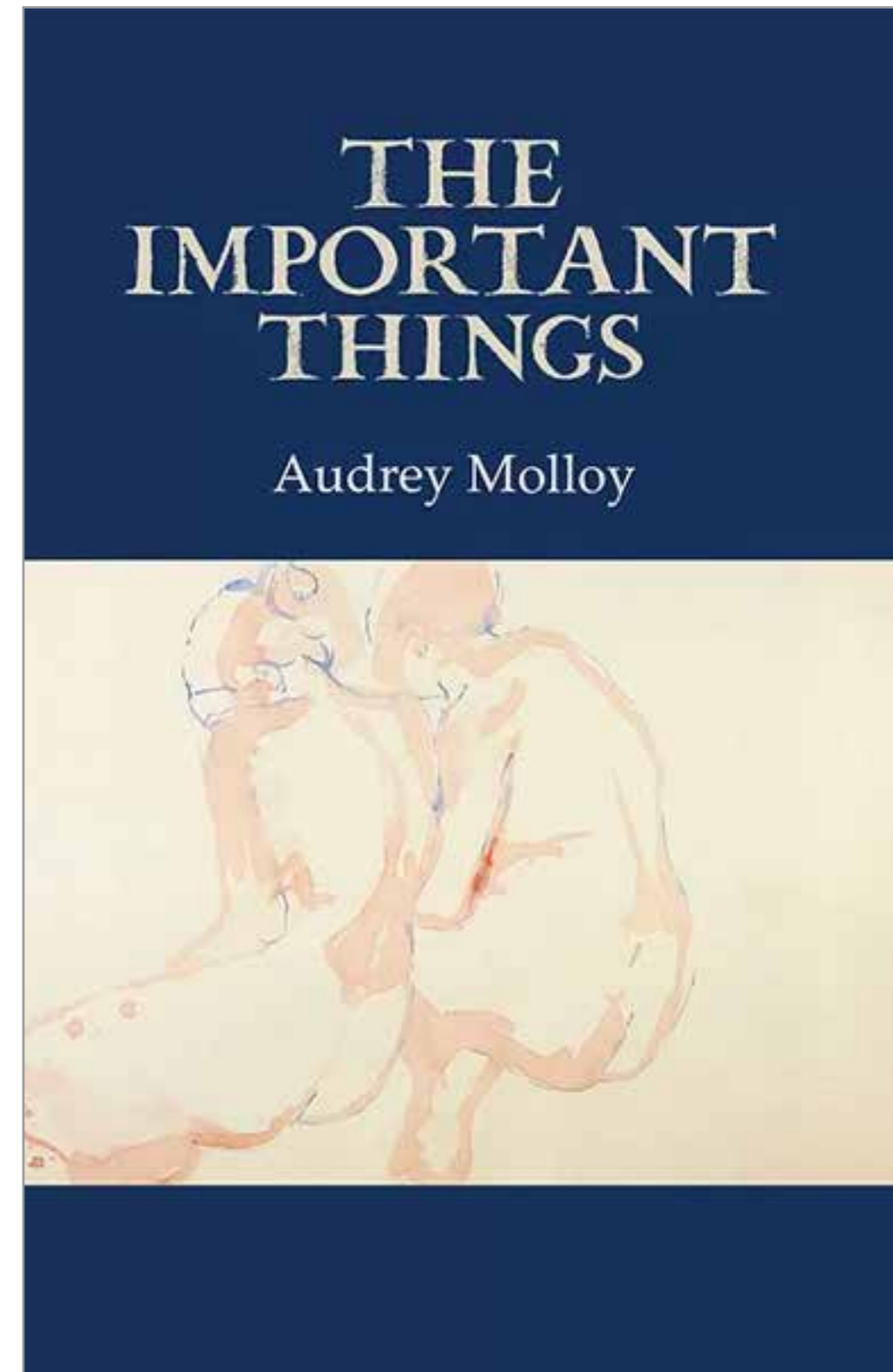
Across the issue, themes are oddly consistent. There are train journeys, road journeys. Poets write about their roots: filmic scenes from their childhood, the good and the bad of their families. And they write about the plight of others – children, endangered animals, the dispossessed. Art and music – classical, baroque, jazz, rock – are prominent, with their powers to inspire awe and evoke memory. Reading through the final proofs, my own personal obsessions stood out – the sea, the heart, family, diasporic dislocation, and home. While there is not a lot of sex in this issue (my gratitude to Scott-Patrick Mitchell, Geoff Callard and LaWanda Walters for addressing this) there is great love – romantic, as well as deep love for one's children, notably sons.

The final lines from Judith Beveridge's 'At Barrack Point' where adversity is 'a wave generated elsewhere, but reaching us eventually no matter whose hand / we hold, how careful we are, no matter where we stand.'

In this selection, native Australian animals, insects, flowers and trees – possum, witchetty grub, banksia, ti tree – appear, not necessarily comfortably, alongside introduced plants and animals – fox, calf, sheep, trout, gorse. There are skinks, leeches and koels. There is a dingo that has stalked me since I first read Judith Nangala Crispin's poem. (And have I mentioned the birds?)

It should come as no surprise that one of the most consistent themes throughout the issue is death: dead fathers, dead wives, dead sons, dead animals, dead species. And there are poems that acknowledge that this is where we are all ultimately headed. In 'Prayer', Peter Boyle asks: 'that I may find my way / into that citadel, to surface with the fish / in the cool waters of a sheltered pool, / held safe at the breath's /still centre.' Less soothing and more chilling, perhaps, are the final lines from Judith Beveridge's 'At Barrack Point' where adversity is 'a wave generated elsewhere, but reaching us eventually no matter whose hand / we hold, how careful we are, no matter where we stand.'

- i Translated by Edmund Keeley
- ii <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-nearly-half-australians-have-parent-born-overseas>



The Important Things by Audrey Molloy.
Available on Amazon and <https://gallerypress.com/product/the-important-things/>

Mark Tredinnick is a celebrated Australian poet. His honours include two Premier's Prizes and the Montreal, Cardiff, Newcastle, Blake and ACU poetry prizes. His writing and teaching over twenty-five years have touched the lives and influenced the work of many; in 2020 Mark received an OAM for services to literature and education. His books include *Fire Diary*, *A Gathered Distance*, *The Blue Plateau*, and *The Little Red Writing Book*, and *Walking Underwater* (2021). His fifth collection, *A Beginner's Guide*, was published in 2022. In June 2023, Mark received the Golden Tibetan Antelope International Poetry Prize, an honour bestowed periodically on a foreign poet for their body of work.



WOODHILL IN RAIN ON THE EVE OF AN ANNIVERSARY

For Jodie

THE RAIN became the whole night long; the darkness, an inland sea.

And I don't think you slept any more deeply in it, love,
than the horses sinking out there in their fields.

When you rose in the dawn,

the valley was in cloud—the mind of a kind-hearted deity,

Who could have done, like all of us, with bit more kip.

We are travellers now, you and I,

and each morning is a new land, eloquent with birds;

The weather grows vast around us, and roads slide from valley sides,
behind us, as we go.

From inside the cloud-base this morning, a butcherbird,

her six notes a droll liturgy on a long loop,

A flute among harps, in which I think I heard a note of hope expressed

That soon an end will come to all that falls.

If I have taught the birds to find you, love, you have taught the days to wake me

Like a valley that knows itself a valley, no matter the opacity of the air;

You have restrung me, rebegun me,

And I am again a future two or three hundred million years old,

And tall with songs you sing in your sleep, and steep with woods,

a scarp that's done, for now, with falling from the sky.

Mark Tredinnick

THE RIVER PASSES

*For Jodie at Fifty-Four
On the Snowy River
29 January 2023*

THE RIVER passes right to left across
Late afternoon, and, bending at the pines

Where we came in, it freights the ageing light
Back west against the last words of the day.

Among the ti-trees, chita chita shrills
An end to days that took a month to warm

To the idea that something wants to start.
A coolness comes.
A shrikethrush treats its moment

In the limbs of a grey box like a lute.
Along the flats loose cattle bawl, and shade

Begins to make a night of it where summer
Was a herd, belly deep in pasture,

Last time I looked.
Last time I looked, the luck
That lands me here at dusk in the Divide

Was you, in the beginning like the word,
And word of you plays green on blue among

The timbered hills and pulls the distance close
To sit with me in my good fortune here:

The eve of fifty-four years of you, my love.
Night heron barks, a cricket bites the tongue

Of all the cockatoos that want to shush him
From his alleluia obligato

In the flint and granite ground. Let evening
Fall and rivers run and cocker spaniels

Leap into my lap and trap my hands
Behind my back

A scent of newness from the earth—for you.

ARTIST STATEMENT

ART airdrops me into tight places—remote,
and near and fathomless moments—and art says:

now see if you can get yourself, and some of the rest
of us out of here alive. To give you an idea, poetry drops me

in love, in old ideas, in forests, fires, fireplaces, oceans, river
beds, women's arms, grasslands, migrations, riptides, my lives,

other lives; in grief, bewilderment, sunrise, death, and delight;
in the comic genius of dogs, the hermeneutics of children's

voices, in the end of life, in estuaries, rainstorms, proverbs. It offers
rope, rhythm, metaphor; it proffers horses, phrases, books of form, new-

ness, the music of the intelligence of mountains, idiom, birdsong,
chords and keys and awareness of some ways of knowing, some

plumblines, some clues, clouds. And it says: love, practise
dignity, tenderness; be fair, exacting, and kind; forgive, some-

times don't forgive; never stoop to vengeance; disdain
the practice of power, except maybe where it might do someone

some good; make yourself useful; be fearless, poised; make
only the moves that only you can make; love what you love;

let everything break your heart; let grief come and stay
till morning breaks the day like a colt; let winter just

be winter; be sad and grateful; hate cant; eschew theory; pay
respect; dissent; work it all out for yourself; make play; be funny,

if you can; be right, if you can't; make your work memorable,
unrepeatable like your life. Oh, and don't bugger up

the language; improve it if you can, even if just
by a few lines the future thinks it can't live without.

And begin. Keep on beginning until the end.

Denise O'Hagan is a Sydney-based editor and poet with a background in commercial book publishing in the UK and Australia. Recipient of the Dalkey Poetry Prize, she was Poetry Editor for *The Blue Nib* until 2020. Her work is published internationally and has been shortlisted in the ACU Poetry Prize, the International Proverse Poetry Prize (HK), the Robert Graves Poetry Prize and the Plough Writing Prize (UK). Her recent poetry collection, *Anamnesis* (Recent Work Press), was a finalist in the Eric Hoffer Book Award and shortlisted in the Rubery Book Award (2023). <https://denise-ohagan.com>



GHOST OF THE GREAT FAMINE

I tread the portico of centuries,
shaking from my shoulders
the fine dust of days,

passing the russet mulch of
autumn underneath, where
once the leprous fumes

of fog and foreign politics
sowed seeds of infinite grief,
and where my child lies.

Far-flung emigrants, know this:
I am the sum of all your regrets,
the echo of all your woes,

minding the fields, the ditches
and in-between spaces where
so many of us lost our lives—

Denise O'Hagan

THE CARDIAC SURGEON'S DAUGHTER DREAMS

It wasn't enough
that her father had his hands
in other people's hearts every day.

Everywhere she turned,
she heard hearts —

people telling other people
that they *took after their own* — ,
so-and so's got a — of gold, or (upsettingly)
to eat their — out! There was no situation
into which the heart couldn't sneak,
take up residence. Words,
whole sentences even, thickened
with association; language itself
was becoming a stranglehold.

That morning,

feigning sickness, she'd stayed in bed:
she was going to get to the bottom of this.
Or the heart of it. She lay very still,
gathered the wayward tendrils of her mind,
coaxed them through the fibrous layers of flesh,
the rows of ribs arrayed, sentry-like, around
that mysterious roseate kingdom of the heart,
and the secrets it held.

And she located it at last:
a giant pulsating kidney bean,
glistening and slickly wet, rising and falling
to its own beat, totally wrapped up
in itself. It had, she admitted, a sort of
terrible beauty. She tried to take
her mind away, but couldn't; it had infiltrated
the thing that had infiltrated her. She was looking
at what she feared most. And it was in her.
It was her.

The scream, when it came,
fragmented her morning into
a crumpled pillow, half shuttered blinds,
slats of combed white sky cutting the wall.

Her mother's arms tight
around her, her warm breath in her hair,
and on the bedside table beside her school bag,
a small plate of her favourite almond biscuits,
dusted in the finest icing sugar,
heart-shaped.

Geraldine Mills has published five collections of poetry, three of short stories and two children's novels. Her most recent publication is her sixth poetry collection, *New and Selected: When the Light*, which is forthcoming from Arlen House in August.



Geraldine Mills

CARRIED

Someone is saying a prayer for me this day.
Somewhere a palm opens to receive
the bread and offers it up for me.
A jar of honey arrives through the post, intact,
as if delivered by the bees themselves.

Outside my window a skying pavane of hope, of feather,
speedwell sprigging along the thin soil.
In Kylemore and La Cartuja, the nuns sing
my name into their psalms,
candles in Chartres send steady flames my way.

Someone somewhere makes fennel soup,
sends Hadji Bey's Delight from the English Market,
the holy oil of smile, word, card,
scarlet fringed tulips, orchids,
April teaching me about myself.

The hare comes every day. Looks
towards me through the high grass.
Unafraid,
before he shape-shifts
into Mike Healy's field.

Somewhere a woman takes up a crochet hook, thread,
works her own faith into every coloured stitch,
a mantle for my shoulders,
socks of possum fibres,
a necessary hat for my naked head.

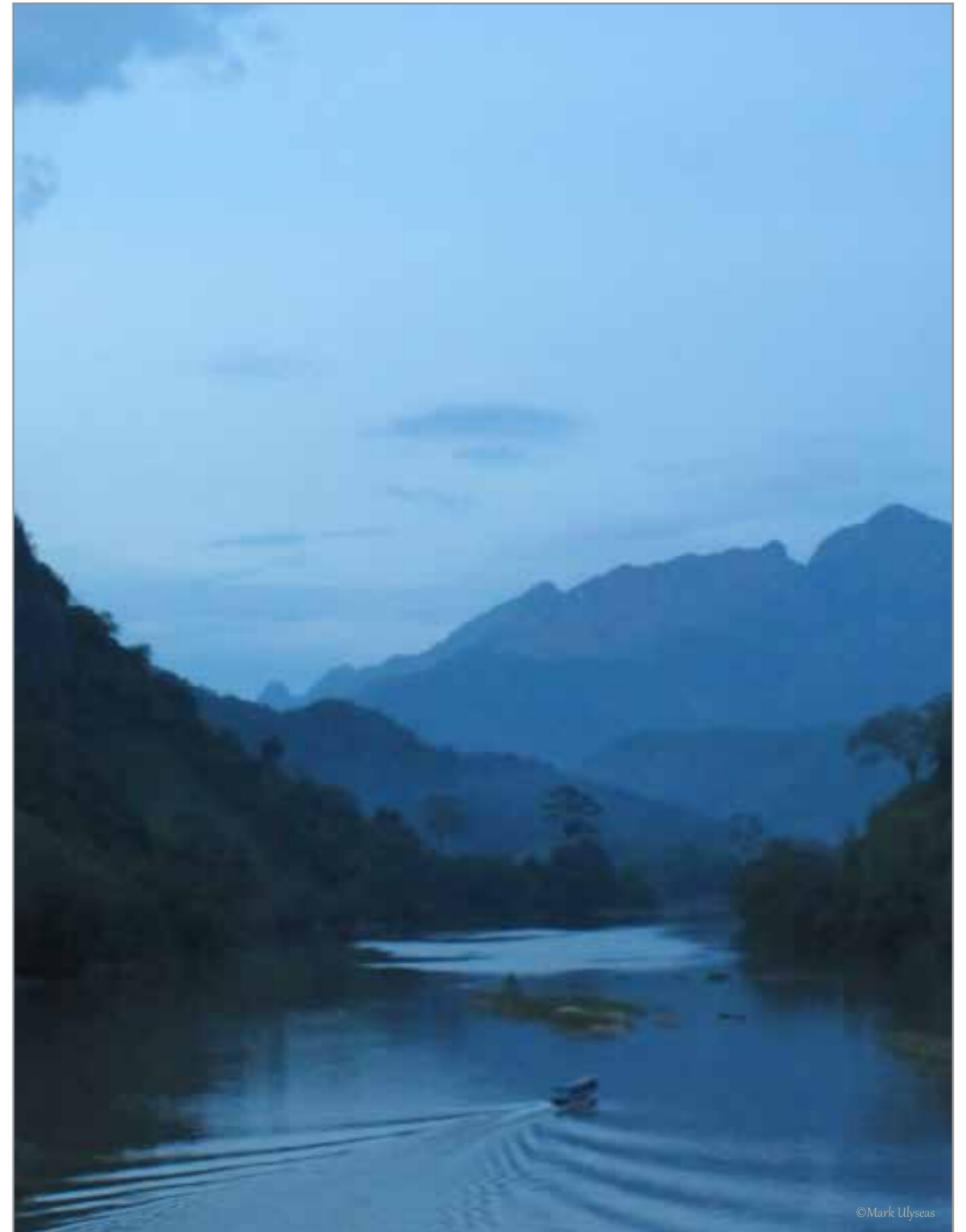
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CARRIED *...contd*

I could not know till this
how a person can be carried,
can be borne by the grace of a settling hand,
a message with the sound of the dawn sea.
A good belly laugh that could split stitches.

And now this day,
as your constant arms guide
me across our living-room floor
to the music of Piazzolla's *Oblivion*,
all these gifts I pass back through my heart:

recalling when I was wheeled into
the operating theatre, there was more
blue sky from the three windows
than I ever expected. More
than I ever thought possible.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Terry McDonagh, Irish poet and dramatist has worked in Europe, Asia and Australia. He's taught creative writing at Hamburg University and was Drama Director at Hamburg International School. Published eleven poetry collections, letters, drama, prose and poetry for young people. In March 2022, he was poet in residence and Grand Marshal as part of the Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in Brussels. His work has been translated into German and Indonesian. His poem, 'UGG by Degrees' is included in the Galway Poetry Trail on Galway University campus. In 2020, *Two Notes for Home* – a two-part radio documentary, compiled and presented by Werner Lewon, on *The Life and Work of Terry McDonagh, The Modern Bard of Cill Aodáin*. His latest poetry collection, 'Two Notes for Home' – published by Arlen House – September 2022. He returned to live in County Mayo in 2019. www.terry-mcdonagh.com



ABOUT SOLITUDE AND SILENCE

As a solitary person among many,
I can't help thinking
about fields of silver as I swim
in granaries of helpless ideas
that stick to me. I fight them off,
try to avoid slippery banana skins
when trading at markets
that few attend and, afterwards,
dragging weary bones
back to rooms lining up to be lit
as children hiss and dance on spray and air
in a jungle of high seas.

How simple and complex our world is.
It keeps us happy and grave
in formality and fate – we're
tossed from root to horizon
until age and caution take over
at crossings and kerbs – no longer
strutting at large or searching
for secrets in bewildering shapes,
and if there are nasty noises about,
rain and wind will hush them
because it's about fields of silver
and growing into solitude and silence.

Terry McDonagh

EDUCATION OUCH!

I was only four or five when school started to insist
on tribute to a life without dreams. Tone down child.

I, who had shared lanes with butterflies and slithered
along hedgerows with blackbirds to arrive on time

in shoes bulging with squelch and sucking sound.
Behave started on page one. I was a solitary fighter

with a pocket full of stones, being trimmed to fill
a front-pew suit as well as any saint or neighbour.

I learned page after page by heart and grew out
of jumping about on cloud nine extravaganza.

Against a shroud of statues and epics, I became
unprepared for the hacks and chips of what to do

when bewildered and happy. I learned rules. A lady
couldn't be asked to strip during singing lessons

and I convinced myself that slurping and slobbering
when licking a plate, should be frowned upon and

as I didn't know which smile suited, I'd fling my feet
on the table to be funny and walk about naked to shock.

I'd wanted to be good craic, a bit of a lad – misbehave
but I'd usually revert to type, and nod to the dictum:

*never get above yourself
or speak out of turn in gatherings.*

Behave. Atone. Conform. Keep taking the tablets
and smile at other Sunday-morning dog-walkers.

I'd always wanted my fill of magic stones, shenanigans
and skipping like an itinerant antelope among trees. I did.

*Daydreamer.
Daydreamer.
Daydreamer.*

Thankfully, the west wind came to my rescue
dropping droplet-potions on me and

I rejoiced keeping them secret to float my feet
to horizons where oceans grew – to where

longboats appeared out of nowhere whistling
and singing of places where colours learned to fly.

I'd sifted through tests, crawled on beds of nails
and missed magic along hedgerows – except

those shadows in threatening holy attire
and demons under heavenly influence.

I became honourable, bursting with self-denial,
believing, conforming and atoning for a time – only.

These days, I close my eyes to see horses galloping
on the wild sea or rolling in flat on white foam

while I wriggle happily with carefree fish.
My learning had to be learned later.

Anthony Lawrence has published sixteen books of poems and a novel. His poetry collection, *Headwaters* (Pitt Street Poetry), won the 2017 Prime Minister's Award for Poetry. He has won many other awards including the Ginkgo Prize, the Peter Porter Poetry Prize, The Gwen Harwood Memorial Prize and the inaugural Judith Wright Calanthe Award. His work has previously appeared in *The Rialto*, *Prole*, *Magma*, *The Moth* and *Poetry* (Magazine). He lives in Moreton Bay, Queensland.



THE KOOKABURRA

I am fourteen, halfway across a metal pipe
I gained access to after climbing over
a fantail of rusted spikes - a deterrent

only for those who can resist a risk.
Below, a river, on the far bank, my friend,
shouting encouragement or abuse,

it's hard to tell from fifty years away.
If I sound like a time-obsessed observer
of the past, it's because poetry stopped me

on the way home from school and said
'Sign here where it says *Your memory*
is now the property of Imagination & Co.'

My friend swears he wasn't there,
but I can hear him and see, above his head,
a kookaburra, its face angled

like the one I shot with an air rifle,
its blood dripping from the end of its beak
before it fell. I have known disgrace.

Anthony Lawrence

A FOX ON THE FLATS

While digging for worms on the mud flats,
 the moon new and dark, the worms
 segmented cord in a tin,
 a man turned to find a fox, its eyes
 a red flash in the beam of his headlamp.
 His pulse changed gears, and there
 was a heaviness in his chest
 as though a living thing had found
 somewhere in need of treading down,
 in circles, before sleep.
 He switched the lamp off then turned
 it on again. The fox was gone.
 He went to where it had been and found
 paw prints filled with water
 and starlight like powdered frost.
 There were other things worthy
 of his attention: bloodworms, bivalves
 that write difficult code and verse
 in mud, the afterglow of a sail, blown in
 from the Continental Shelf.
 A fox barked, twice, once to put down
 a vocal marker in the world, and again
 to answer itself.

FIELDS

I rarely leave a field unvisited, morphometrically speaking.
 This extends to the vanishing-point glow of runway lights,
 carcinoma-seeding beds like radio-active sarcophagi
 in tanning salons, and sub-zero cocktail bars, with drinkers
 in snow-mobile suits lounging on blocks of ice.
 When I have passed them without entry, which is a poor
 stand-in for *intervention*, such as when my circadian rhymes
 fail to marry *comatose* with *induce* in a full-throated way,
 I accept illumination in lieu of a rural expanse: cricket ovals
 where shadows are cast in four directions, or a golf driving range,
 at night, the grass sewn and bulbed with narcotic fungi.
 When I return to fields for the olfactory gift and overload
 of fauna like the red, downwind, ink-and-brush vision
 of a fox going to ground, or the swish and tatter of pheasant
 beaten from cover by the flash-drive of cars on backroads,
 the game-scent drift into air softens to a scene from *Water-*
ship Down with its clearances and erosion like landslip scars
 in starlight. Sometimes, craving the open plan narrative
 of words instead of a smallholding I am drawn to the poems
 of Patrick Kavanagh, who understood that headstones, seen
 through gaps in a wall, tell more about the dead than any
 epitaph you stop to read for too long on a cemetery walk.
 As for my own entry to a cutting in a field or mantle
 of reef my ashes might darken like cloud shadow, permission
 is unspoken and universal. Please don't rhyme my name
 with anything like *leeward* or *terminal*.

Tricia Dearborn is an award-winning poet, writer and editor. She has published four books of poetry: *Autiochemistry* (University of Western Australia Publishing, 2019), *She Reconsiders Life on the Run* (International Poetry Studies Institute Chapbooks, 2019), *The Ringing World* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2012) and *Frankenstein's Bathtub* (Interactive Press, 2001). Her work is widely represented in literary journals, and in anthologies including *Fishing for Lightning: The spark of poetry*, *The Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry*, and *Contemporary Australian Poetry*. She has been a guest poetry editor for literary journals including *Rabbit 31: The Science Issue* in 2020, and a judge for the University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize. She also writes fiction, and was the winner of the international 2021 Neilma Sidney Short Story Prize. Tricia is currently completing a new poetry collection with the support of a grant from Create NSW. She lives in Sydney, Australia with her wife, who is also a writer.



THE LONG MILES

maybe you know them, maybe you've walked them
those long bleak miles

where there is neither pleasure
nor the prospect of pleasure

nor any memory of what pleasure or prospects
were or are

but one day you may find yourself washing up
with your phone in your back pocket

and the Mozart 'Recordare' in your ears
thrilling to its power, moved to tears

actually singing along, knowing at last
that no matter how long your heart

is cleaved from the life of the world
beauty will wait for you

Tricia Dearborn

Jo Lyons is a poet, artist and editor. Born and raised in Wollongong, New South Wales, she now lives and works on Gadigal land, Sydney. She has worked as an editor for leading Australian publishers and institutions, including Allen & Unwin, Pan Macmillan, the Powerhouse Museum and Sydney University Press. Jo has worked with a wide range of authors and creatives such as Bruce Pascoe, Vanessa Berry, Delia Falconer, Samuel Wagan Watson, Akira Isogawa, Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson. Her poetry was shortlisted for the 2023 Arts Queensland Val Vallis Award and has been featured in *Cordite Poetry Review*. Jo is currently working on a poetry-photography collaboration with photographer Riste Andrievski for the group exhibition *Visions of the Illawarra* to be held at Wollongong Art Gallery in 2024.



EAGLES' DANCE

What would it feel like
to float together on the wind,

soaring with slow deep beats
of the wing on warm currents

of air, whirling away from
the world we know—

or think we do—to one
where we can always be

our true feathered selves,
soft and light, dipping

and diving, circling each
other in the climb to new

heights, weaving invisible
patterns through the sky

beyond anyone else's reading,
taking turns to guide the other

ever higher, further, forever
switching places,

I lead you follow now
you lead I follow

in a constant dance
among the clouds

Jo Lyons

AUBADE TO HOME

I wake up with poetry in my head,
see my currawong swing into the pine tree.
I saw it knock feathers off a rainbow
lorikeet yesterday and keep flying.

I have only three weeks left in this house;
I sit on my perfect balcony,
just the birds and me—drinking Irish tea
out of my favourite green bird cup, Owly.

To sleep, to dream, to keep the dream in reach,
to quote Kae Tempest riffing on old Shakespeare.
I don't think I've woken up yet, even
though I've had a whole lifetime to practise.

Sun hits the pines, the currawong lets out a song.
Cicadas chime in, thinking summer's come;
they have another think coming—the rain
will be back, and here to stay.

Cicadas don't want to know, start in stereo.
A plane rumbles overhead, they're back again.
Currawong zips in and snaps the loudest
cicada in its beak—a moment's silence

from its peers as they decide what to do.
After a beat they carry on, seem
to have learnt nothing from experience.
Another plane flies in low, another train pulls up

nearby at the station. We keep repeating
the stuff from before but the old world
is gone, the whole earth on borrowed
time, yet we keep moving.

FOLLOW THE BIRDS

On Minnamurra Lane

Tune into the birds, you'd said, or something like it;
they told me to get in touch with you but I don't know how.

Do I take wing and fly over, land on the doorstep, knock on
your pane? Clouds I can read better, I can't decipher chatter.

I rise up the hill on the scent of cinnamon hay for answers.
Can lorikeets deliver my message? Too brash, such racket.

The friarbird in the coral tree? Its monstrous face alarms me.
Could the eastern rosellas do it: just three sweet tweets.

Not ducks, can do without quacks; silvered notes fall
on me, grey fantails flitting too fast for me to catch.

Up the top, I just let go. Blossoms alight on branches;
the lane holds such treasure but turn around and the hills

roll over to the sea in true green pleasure, as toy cows
cast slant shadows from gentle sun on velvet grass.

Come down south! We'll glide along the coast where kestrels
wait for you on carved posts, welcoming you to Wodi-Wodi

and Dharawal land. We'll enter rainforest, give out some sassafras,
stem the leaves of bleeding hearts, chase lyrebird tail and song.

A sudden whip cracks in the gully fringed with frog creaks – a whipbird
in the light glow zinging over pigeon's whomping bass note.

Then once, the call is answered: the reply ends in beautiful shatter
through the air, tinkling like glass. *You just need to be there.*

I soar back down the lane, turn my own beak northwards.

Daragh Byrne is a Sydney-based Irish poet. Recently his work has appeared in Poetry Wales, Southword, Crannóg, Abridged, Skylight 47, Wild Court and One Hand Clapping. His work has placed or been commended in the Poetry London, Winchester and Allingham Prizes, amongst others. In 2022, he was shortlisted for the Val Vallis award and was a finalist in the Fool for Poetry International Chapbook Competition. He runs the Sydney Poetry Lounge, a regular open-mic night.



THE DECISION

When she thought of her history as a bell-curve with a narrow standard deviation, the day itself was a tall spike that sundered the expanses of *prior* and *since*, on an otherwise placid lifeline. That morning, the breeze blew from its bad side, and flattened her hair with a first intimation that the sense of herself she had long been so sure of could be ripped from the mast of her being and flap in a gale of dissemblance.

In the days immediately afterwards, she was relieved that there were few witnesses. She mended herself invisibly, stitching her tears, wearing her conscience like a favourite undershirt. As the long years ushered her through, she sometimes gave thanks that those who felt a nameless narrowing on their path — at times when they expected smoother progress — would never have known to condemn her.

In her later years, when she walked past churches, she'd sense the tug of a faith that was no longer hers. Those holy men who milk the instinct to confess, to the same ends they lid our more urgent instincts, would goad her to share her act beyond herself. She held less tightly to their notion of sin, so she clasped her decision to the hub of her breastbone, and coddled it like a taciturn child, until they put her in the coffin and buried them both.

Daragh Byrne

Esther Ottaway's poems have been shortlisted in the international poetry prizes, the Montreal, Bridport, MPU International, and Mslexia, and she has won the Tim Thorne Prize for Poetry, the Tom Collins Poetry Prize, the Queensland Poetry Festival Ekphrasis Award and other prizes. Often powerfully bringing to light the experiences of women, her work is widely published, including in *Rattle* (US) and *Mslexia* (UK), and anthologised in Australia and New Zealand, notably in *Thirty Australian Poets* (UQP). Her acclaimed new collection, *She Doesn't Seem Autistic* (Puncher & Wattmann), creatively illuminates the hidden experiences of women and girls on the autism spectrum, and her previous collection, *Intimate, low-voiced, delicate things* (Puncher & Wattmann), which explores family and its origins, motherhood, love and the loss of love, won both the Poetry category and People's Choice in the Tasmanian Literary Awards.

READING YOUR POEMS ABOUT YOUR DEAD SON, QUICKLY

"And Jesus gave him to his mother." – Luke 7:15

I am reading your words
hungrily, because I need to know
what it is like
even as I pray never to know
what it is like. We face each other
in the mirror of motherhood:
you are speaking to me
from the land of no-longer,
you have your theodolite out,
your sextant, and barehanded
you are mapping negative space,
every millimetre of the white room.
I hear you speaking with your cut-out tongue,
you, bare and bloodied under a granite moon
that travels with you everywhere,
you, bearing down
as he is born, you raising a man,
you taking the measure of horror –
I am shamed in my barefaced greed
for my daughter's life. I splash water on my face
and it pools on your mirror-cheeks,
tracks along your jaw where his baby hand
stroked your skin. How can you bear
what cannot be borne? My body says
to gather you up as if you were my daughter,
tuck you under my chin, and hold
my firm, calm heartbeat
against your flayed bones – a paltry offering,
viviparous mother-instinct all I have.
But I face you. If listening could re-create, I would
give him to you as Christ would: whole, vital.



Esther Ottaway

VAN GOGH'S *Sunflowers*

I'd seen them for decades, on postcards, on tea towels and tote bags, on plates and coasters, I'd seen them on charity leaflets, in pixels and algorithms, so dowdy in their vase, unprepossessing, flat colours of pigeon or scree, and in truth, it was Monet's gardens for which I had flown a day's journey. I didn't care whether I would see them here, knowing them brown and irrelevant – what could be announced by a bunch of sunflowers? But when I saw them, morning light streamed from the sunflowers and struck my face and shoulders, my long-stemmed neck, the light bathed the flowers of my breasts – the lovers' light rippling through a stone window, the tender light of citrus in a mother's bowl, the larrikin light in the crest of a young cockatoo, the maverick light of gorse-blossom down a midlands hillside, the life-force light of an opened egg, the God-blessed light of Solomon in his glory, and I saw that the real thing – the truth of things – shines. In my selfie the flowers look brown, but the light is in my eyes.



Six Sunflowers by Vincent van Gogh. *Sunflowers* (F459), second version: royal-blue background. Oil on canvas, 98 × 69 cm.

Rico Craig is an award-winning poet, writer and workshop facilitator. His poetry has been awarded prizes or shortlisted for the Montreal Poetry Prize, Val Vallis Prize, Newcastle Poetry Prize, Dorothy Porter Poetry Prize and University of Canberra Poetry Prize. Bone Ink (UWAP), his first poetry collection, was winner of the 2017 Anne Elder Award and shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Prize 2018. His most recent collections *Our Tongues Are Songs* (2021) and *Nekhau* (2022) are published by Recent Work Press.

DREAM OF BITTER SEASONS

Bark with the dogs, help me
herd sheep toward the fence line. They were better
days, seasons that disappeared like lies flooding
for a fissure. Our arms were outspread, our noises
ancestral. We worked a flock through dust,
toward the abstraction
a gate submits to the mind.

I have woken from this dream before,
at different points, with sheep shorn to skin,
with the onset of metal ramps,
a truck in idle threat, the sharp tang of burnt
wool. Times when the air is alight
with a fury of buzzing flies, men speaking
in numbers over braying flesh.

On other nights the boat is pulling
away from shore, an industrial prison,
ballast of blood, hoofed life afloat
on salt water. In the dream we watch
what we know leave a wake,
grey water folding away from itself.



Rico Craig. Photo credit: pax valentine.

LEAVING A SUMMER

a curse to the air / bodies surrounded by drouth / empty sky / doom's eucalyptus
smoulder / memories provoke fire / she's planning to bury her passport in a mound
of new leaves / this is how people relinquish their only home /

the brown roadside
helter-skelter beneath their feet
smoke
dull orange light
the laughter of planes leaving a small airport
rising from the earth
her father turning the ignition and pulling away
her plane lifting

each day she will rise into an eclipse / light smoked into new colours / she will
breathe the burning earth / the smoke will enter ears / nose / mouth / she will drift
/ until she becomes transparent / and longer taints air / with the scent of what they
have been /

CINDER IN OUR CHESTS

If we are friends I have collapsed
in the crook of your arm,
we have crossed continents together,
you are free to filch coins
from my pockets, we have mocked
clouds as they wail against the dawn.

If we are friends every time we meet
we play
a game of three objects
paper
scissors
rock.

It will take us three tries
to break a tie. Even at the end
we will be creatures flashing hands
at each other — fist, flat, fork —
cinder in our chests.
We will clutch like newborns
blind to everything
the next day threatens to teach us.

If we are friends there will be trains
waiting in many cities. And, even strangers
will be able to see
I bear the vigour of your name
chiseled in code
on every heartbeat.

Judith Beveridge has published seven books of poetry. She was poetry editor of *Meanjin* for 10 years and also taught poetry writing for 16 years at post-graduate level at the University of Sydney. Her books have won major prizes including the 2019 Prime Minister's Award for Poetry. She has also won the Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal and the Christopher Brennan Award for excellence in literature. Her new volume *Tintinnabulum* will be published by Giramondo Publishing in 2024. She lives in Sydney.



DEAD POSSUM

For days the possum's stink pulled the blowflies in—
they must have quit their garbage tips, their food dumps,
their compost, their public bins, their dog droppings
and other festering filth to spawn here and devil-sing.

I eased the carcass out from the slats in the gate—
then carried it away with a spade but the fly-pack
followed, a frenzied paparazzi, that just kept assembling—
though of course they were simply engendering

new larval life, a writhing maggot mass to cleanse
the carcass, turning over the next life cycle
in the possum's flesh—but more and more kept
swarming in, thick and obdurate, with a greenish

oil slick glint, and intoning feverishly like high voltage
when it bleeds from power cables, satanic twanging
at frenetic tempo, demonic tremolos musing on
damnation in the heat, the cursed whines of old

blues harmonicas doing time at the cross-roads—
anthems for an apocalypse in which I couldn't help
but foresee thousands and thousands of maggots
creaming, risotto-like, inside my own half-eaten head.

Judith Beveridge

TWO BROTHERS

Bibo and Jakov lived with six cats in their green fibro house. The two brothers worked on the docks—they always said ‘stevedoring’—refused to be called wharfies or dockers.

I could hear chains clanking, a sea wind blowing through an open hatch, tools cutting through metal as they spoke about their waterside lives, the cats winding through

their legs like smoky veils, sometimes sunning on the porch, paws lazily palping at mice in their dreams. At knock-off the brothers came straight home to tend the garden

and feed the cats. They’d often give my mother potted herbs, plates of pastries stuffed with cashews and dates, boiled apples filled with walnuts. They’d give me glasses of spiced

milk and let me play with their cats while they took showers to wash away the insults, mostly from labourers with fists the size of blacksmiths’ hammers, tattoos flowing down

their arms like an outer network of veins, profanities about disputes, scabs, and immigrants steaming off their tongues as they clustered around the pubs like drain flies after work.

One late afternoon we heard Bibo and Jakov out on the porch, their voices explosive with anger and grief. Five cats: Nada, Jamina, Enas, Feriz and Malika, named after family members killed

in Sarajevo, were hanging by their tails from the clothesline, drowned. It was someone’s cruelty—perhaps a neighbour, or one of the dockers who didn’t like the garlic, bean soup,

or stuffed peppers on their breath, or the language they used to express a longing for spruce and birch forests, the scent of orange bellflowers, the taste of bramble gin, the calls

of the marsh tit, the river warbler, and nuthatches that build mud nests and climb down trees head-first . . . I can still see those cats swinging on the line, dripping like old black grease cloths.

AT BARRACK POINT

for Phillip

Today the weather is blustery, the chop is a ruckus of plucked feathers, so many waves on white knuckle rides to the shore. Surfers tumble, their boards scutter upwards, backwards, shoreward—then they're hit by another avalanching weight, a congested torsion of water that pounds into the cliff, sprays up like a flock of startled gulls. Do you remember the first time we were here, when you stood by yourself at the edge, you wanted to feel with your toes the tide's drag the moon's gravid haul.

Then we sat on the sand, you were mesmerized by the flow of waves as if a magician were pulling endless scarves from a sleeve. Now I watch a boy, five or six, arms aloft, rock hopping. Startled his mother calls telling him to watch his footing but her voice is lost among the dubstep of the surf. He tires, comes down from the rocks and I can almost feel the sweetness of their held hands. Now he steps on a cluster of cunjevoi, each expulsion of water as amusing to him as the prank flatulence

from a whoopee cushion. In three days it will be your 25th birthday and still I want to tell you to be careful, that disaster can be a loose stone, a rickety stair, but your days are beyond my charge now. I can only watch you go into the tumble of time, into the tidal bore of fate that can work behind our backs to deliver setbacks, mishaps, who knows what adversity, a wave generated elsewhere but reaching us eventually, no matter whose hand we hold, how careful we are, no matter where we stand.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Alison Gorman is a poet and teacher, living in Sydney on Wallumedegal land. Her poetry has appeared in *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *Southerly*, *Mslexia*, *The Honest Ulsterman* and *Popshot Quarterly* and two Australian anthologies. She was awarded a 2023 Varuna Residential Fellowship. Her pamphlet submission was a finalist in the 2022 Fool for Poetry International Competition. In 2022, she was short-listed for the Mslexia poetry prize competition, the Wells Festival of Literature poetry competition and the ACU poetry prize. In 2016 she won the Dorothy Porter poetry prize. She has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Sydney. When Alison is not writing poetry, she teaches creative writing to children at Inkling Writing Studio which she founded in 2018.



COWLICK

For Will

Tucked in a tussle of fireweed and kikuyu, he could be mistaken for a boulder or charred log, except for the quiver of dew lacing the tips of his ears. Cutting the engine, I watch his breath mist from glistening nostrils into mauve light. The dog noses my jacket for warmth. We watch the calf raise his clumsy head from folded forelegs. Black pearls veiled beneath an awning of eyelashes. Velvet ears cup the air, listening for his mother, as she walks a steady rhythm back to him. For the first time, I understand the word—*cowlick*. The dark whorl of fur, styled into an abundant toupee by his mother's black tongue before she hid him in the grass.

I longed to keep you safe, tried to hide your swirling mischief, buttoned you into clean shirts, pulled up your long grey socks. Wiping milk from your boy mouth didn't stop your stream of questions, nor your classroom wheel of chaos, all the red pen teacher notes. Please forgive my instincts. It was a doctor who told me, it was time to pull away. To let you graze among the apple gums and run freely on strong legs.

those cold school mornings
warm spittle on my fingers
tames flyaway curls

Alison Gorman

DINNER PARTY, 1973

My mother bends to place a tray of devils on horseback in the oven. Snug prunes swaddled with bacon and fastened with toothpicks. Heat pours from the open door and ripples the silk of her paisley culottes. She's a kaleidoscope in tangerine and gold. Baby vol-au-vents stand ready, their asparagus resting in bechamel. *Careful, they're hot*, she says, and passes me one on a napkin. I sit on the kitchen bench, swing my legs, and watch her place the rest on a wooden tray, tufted with parsley. I bite into buttery casing and shards of pastry scatter over my pyjamas.

And this is where she's been all day—here in the kitchen piping boiled Dijon yolks into rubbery white halves and flecking them with caviar. Scooping and chopping the sweet flesh of pineapple to create her signature rice salad. She's been broiling and braising blanquette de veau, which she'll keep warm through dinner on her electric buffet tray. And there are spatchcocks in baskets, wearing tiny paper slippers. But I'm thinking about the dessert hidden deep in the fridge. Chocolate mousse and a biscuit torte. I want to stay up late enough to watch brandy burst into a ruffle of blue flame on crepes.

Meanwhile, my father is in the good sitting room, preparing the bar in his teak cabinet: stuffed olives, toothpicks and beer nuts. Freshly showered and pungent with Old Spice, his shirt tight and patterned with sunsets, palm trees and a half-naked lady. He sings along a little out of key and dances an awkward cha-cha, while Sinatra croons a bossa nova from the HiFi. *Tall and tan and young and lovely*. He drops three clinks of ice into a shaker and shakes, unscrews and pours in vermouth and gin—a splash of this, a splash of that—then strains his martini into a glass.

Even then, I sensed a devil riding. The way my father sank into his favourite armchair before the guests arrived and, just like that, with the plop of an olive, his work was done.

THE URN

after Sharon Olds

My mother sits with her back to a locked cabinet of display urns. Teardrops, hearts and silver birds rest on polished glass shelves. We are talking options with Dianne. She slides a Simply Beautiful brochure across the desk. There is a vase embossed with butterflies and blossom, *our most popular urn*, or a hand-crafted box in maple or oak, engraved with a seascape. Mum is perched on the edge of a beige tub chair. Her worn hands grip the brakes of her walker. She looks past Dianne who shows us an ocean sunset painted onto a scattering-tube. There are other designs too—ascending doves, a field of forget-me-nots and a starry night. *Take your time*. Dianne smooths her black skirt and leaves to collect paperwork and my father's remains. Bronze plaques stud a memorial lawn outside the window, unfurling in a green sweep toward the Garden of Serenity. Blousy pink roses bow their heads in the rain. Dianne returns with a blue box, the kind you might purchase shoes in. Mum stifles a noise, a soft stridor breath. Dianne places my father on the desk. We don't choose an urn or a vase or a carved box or a tube. I tap a PIN into a mobile cash machine. Mum wheels herself to the front entrance. As we head out under a shared umbrella, I am startled by the sudden weight of a father in my arms.

Damen O'Brien is a multi-award-winning poet based in Brisbane. Damen's prizes include The Moth Poetry Prize, the Peter Porter Poetry Prize and the Newcastle Poetry Prize. He has been published in journals all over the world, including New Ohio Review, Poetry Wales, Mississippi Review and Overland. Damen's first book of poetry, *Animals With Human Voices*, is available through Recent Work Press. He is currently working on his next book.



BECAUSE

This is your Earth: a warm flannel cave of pumpkin heads and cartoon witches. From your yawn you point out inconsistencies in Harry Potter, fatal flaws in the laws of wizarding that threaten to pull down that edifice of dubious literature. We debate with the cunning of wisemen and precision of magistrates over the iconography of wands, the hagiography of incantation, even as you drift easily into the other universe of logical illogic which are dreams. You ask: *but how? How could he? How could Dumbledore...?* and like an apologist, a prophet, a spokesman for Big Oil standing beside a black slick beach, I attempt to piece together an orderly scaffold, a Great Big Theory of Everything, like two Popes meeting to reconcile Eastern and Western churches. I want to tell you that it doesn't matter, that we argue over the lesser work of a discredited author, that Hagrid and Hermione and the rest don't need to make sense, can't make sense, that you should surrender to sleep, but I may as well stand before the Court of Arthur and predict an eclipse, I may just as well speak to a sceptic of science, to an agnostic of faith, I may as well speak to you a truth: there is no law that holds beyond a nation's gate, there is no rule that binds the ignorant, no word that stays the strong, none that I've found. When you grow up, perhaps you'll find something, some temporary thing that might serve. The News is growling somewhere in the house, speaking its own dismal tales of confusion and doubt. My wine warms in its bloody bulb. It's getting late and this is the Earth that we are given. *That's magic*, I tell you, just as someone long ago must have spoken of their God manifest as swan or bull. *Because magic lets him do it.*

Damen O'Brien

LUCKY

At saturation point on Crescent Head,
 rain slicking my hat brim down.
 Mud, ti tree tailings and bitter iron
 from the mined topology of the coast
 washing and staining the river thick.
 From the shelter of caravans and camper-vans facing
 the spuming and sputtering sea,
 fishermen and surfers line up and carve up
 their waves in arcane measures of precedence.
 On the hard fourth hole with the right dog-leg
 down by the weather-board golf-shop with its failed pros,
 children toboggan down the fairway on old surfboards.
 A seamed knucklebone from the aboriginal graves
 swallowed by tourist rentals and car wrecks,
 has eroded to the surface under the pressure
 of the laden, bilious water table.
 Down at the Local, after tossing back a last beer,
 a bus-driver waded into a cold rip in his boxers,
 and isn't found, until the mud shifted
 and the sodden grass dried out.
 But before that I stood on the cliff face of Little Knobby
 and pointed out to my son a pod of black dolphins
 cutting across the foam chasing fish,
 we peered into the curl of each wave,
 and I told him that he was lucky.

A WAS FOR AARDVARK

Who knows if the aardvark still exists
 or if it ever did – I've never seen one –
 invented to prop up the opening vowel
 in dictionaries and alphabetical lists,

even ahead of the erstwhile armadillo,
 with which I fancy the creature resembles,
 its bloody fangs bared in exhilaration as
 it swings through the forests of Borneo

after ants and apes and other aleph
 animals. Or so I'm told. I wouldn't know
 one if I met it on some dark night,
 rooting in alley, aviary, apiary or depth

of darkest mine, or fishing in a stream.
 The world heats and all the animals are going –
 aghast, appalled or in apathetic extinction
 and what remains is mostly silent, unseen,

so too, perhaps the aardvark in its flight.
 I've sometimes thought I've heard it,
 woken from my dreams to glowing eyes,
 its lonely shriek shattering the night.

Daniel Lusk is author of several poetry collections and other books, most recently *Every Slow Thing*, poems (Kelsay Books 2022) and *Farthings*, eBook (Yavanika Press 2022). Besides appearances online in *Live Encounters*, his work is published widely in print journals and his genre-bending essay "Bomb" (*New Letters*) was awarded a Pushcart Prize. His sonic poem, "Toccatà for Spoons," was among Honorable Mentions chosen by Billy Collins for the 2023 Fish Poetry Prize (Ireland). He lives in Vermont (USA).



IS THAT ALL THERE IS...TO A POEM?

after a song by jazz artist and composer Peggy Lee

Old poet foresees questions of veracity. What must a poem have? Or do? Or be?

Say it aloud: Will it sing itself (I wonder) off the page?
Does it skip or trip along? Or amble, so we abide the pace?

Never mind formalities: sonnet, sestina, villanelle—the box. The hidden tongue-and-groove of tanka and haiku that go without saying.

Vaunted compression? Not only for the sake of brevity, but understatement: leaning into grief or joy. The shadow sense of a reader's mind: To wit: a tingle between the eyebrows.

A poem may merely tease—"bark" of a dog or tree. Or flirt with meaning—"sally" for a willow or a girl.

Listen: there is saffron on the poet's bow.

Have we tale or yarn? Some allusion, connotation, hint?
Or lyric—an echo, a lisp, a lingering...a whisper of citrus or shadow of plum in the wine. Aftertaste of the holy crust.
The little rift of silence after.

Daniel Lusk. Photo credit: Angela Patten.

MORE FARTHINGS & HA'PENNIES

Philosophy

Lift this knot into contemplation.

Exaltation

No one dances with the dervish
and he sleeps alone.

Consonant

Listening to Schumann,
"Adagio for Horn and Piano,"
I hang laundry in the back garden.

Palimpsest

The scent, the hour...

Fleurs

As much as your snowdrops of March and tulips
of April, I loved her moist what-have-yous.

In the Kingdom of Gourmands

When heroes came, we ate them.

Boys

They were not thieves but adventurers in want of a boat.

Hummingbird at the Cardinal Flowers

Little flirty thirty-cups

Sisters under the Skin

The bark beetle. Now there's an artist and a nobody.

Requiem in Steel

—for sculptor Kate Pond

Blessed the light at the end of the day.

Ella Jeffery is a poet, editor and critic. Her debut collection of poems, *Dead Bolt*, won the Puncher & Wattmann Prize for a First Book of Poems and the Anne Elder Award, and was shortlisted for the Dame Mary Gilmore Award. Her poetry has appeared widely in journals and anthologies including *Best Australian Poems*, *HEAT*, *Meanjin*, *Griffith Review*, *Island* and *Southerly*. She is the recipient of a Queensland Writers Fellowship, the Mick Dark Fellowship for Environmental Writing, and the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award. She lives in Brisbane.



LITTLE COVE

I am always going back to Little Cove.
Two weeks, the Pacific splayed

in the hotel window, winding mindlessly
over the rocks. Every day planes sloped

through the fresh crush of sky
against whitefinned ocean, came closer,

seemed to be veering down. The huge
sound scoured my mind. All night I held

still. Through the wall a woman's
strange laugh chinked the dark.

Now, in this rainy house, I hear a plane
overhead and my mind capsizes

back to the room where I was always
almost crushed in the wreckage

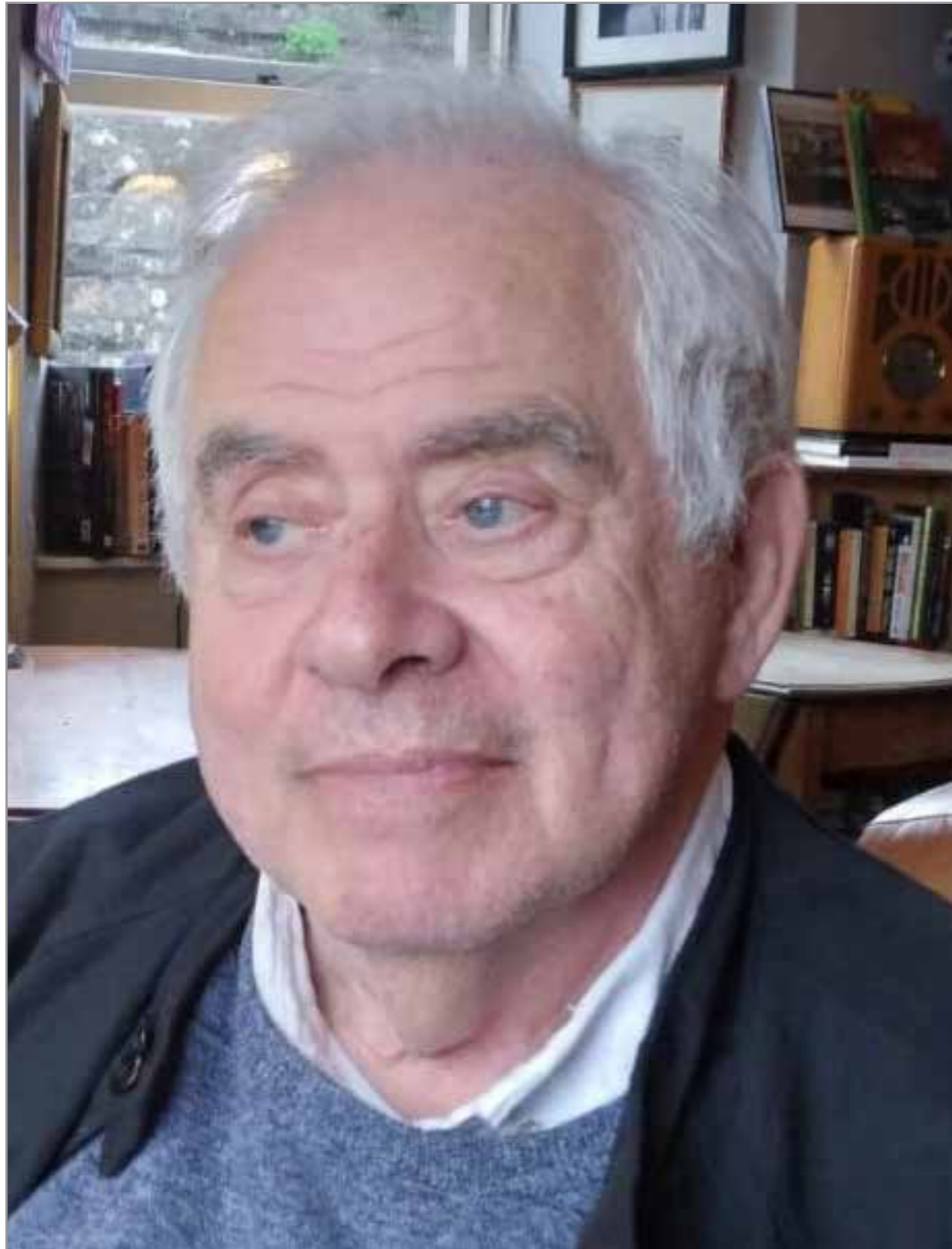
of that white room – how the others
could go on eating chicken and chips

or washing sand from their feet
in the bathtub, not minding that every day

we came so close, we came so close
and survived.

Ella Jeffery

Richard W. Halperin's poems are published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher and by Lapwing/Belfast. Salmon has listed *Selected & New Poems*, Introduction by Joseph Woods, for Autumn 2023; it will draw upon poems from Mr. Halperin's four Salmon and sixteen Lapwing collections, on the occasion of his 80th birthday. A new Lapwing, *The Painted Word*, will also appear in 2023.



THE BOOK OF RUTH

Every day in my neighbourhood in Paris
I pass the house, unchanged as far as I
can tell, with which Edith Wharton closes
The Age of Innocence. Her protagonist,
a middle-aged American man,
has been invited to that house
because his young years await him there.
He decides not to enter. In Wharton,
an entire novel can be written about
'decides.' She did not admire Henry James
for nothing. The man does not enter because
his young years await him there.

I must call this poem 'The Book of Ruth.'
Artists are in the grip of something.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Joseph Woods.

MASHA

for Paul T Dillon

The days pass quickly in the country.
 My friend is sleeping in the long grass.
 The sun strikes the picnic table with the faded
 checked cloth, and I write you, my dear Masha,
 because why not? I remember when we played duets
 at the piano, you playing and singing, I listening,
 three make a duet, my dear Masha, as you now know,
 I too one day. It is good here, it might be the time of
 George Eliot and Turgenev, it might be two minutes ago
 before I thought of you this time again. The sun
 is setting across the mountains, their name is irrelevant,
 and I am using my best composition book style to
 hide myself, as it were, in a novel or classic,
 as my friend sleeps in the long grass like an old
 dog and will shake himself and wake up soon,
 as I hope I will, my dear Masha, but I have to
 sleep first before that, like powder in the long grass,
 long after this day is blown away, and then it will be,
 I hope, we all in the country again, playing duets
 the three of us, but I must stop writing now, before
 I clench anything and spoil the flow of my
 composition book. And so it is evening now, and I go
 inside the cottage to turn on my lamp, my friend already
 in the kitchen. Click I try to go, but I see nothing but
 black. 'Ah,' says the lamp, 'I too used to work.'
 Time for tea now.

PASTORAL

One of my former bosses was Icelandic.
 He had studied with Piaget. All the languages
 he spoke, he spoke elegantly and kindly.
 As a boy in Iceland, he had been a shepherd.

I listen, often, to Klemperer conducting
 the Philharmonia in Beethoven's Sixth,
 especially the dance of the shepherds.
 The producer of the sessions said to Klemperer
 that he was conducting it too slowly,
 that the movement was marked *allegro*.

Klemperer responded, You will get used
 to it, the shepherds are dancing,
 if the music is faster they can't dance.

In his hands, the music is as fragile as lace
 and as earthy as earth, as oil is poured on
 my head and a table set before me in
 the presence of my enemies.

I am a city chap, but my soul isn't.

And if the universe, when it came to be,
 smelt of new-mown grass?
 How do I know it didn't?

A THING OF BEAUTY

for Scott Thornley and Shirley Blumberg

'... Some shape of beauty moves away the pall/
From our dark spirits.' John Keats, 'Endymion,'
Teignmouth, 10 April 1818

My parents had in common, before
their divorce and after, a love of beauty.
In her case, visual art, in his case,
classical music, in both their cases,
wonderful literature. These pulled away
the pall, these pull away the pall from me,
thank God. My wife had that, my friends
have that, so many strangers have that
next to whom I sit in concert halls
or stand next to in museums or leave
cinemas with, the cloud of the beautiful
still there when we find ourselves out on
the street again. 'You just keep writing
those beautiful poems,' my friend Raymond
once told me when we were both face down
in the borscht bowl over the latest senseless
cruelty in the world. Everything
however small or brief or lop-sided
in the kingdom of beauty is alive, kind
and assertive, as it points the way
to get to one more second of life.

Beauty finds *you*. To remember,
as I have this morning, the opening lines
of 'Endymion' and Keats's wonderful human
Preface, does me good, saves my life again
and we'll skip why. Especially, in his
Preface: 'The imagination of a boy is healthy,
and mature imagination of a man is healthy;
but there is a space of life between, in which
the soul is in a ferment, the character
undecided, the way of life uncertain'
Keats thinks that he is in the in-between
stage; that, if he lives longer, he will reach
imagination that is healthy and mature.
My dear chap, no one does.

A CERTAIN GENERATION

i.m. Grace Eldridge Halperin

To-night I look through an immense picture book. Nineteenth-century Russian paintings. Young czars-to-be, duchesses on horseback, peasants in sunset fields. I am still alive and can do such things. I feel like writing a letter about all this to my stepmother Grace. She was always very good at reading letters. She came from a certain generation of quiet graciousness.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Peter Boyle is a poet and translator of poetry living and working on Dharug land. He has ten books of poetry published and eight books as a translator of poetry from Spanish and French. His most recent collections are *Ideas of Travel* and *Notes Towards the Dreambook of Endings* (Vagabond Press, 2022 and 2021). In 2020 his book *Enfolded in the Wings of a Great Darkness* won the New South Wales Premier's Award for Poetry. His book *Ghostspeaking* also received the New South Wales Premier's Award in 2017. Other prize-winning books include *Apocrypha* (2009), *The Blue Cloud of Crying* (1997) and *Coming Home from the World* (1993). He has performed his poetry at International Poetry Festivals in Colombia, France, Venezuela, Macedonia, Canada, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Spain. His poems have been translated into Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Macedonian, Vietnamese, Korean and Russian. As a translator his books include *Anima* by Cuban poet José Kozler, *The Trees: Selected Poems of Eugenio Montejó* and *Three Poets: Olga Orozco, Marosa Di Giorgio and Jorge Palma*. In 2013 he was awarded the New South Wales Premier's Award for Literary Translation. He holds a Doctorate in Creative Arts from the University of Western Sydney.



AT THE RIVER

Sunday. Bright sun.
 Tomorrow you'll turn eight.
 You have already entered the water
 and stand waist-deep now in its blue quiet
 right where, any moment, the mud underfoot
 will plunge into swift cold currents.

Across the river's wide bend
 the water's shimmer, its long curve of light, settles
 exactly where you are standing, the furthest point
 the late morning sun reaches.
 Interweaving your fingers
 you cup your hands as if you were calling
 to unseen friends further out,
 caught up in your own delight to feel
 your breath rush through your hands
 to bounce reckless off the sky.

And you wait a moment
 as if your voice might come back to you
 from somewhere far across your life,
 rippling back from distant suburbs
 and unknown cities, fields and hillsides,
 from the joys, griefs and bewilderments,

as if one Sunday morning, aged seven,
 you'd gone fishing
 only to haul in the world
 which you couldn't know or see
 but somehow sensed echoing back
 like shadows into the blue
 circling stillness.

Peter Boyle

INSCRIPTIONS 5

In your gaze
water would go on
quietly sleeping through summer,
sharing its coolness with every leaf
that brushed its surface.

And, despite myself, I see you again
in black diadem and red knitted shawl
shivering at midday with a chill
that does not come from the sky
but from somewhere very far
in the earth's core.

PRAYER

I remember some Renaissance composer wrote
a Mass for the West Wind --
perhaps it was only the tune he had in mind
but why not dedicate a mass to the wind that comes
out of the unknown, unbounded ocean?

Sultry summer here and
the blazing quietude of mid-afternoon,
windless. The sea is far from me
though its waters lap across my memory.
No use asking for a cool breeze -- Aeolus, the wind god,
has built himself a deep cave to block
the fickle imprecations of humans.

A cathedral in Venice
dips its toes in the wash of liners --
the great hands of its doors
fall open to let the nimble
quick-spirited fish enter the gold-cloaked
chambers of its body.

I too ask
that I may find my way
into that citadel, to surface with the fish
in the cool waters of a sheltered pool,
held safe at the breath's
still centre.

Judith Nangala Crispin is a poet and visual artist living and working on unceded Yuin Country on the Australian Southern Tablelands. She is the author of two collections of poetry "The Myrrh-bearers" and "The Lumen Seed". Judith has served as poetry editor of the Canberra Times and was the winner of the 2020 Blake Prize for Poetry. She is a proud member of FNAWN and Oculi Collective.



THE DINGO FENCE

For Djon Mundine

The motorcycle and its travelling shadow are aliens in this flatness.
The horizon draws back, becomes a wide flat line. Slate-grey ranges breach
like submarines. The sky—eggshell blue.
Monet's clouds.

And everything is the road.

It bisects the landscape in a straight line, hundreds of kilometres long.
When it curves, it does so in a broad flat arc.

At night, the stars detach and become headlights.
Vulpecula and Lupus, constellations of the dog
are lights of an approaching roadtrain.

By day, there's powerlines, a wire fence stretching into nothing.
Sometimes tracks of dirt bikes or community cars—
figure eights, partly erased by salt.

But the road is primary. All forces converge there.

Last roadhouse after Elliot—a broken concrete camel lies on its side
near a cactus and a cage of budgerigars.

A tourist approaches in a Pajero with a bullock's skull strapped to the bonnet.
He slows then speeds away. A sign on the bowsers reads "closed indefinitely,
because of dingoes".

White people have been afraid of dingoes since Captain Cook.

continued overleaf...

Judith Nangala Crispin

THE DINGO FENCE *...contd*

A dingo can pass for a dog or a wolf but it's neither.
A dingo is a shapeshifter—sometimes a sparrow hawk,
an old man meandering in the road, a girl in a red dress.

They disguise themselves in mirage, in Fata Morgana—a Southern wind garrulous
with finches or heavy owls. When dingoes howl the whole landscape shakes.

Waterfalls appear in stony mountains.
Rain fills the dormant creeks.

A dingo can pass for a dog or a wolf.
It can enter your home as a pet, a rescue, cattle dog, an abandoned kelpie cross.

A dingo rotates its wrists to open doors, windows or locks.
It can enter your home with its strange golden eyes and watch you sleep.

Dingoes don't care if you typecast them as cowardly, promiscuous, vicious, or cunning.
They have heard that all before and they're still here.

Unlike a wolf, a dingo will hold your gaze. Unlike a dog, it holds your gaze
for a maximum of three seconds. Dingoes do not seek a window to your soul.
They see your soul already.

A person is a mutated dingo.
A dingo's nose is longer than a person's and its head is rounder.

White people have been afraid of dingoes since Captain Cook.

They built a dingo fence, spanning 5614 kilometers from the Darling Downs
to the cliffs of the Nullarbor. In their cowardice and cunning,
they built the world's longest fence.

No choice, they said, it's dingoes or the livestock.

Dingoes know evil has a scent like rotting metal, like meat and rusting tin—
An imperial aroma, blood libel of the sheep eaters.

The dingo fence does not keep dingoes out.
They run along its length hunting for a hole.
When they find one, they pass their babies through.

Eagles are caught in the wire. Kangaroos, misjudging a jump,
hang by their back legs until they die from exposure or shock.

Dingoes are hard to kill because of "hybrid vigour".

They can swivel their heads 180 degrees to look back along their spines.
When they hunt their ears turn like radar dishes.
One ear points forward and the other back.
A dingo could be tracking you now and you'd never know.

When they sleep, they keep one ear against the ground and the other in the air—
listening to two worlds at the same time.

Dingoes are autonomous. They dig their own homes,
follow their own laws, hunt their own food.

They forge strategic alliances with women and bats, diamond doves,
bowerbirds and wrens.
Dingoes taught women how to hunt.

Given the chance, a dingo will poison your dog with orchid venom and take its place.

continued overleaf..

THE DINGO FENCE *...contd*

When you speak to a dingo about obedience or puppy training,
it hears the word 'slavery'.
When you offer a dingo toys, dog collars or soft indoor beds,
it hears the word 'slavery'.

A dingo is teeth, bones and fur. It will not perform tricks.
It does not win ribbons in kennel clubs.
No dingo has appeared in a dog's family tree for at least 10,000 years.

Dingoes are as old as the last Ice Age.
Unlike pedigree dogs, their lineage did not originate in last century eugenics.

A dingo can fake interest in universities, art galleries, politics and God, if it must,
to survive,
but finds this distasteful.

It is not a full-blood, half-blood, hybrid, real, pure-bred, dingo-dog or authentic.
It is not a footnote to an essay on miscegenation.

Dingoes have wolf and dog ancestry.
If you ask a dingo how it identifies, it will say it's complicated.
It does not see itself as a living embodiment of extinction.

A dingo is not looking for your validation.
If you suggest a dingo should get a DNA test, it will kill and eat you
in your suburban dogpark.

Dingoes have an unbreakable connection to land.
Their connection is not a lifestyle choice.

The status of dingoes as outcasts is not lost on them.
They choose Country over kin. They sleep with their bellies to Country's skin.
When they wake, they offer her their crawling dance.

A dingo doesn't give a shit what you think about that connection.

Sheep eaters have failed to exterminate the dingoes.
Their poison baits lie uneaten in the scrub.
Dingoes understand traps and strychnine in a way that wolves and dogs do not.

They will not be contained by a fence.

Dingoes didn't kill the thylacines, but they saw who did.
They snarled at the newspaper's obviously fake photographs
of thylacines holding chickens in their mouths—

the same newspapers that now run pictures of photoshopped dingoes
tearing at murdered lambs. Dingoes are marsupial predators.
They are not interested in your sheep.

In South Australia the Dog Fence Board administers and maintains the fence.
In Queensland the Wild Dog Barrier Fence Panel administers and maintains the fence.
In New South Wales the Wild Dog Destruction Board administers
and maintains the fence.
In Northern Territory Aboriginal Protected Land dingoes roam free.

VISITORS

Alfy carries Snake Jukurrpa from his father's line, along with stories of the visitors—people, who are also snakes, white-coloured or gray. They came on meteors, his father said, but they've got spaceships now.

And for as long as he remembers, strange lights have crossed in the Gurindji skies—dropping from clouds in flying V formation or hovering above the backyard trampoline until his father came with a shotgun and frightened them away.

Once, while camping at Chilla Well, he watched a circular object go down among the dunes—then the bulldust of incoming Army trucks. By dawn, the wreckage was packed on a flatbed truck and spirited away.

Before she died, Alfy's mother told him he was chosen. "Got that Jukurrpa," she said, "those special songs." And by twenty he could tell when the saucers would land, from the numbers and pictures inside his head.

He remembered one night waking with buzzing in his ears. A blue beam, shooting through the window, lit up the whole house. Electric people were standing around his bed—with huge shiny eyes and skulls as long as taipan's.

When he sang his special song, they lifted him like a triumphant footy star, and beamed him through the bedroom wall.

The kardiya doctors didn't believe him. They said it was sleep paralysis, a symptom of intergenerational trauma. But a psychic in Tennant Creek called him 'starborn'.

So he told her how they made the spaceship walls and floor disappear, how he saw the Earth rolling, like a blue-green ball, under his feet.

And he told her about the incubator tanks, where hybrids float like premature babies, like stingrays with sharp hanging tails.

The psychic reckons we're surrounded by hybrids in disguise. "They look like ordinary people," she said, "but they control your thoughts and actions, like a Jedi mind trick."



Artwork titled, *Vincent rises in the stratosphere, over night-cities, on a line of zodiacal light - last astronaut of the Rex Hares*, by Judith Nangala Crispin.

Edward Caruso has been published in *A Voz Limpia*, *Australian Multilingual Writing Project*, 'La Bottega della Poesia' (*La Repubblica*, Italy), *Burrow*, *Communion*, *Kalliope X*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *Meniscus*, *n-Scribe*, *Right Now*, *StylusLit*, *TEXT*, *Unusual Work* and *Well-Known Corners: Poetry on the Move*. His second collection of poems, *Blue Milonga*, was published by Hybrid Publishers in 2019.



TOWARDS DUINO

A train is never far off.
Once on board,
those deep in screens,
eyes lost to a countryside whose
autumn rains are as interchangeable
as with cityscapes.
Plains, I'm lighter than grey.

Two seats away
a teenage couple pashes, in laughter
one dares let loose a slap
even I feel.

I fade more each day,
travelling without fixed destinations,
money or ID.
A ticket inspector's threats of legal
action. What remains?
A fellow passenger who intervenes,
gesture thinned to a tract forged in the gut
as he buys me a rail pass.
To float through; another train
approaching at 250 km an hour, the sound
and air currents that collide.
I'm still here
waiting for the hit of another train streaking by.

continued overleaf...

Edward Caruso

TOWARDS DUINO *...contd*

In a provincial town railway station,
 from a yellowed edition of *The Betrothed*
 handed down to me by my father,
 I've been reading about plague,
 Renzo coming back from the brink.
 All these pages that feed my atheism,
 this waiting room of emotions.

Breathe in light.
 Announcements of prospective cities,
 departures for lost worlds
 and conversations
 with the Slav whose brother had been electrocuted
 on a building site, no compensation.
 He takes my hand.
 Now that I know where to find him,
 breathe deeply, wait for church bells.
 Light fades before twilight.

Home, a dishevelled space.
 Blood test kits and luminous clock faces.
 Cravings for Limoncello
 ablaze in dark flights
 across paths of muddied nights
 (my thoughts a foreign tongue).

I'm still fading,
 my shadow stretching.
 If snow could absorb my footsteps.

Desperate rains,
 incursions.
 It's childhood I seek
 as if past homes yet exist
 and photos of grandparents
 remain in the present – movies
 from their day rerun.

Towards Duino, after locking
 myself in train WCs
 for much of the ride,
 sea ripples whose tankers,
 lights visible from the coast,
 are notes in skies that close in.

My life in a day,
 biding cholesterol levels and fatigue.
 Suddenly I grow agitated:
 the *bora* of my state,
 the Adriatic in my veins.

Vultures above confines,
 constant wind,
 the sea a hunger
 that renders waves
 audible
 – what I call prayer.

continued overleaf..

TOWARDS DUINO *...contd*

As I make out saplings
 that will grow into trees,
 if only the chill wind and sound of surf
 could fortify this sunlight, illumine my skin.
 Let me retreat to sea views that blind at midday,
 in gardens where I pretend to live in bucolic myths,
 composing testaments among mosquitoes,
 flies landing between words
 that have to be rewritten
 because one gets too close
 and is hammered.
 To live outside years,
 as if this countryside
 could have a bearing on me.

Digressions:
 inductions to greater weariness.

bora, a cold, dry wind from the north-east, blowing from the Balkans
 towards the northernmost Adriatic regions

IN MEMORIAM

The barber's wife passed away Tuesday afternoon
 Salvatore shut up shop, spends nights listening
 to St Matthew's Passion,
 Schubert's hymns and the 'Ave Maria'

Since Salvatore met his wife
 in the abyss of wartime occupation,
 most nights are lost to a bottle of wine

Salvatore will call what's left of the old circle to play
 Verdi's 'Va, pensiero' as if his life were staked
 to where he first heard that melody

Should his heart fail,
 Salvatore will depart before the whispered prayers
 of a sombre priest and small gathering,
 to the undertones of a future life

TARKOVSKY

A cirrus cloud shadows me with the weight of a breeze that departs from the Atlantic and reaches the Apennines. And I fly with it, with the impression of having lived other lives in moments similar to this.

On studying the terrain in the opening scene of *Andrei Rublev* by Andrei Tarkovsky, I discover the surface from above, in the 1400s, from the perspective of a Don Quixote riding his hot air balloon, in which the poplars of the plains accompany me. Fine poplars, with no reason to resettle as people do, forced by an unstoppable restlessness as I find a rhythm in thoughts that accompany this stride.

I depart once again, in a dream that traps me in one part of the mind where everything I spy becomes a film without a soundtrack, such as in movies that use the sounds of the locations they're in, actors' voices or the musical instruments they play.

In searching out new perspectives, maybe the discovery of colours through touch, or young children seeing through me with their blithe ways, the distances I dream become a prelude. It takes me an entire life to get to the end of a sequence that lasts mere seconds.



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Gary Fincke's collections have won university press prizes sponsored by Ohio State, Michigan State, Arkansas, and Stephen F. Austin as well as by Jacar Press. Individual poems have been published in *Harper's*, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Ploughshares*, and other such national magazines. His new collection, *For Now, We Have Been Spared*, will be published by Slant Books in 2024.



Gary Fincke

UPON THE DEATH OF SONS: AN ELEGY

*"No one believes that to die is beautiful . . .
we console each other though we have been spared."
Philip Levine*

The Father's News

He has lost a second son,
the first at twenty, yesterday
at forty, as if round numbers,
decades apart, had been cursed
by a long, cruel, deliberate con,
and we, acquaintances and friends,
join together in chorus,
our condolences changing
as little as prayer, our language,
interrogated by catastrophe's police,
unable to form an alibi for God.

1

Underground

In a museum dedicated
to man-made landscapes,
a virtual elevator
lowered his family through
the Earth's calibrated crust,
the temperature rising
from coal mine to gold mine
to the deepest bore hole,
each with a verified heat
until they were safely in hell.

continued overleaf..

UPON THE DEATH OF SONS

...contd

They did not descend
to the death of sons;
nobody said a word
about anything but flame,
the childish horror that
is taught like spelling.

Consolation

Giraffes, until now, considered
mute, have had their voices
recorded in a Viennese zoo.
They hum to each other at night,
the frequency so low that no one
had suspected. For comfort,
the zookeeper has guessed,
although he admits uncertainty.

2*Desert*

Once, visiting Joshua Tree
in August, he woke his sons,
early morning already at
one hundred and six degrees.
Outside, both boys stood stunned
by what living things can stand
from a constant sky, and though
the park was posted like a building
officially condemned, others, too,
were willing to enter, a clutch
of hushed tourists wandering
among gravely threatened trees.

Even these adaptive trees
have limits, he told the boys.
What's more, they are vanishing
in an orderly way, the last
to die those that flourished
at elevation, torrid scaling that
natural defense like a Sherpa
leading extinction's assault team.

Consolation

His colleague says she has been
practicing "feeling" to prepare
for the trauma of failing students.
Throughout the spring, she has
rehearsed for her mother's passing.
To calculate the responses to
her own death, she remembers
herself in the third person.

3*Park*

When the township ballpark had been
restored, the infield dragged and rolled,
he walked the treated lawn of center field
to where a slide and swings were set
in concrete beyond the wooden fence.
Both boys, unprompted, chose to scramble
along a jungle gym, ignoring April's view
of dried milkweed and goldenrod,

continued overleaf..

UPON THE DEATH OF SONS

...contd

wild blackberries, sumac, a stand
of maples that shadowed a patch
of dark snow that he challenged them
to closely watch, staring and staring
to mark the moment it disappeared.

Consolation

Because blasphemy is like fair weather,
inevitable, without consequence.
Because we are taught never to do so.
Because there is pleasure in rebellion.
Because our bodies do not suffer, no
Blistering of the flesh or open wounds.
Because belief falters like the body.
Because we recognize its impotence.
Because the soul is a beautiful lie.
Because the gods are indifferent
to our children. Because of
the merciless biology of the heart.
Because our words dissolve in air.

4

Remnants

A stroke victim in Portugal,
for years a widow, has lost
her sense of ownership,
jewelry and evening clothes
become roadside litter.
Now, not even her eight cats
seem hers, those surrogates
a mewling nuisance.

She is seventy-seven,
his father's age the winter
he opened a closet to show
him his dead brother's suits.
Like a clerk, he displayed
all seven one by one,
lifting each to the light
for extended appraisal.
"Your boys are his size,"
he said, expecting him
to welcome opportunity.
Near the door, laid across
an overstuffed, blue chair,
were two decorative canes
his father had accepted
after receiving the gift
of heart bypass wrapped
intricately inside a small,
but expensive box of time.

Consolation

Sometimes, a second language
is necessary for what's intended,
the longing for impossible just
beyond the borders of English.
Tesknota, 'the pain of distance'
in Polish, a longing, beyond
nostalgia, for more than the past.

continued overleaf..

UPON THE DEATH OF SONS

...contd

5

Birthdays

The morning each boy turns ten,
 It is raining, but expected to clear
 By noon, sunny, humid, both beside
 Water, premonitions in a distant country.
 One boy is fascinated by knots, the other
 Loves the strokes of the medley relay.
 One bedroom wall displays bowline
 And square, sheepshank, clove hitch,
 And tripod lashing, all those twisted cords
 Arranged under glass like monarchs.
 Another celebrates the recent heroes
 Of freestyle, butterfly, breast, and back.
 Before those birthdays end, he rounds
 Them up to clear and warm, twilight paired
 With fireflies, full darkness with promises.

Consolation

Because we listen to nothing else
 When our bodies clench and stiffen,
 Our blood thickening in our throats,
 We can only hurl and thrust, each
 Object a weapon—Chairs, dishes,
 Cue stick and fist--the legs unwilling,
 Refusing to leave the breakage
 And scars until we have raged
 Long enough not to damage
 Someone who is closer than ghosts.

6

Science

Two boys created a stew
 of cafeteria food, bits of bread
 and fruit, filling a paper cup
 and sliding it into the hollow
 of a spill-stained table leg.
 Then they waited, eating
 only brown-bagged lunches
 above that school-bought brew.
 This was science patience,
 sandwiches and desserts
 before they raised that table
 on the seventh day, nudging
 that tiny womb into the light
 expecting the fine hair of mold
 their recipe grew with darkness,
 time, and heat, astonished as
 a flurry of fruit flies lifted from
 that soggy cup as if they had
 fathered them, a sudden cloud
 that fluttered and disappeared.

Consolation

This is the week he discovers the pitch
 Of the blue whale's songs is getting lower.
 This is the week mosquitoes swarm,
 Their numbers swollen by record rain,
 And yet science has learned these pests
 Choose mates who harmonize perfectly
 With them, enhancing the couplings
 That bring some small equivalent of joy.

continued overleaf..

UPON THE DEATH OF SONS

...contd

7

Rapture

He has listened, lately, to someone
 Explain mindfulness at a dedication,
 The rooms named for a colleague
 Who has died by suicide, a woman
 Who, each term, asked her classes
 To write their thoughts in columns:
 To be done. Maybe later. To delete.
 Now send the erasable into space,
 She would say, creating the rapture
 For distractions. Those rooms had been
 Refurbished like an abandoned mall.
 Her father narrated her last weeks,
 The sporadic phone calls farther
 And farther apart like hospice breaths
 Until, he finished, there were no more.

Consolation

Our nerves, science says, produce
 The greatest pleasure when stroked
 Four to five centimeters per second,
 Though just now, he does not say this,
 Not mentioning distance and speed,
 The mathematics of ecstasy,
 The encouragement of desire.

Now

He dreams, each evening, only of family,
 his wife a frequent character, the voice
 of his daughter, childlike, from the doorway
 after midnight, her questions progressing,
 phrase by phrase, from anxiety to fear.
 His wife approaches like a survivor
 emerging from catastrophe, their street
 always behind her, its devastation
 obscured by swirling fog or smoke.
 His sons appear in their former rooms,
 searching for things they hid when young,
 toy cars and tiny, coded, secret notes
 wedged in where they would survive,
 untouched, forever. Both boys sleep
 as late as vampires. Always, they return
 at night like livestock. Though each dream
 ends in limbo, his wife still advances
 with sorrow in her arms, his daughter
 still calls, his sons are always silent
 overheard, moving from room to room.

Jonathan Cant is a Sydney-based writer, poet, and musician. He won the 2023 Banjo Paterson Writing Awards for Contemporary Poetry, was Longlisted for the 2023 Fish Poetry Prize, and the 2022 Flying Islands Poetry Manuscript Prize, Commended in the W. B. Yeats Poetry Prize, Highly Commended in the South Coast Writers Centre Poetry Awards, and selected for the Ros Spencer Anthology *Brushstrokes III*. Jonathan's poems have appeared in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Wingless Dreamer*, and *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*. His short stories have featured in publications as diverse as *Playboy* to Australia's leading flyfishing magazine, *FlyLife*.



Jonathan Cant

TROUT THERAPY

No man ever steps in the same river twice...—Heraclitus

A FISHERMAN stalks the gin-clear mountain stream. Dancing riffles make river music. Soothing sounds like Wes Montgomery's smooth jazz octaves. Smoke rises from his cigarette to mingle lazily with fireplace smoke among late autumn, amber leaves. Leaden clouds creep across the sky leaving an early dusting of fine, white powder. He tries to remember to forget unhelpful thoughts. And yet, he lifts a silver hip flask to his lips then sips the warming spirit. Is it the Angel's Share or the Devil's Cut? In his High Country home, the bellbirds toll—but for whom? He ties a fly to the slender line. Underfoot, the riverbed rocks are slippery like ice on a country road. Then, splash! Around the bend, a trout rises—and with it, hope. Now he's chasing rainbows.

WISHING UNDERWATER

*after a line from Cargo by Ada Limón
and a poem title by Mark Tredinnick*

*I wish I could write to you from underwater.
I'd try to describe what I'm seeing down here,
In the lagoon, at Lord Howe Island—where I snorkel*

Inside the rusted and coral-encrusted steel freezer room.
All that remains of a sunken, American tuna boat named
“Favorite”. (I picture Pablo Neruda trawling the seafood

Market for fresh images.) Now *I'm* the intruder in this
Palace of Fish. Once their dark and frozen prison.
Today it's lit by sunbeams like Broadway lights

On opening nights. The star, a Painted Cray, walks and stalks
The sandy sea floor: a multicoloured Mars Rover searching
For signs of life—and prey. The Yellowfin—no longer dead

Cargo—free to swim on in through this ruined cathedral
Of a vanquished god. Nature won out here,
Though I'm pretty sure She wouldn't see it as “winning”.

Nature just... is. She may be unaware of Her artistry, too.
The Pantone perfection of this shoal of Three-banded
Butterflyfish who socialise and hover in their new

Favourite haunt, all dressed in vertical stripes of yellow, black,
And white. Yeah, you'd love their vibrant colours. The pouting
Spotted Sweetlip is not caught, she *holds* court, surrounded

By rainbow-splashed species like Moon, Surge, and Cleaner Wrasse.
A lone Galapagos Shark seems a long way from home,
But *I* am the alien here in this silent water world. I am drifting—

A ghost in the making. My snorkel pierces the sea's surface and
Mimics the ship's exhaust pipes that protrude at low tide.
All I can hear is my own regulated breath travelling through

A plastic chimney, the sound: a steady metronome keeping Life's
Beat alive. For now. And we know how *that* can change in an instance.
How can I do justice to the Life down here, in the lagoon, at Lord Howe?

I wish I could impart the beauty and feeling to you for real.
Yeah Dad, *I wish I could write to you from underwater.*
I wish I could *write* to you.

I wish I could write.
I wish I could.
I wish.

THE GOLDEN SEASON

*after "April 18":
A future was lost yesterday as easily and irretrievably
as a tennis ball at twilight.*

—Sylvia Plath

AUTUMN is a friend. It has its pastimes and likes to contemplate. It's also a time to fossick for ideas and images from the past, from the future or from Nature. With a shovel, I dig the earth for rare gems. I am (always was) sieving soil: sifting, reducing, distilling. Finding myself lost in thought. Seeking the hidden, spiritual paydirt that might bury yesterday.

Immersed midstream in life, I find myself chasing trout in the afternoon as a form of meditation (medication, too). Nothing fine comes easily: this, the fly teaches you. So I keep casting for a connection on the line, for truth and intelligent responses from the wild—even if, at times, my fly gets irretrievably snagged in the branches of snow gums downstream. I must keep at it—as

Browning said: *A man's reach should exceed his grasp. Or what's a heaven for?* I, too, reach as I grasp the handle of the landing net: a strange tennis racket designed by Dali to scoop up the *terrible fish* of mortality rather than a ball or party or some other youthful celebration. And yet, I draw pleasure and comfort at this autumnal time—bathed in the soft, amber glow of the Golden Hour. Twilight.

Note: *Terrible fish* is a reference to the poem "Mirror" by Sylvia Plath



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

LaWanda Walters earned her M.F.A. from Indiana University, where she won the Academy of American Poets Prize. Her first book of poems, *Light Is the Odalisque*, was published in 2016 by Press 53 in its Silver Concho Poetry Series. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Georgia Review*, *Nine Mile*, *Radar Poetry*, *Antioch Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Laurel Review*, *North American Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Alligator Juniper*, and several anthologies, including *Best American Poetry 2015*, *Obsession: Sestinas in the Twenty-First Century*, and *I Wanna Be Loved by You: Poems on Marilyn Monroe*. She received an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award in 2020. She lives in Cincinnati with her husband, poet John Philip Drury.



ACANTHUS

My fear is that these headaches keep me
from focusing. I can't stretch the nerve taut
enough to think in that way it takes
to write a poem, so I have these ideas
but don't take them on. Playing those notes
means twisting the little knobs tighter
on the violin's scroll, making the E
string hurt like my scalp when my mother
rolled my hair up with bobby pins.
It hurt to sleep that way.

LaWanda Walters

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

I was at a low ebb, sitting at the built-in booth
in your kitchen, watching you in your Bermuda shorts,
your calves so pretty, like Errol Flynn's,
as you jostled with the grilled-cheese sandwiches,
figuring out how to split them so there would be
enough. The half-sandwich I ate was delicious.
Then I started crying again and ran upstairs
melodramatically, I thought, but really I was drunk
on gin-and-tonics, my all-time favorite drink.
(I'm not saying they're good for you.)
And fell asleep on your son's twin bed in the room
that had steps up into the attic.

Your wife and her friend had left for the bar.
My husband had fallen asleep some place upstairs.
You were left having to entertain us all, and annoyed.
My husband slept through it all. The kids ran up and down
the stairs, all around the house, watched TV in the basement
room, cozy with a fireplace. It was a Sears Catalogue house.

You must have washed the dishes, then come upstairs
in your enticing shorts, but I was dead asleep, black-out drunk.
You say I was awake, talking about killing myself.
My husband had a brain tumor, and we had come over
without calling first. His legs used to be so muscular
from water skiing, ice skating,
but lately were horribly swollen from prednisone.
It was hard to get those socks on his legs.

Anyway, I may remember talking about killing myself
as I ran upstairs. But then I was dreaming
a high-school boy was trying to stick his tongue
in my mouth. It had been a long time since high school.

Gradually, during that high-school experience,
the score up in the klieg lights,
I started waking up. The high-school guy turned out
to be you. I thought, well, I know him,
and he does have pretty legs. I let my lips go open.
I woke up in love with you.

Geoff Callard is a New Zealand-born, Melbourne-based writer. He has had poetry published in over 20 journals across the globe and in a number of anthologies including *Planet in Peril*, *Messages from the Embers* and *Poetry for the Planet*. His chapbook, *Other People's Lives* was released in 2021 through Kelsay Books.



AND THEN WE WALKED FOR MILES

The decade I went to sleep
the blue mountains were
just an outline against
the dark rim of the earth.

The towns I knew became
invisible as they closed
over the hollows of my eyes.

I remember little about
being under the roof of stars
as I peered up from
my dreaming.

Then there was a brilliance
as smooth as marble
and forgotten house by forgotten house
we awoke,
blinking, stumbling.

Still dumb with sleep,
we felt our way
to the light
unaware how terrifying
we had become.

Geoff Callard

THE NIGHT YOU GOT THE MOON AND STARS TATTOOED ON YOUR THIGH

On the walk home from recitals
I hum the Nutcracker Suite,
the sticky afternoon heat rises
from the asphalt like a drug.

Our house is empty
so, I sit at the piano,
play two preludes of Bach.
A late flock of birds
fly high over the trees, circling
down to the waterfront.

Glad-hearted laughter drifts
up the drive: you and your
tattooed friends, silhouetted
by splinters of light
from the Casino.

I feel a surge of relief
as your heels clatter
down the hallway,

and as your friends settle
in front of the large screen
with beers and a bong,

we go to water the garden,
pick green loopers
from the leaves.

A tune drifts up the hill – something
we both recognise -

you smile, slow and wide,
reach for my hand

and we climb
a stairway
into the indigo sky,

feel the moon and stars
brush against our skin.

STUDS

When you were sixteen
you asked if you could get
your ears pierced.

We had been arguing over
you leaving your clothes
lying about after you moved

back from your mother's place
and I was practising letting
resentment build.

We went to the chemist
behind the supermarket,
and a girl barely older than you

popped each lobe
with a piercing gun
and there you were

with a couple of bright studs
and your mother's
cock-eyed grin.

We made popcorn and watched
'The Shining' to celebrate.
You reminded me how easily

frightened you were
but would watch horror movies
with me, just to get some time.

Now you just shake your head
and say, *the women are so fucking lame
in these old movies,*

and you tuck your hair
behind your ear,
exactly like

your mother does,
two studs shining like moons
in a private universe.

Mona Zahra Attamimi is Yemeni-Indonesian and lives on the unceded land of the Bediagal people. She lived as a child in Jakarta, Washington DC and Manila, before moving to Australia at age nine. Her poems have been published in *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *Antipodes*, *Best Australian Poetry*, *Contemporary Asian Australian Poets Anthology* and *To Gather Your Leaving: Asian Diaspora Poetry*. Currently, she is writing her first collection - poems about fractured roots, dislocation, reimagining mythologies through a feminist perspective. She has read at regular poetry events, performed at the Sydney Writer's Festival and the Ubud Writer's Festival, and translated the poetry of the acclaimed Indonesian poet, Dorothea Rosa Herliany into English. She is the co-founder of the online poetry platform, *Sun Talks*. In 2019, she was the recipient of the Asialink Arts Emerging Writing Residency, in Bandung, Indonesia.



THE LEGACY

Paradise is at the feet of the mother
(Hadith)

How did I survive your mothering?
You were shaped by silence and mirrors, drawn
to the angles, rubies, the flowery mihrab

embroidered and sewn into the prayer mat
by the ailing women of your childhood.
In your silk white tunic you were carved to fit the divine.

Schooled to muscle the bag of sacrifice,
you shouldered your mother's scars and blisters,
but in motherhood, you never prayed for my placenta,

never clawed the earth to bury it in the garden bed
of our Jakarta home. Escaping your paradise
was the longest thirty thousand days of my life.

On the path to emancipation, I erased memories,
tossed away pictures of my baby hands squeezing
your breasts. But why give you a piece of love —

that rainbow shoes bought at the market in Delhi?
When twilight came I wished for blessings
I found Mister Badrish, the astrologer, in a Hajj kopiah,

white kameez, polishing a time-wheel; he chanted
and rinsed our bowl of sins in the Yamuna;
when I wished for a talisman to shade me from the world

continued overleaf..

Mona Zahra Attamimi

THE LEGACY *...contd*

I bowed to Kali in the minarets of Qutb Minar.
That hair —a crown of flames — anklets of lapis lazuli
gleaming at her feet, her gown silvered in white gold,

but those sharp teeth, her ferocious eyes
drove the nightmare of you into my blood. Your fury,
Mother, stunk of used cotton balls dripping acetone.

There were stirrings, the horrors of my girlhood,
shrieks of attic madness, the voices of dead women
banging in my ear, blowing my life to ruin.

Let me forget the time you leered at me. I begged
to forget the time you carried on painting red nails
and rouging cheeks, glossing lips as my nose bled.

I read your face before you detached, slithered
behind a mask, before you caught me gazing at the hole
in your back. That night I locked myself in a broom closet,

I taped my mouth. When I breathed again, I flew,
and fell, landing on my chest in prostration on the marbles
of Masjid Al Haram. Surah Al Fatiha on my lips, a haze

of burning incense swirled on my breath, and you
vanished, smoked out of my head.
When all was quiet, my bones asleep, a knitter

of wounds knocked at my door with cures
and balms in hands dark as water, the blackest stones
on her fingers. Half of her was Kali,

the other half, hidden in the folds of her thick cloak
was your mother. Perfume bottles clinkedclanked
in soft purses. Her hair, uncoiled and crimson,

as she leaned in, as she stroked my thumb, read my palms,
whiffed of fury. Before light, she fled.
Trees, blue and grey in the fog of dawn, resembled

awakened souls collecting lost pieces of themselves.
A shadow glimmered on the windowpane
with a look so familiar, and there, glaring at my old age,

unleashing old dread was my inheritance — your gloom,
your stare, those water-brown eyes — stamped on my face.

Irish-Australian poet Nathanael O'Reilly teaches creative writing at the University of Texas at Arlington. His ten collections include *Selected Poems of Ned Kelly* (Beir Bua Press, 2023), *Dear Nostalgia* (above/ground press, 2023), *Boulevard* (Beir Bua Press, 2021), *(Un)belonging* (Recent Work Press, 2020), *BLUE* (above/ground press, 2020) and *Preparations for Departure* (UWAP, 2017). His work appears in over one hundred journals and anthologies published in fourteen countries, including *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Anthropocene*, *Cordite*, *The Elevation Review*, *Identity Theory*, *New World Writing Quarterly*, *Trasna*, *Westerly* and *Wisconsin Review*. He is poetry editor for *Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian/New Zealand Literature*.



RAINWATER

Rain falls flooding the backyard.
The pond overflows.
Drops drip from the trumpet vine.

The circular paved dining
area an inch-
deep pool, the overgrown lawn

yearns for the lawnmower's blade.
Peach trees bend towards
the earth. Drops bead upon strings

of outdoor party lights. Steam
rises from beneath
the edges of the hot tub

cover. The wheelbarrow fills
to its rusty brim.
Rainwater glazes the grill.

Nathanael O'Reilly. Photo credit: Cedrick May.

VILLIERS STREET

A one-storey house with baby-blue aluminium siding and a red-dirt corrugated iron roof occupies a double block on the town's northern edge.

A white exercise bike basks in the front porch sunroom beside the master bedroom housing two single beds. Venetian blinds block sunlight from the lounge room. French doors slide

open onto a concrete back porch. One carpeted step leads down from the kitchen to Nana's consultation room where she cuts and files toenails, treats afflictions, gives

expert advice, listens to elderly patients share the town's gossip. Blue leather couches and armchairs furnish the lounge room. Folding metal TV trays lean against

wallpapered walls. Nana's wooden writing desk protects letters and records beneath a rolling lid. Cassettes, VHS tapes and Yeats rest on shelves next to Pa's armchair.

In the backyard a narrow concrete path leads to the rotary clothesline from the backdoor. Mulberries, nectarines and peaches ripen in the orchard.

In the double-garage built from Besser bricks by father and son shelves and rafters hold fishing rods, spearguns, wetsuits, surfboards, snorkels, masks, ladders, trowels, spirit levels, saws, spades, shovels, picks and rakes.

Grandkids creep quietly out the backdoor at dawn, lift surfboards from the garage rafters, stuff wetsuits and towels inside covers, grasp boards under left arms, hold handlebars with right hands, pedal stealthily down the driveway towards the beach and waiting surf.

Grandkids wash sand and salt from their feet at the outdoor tap, rinse wetsuits with the hose, eat boiled cabbage, carrots, potatoes and lamb chops for dinner, bowls of fruit served

with Neapolitan ice cream in blue and white bowls for dessert, recline in leather armchairs with feet propped on ottomans, watch ABC news with Pa. Hours later,

young bodies crawl into single beds made tightly with yellow and white striped sheets beneath a sorrowful bleeding Jesus crucified on the dark wood-panelled wall.

RETURNING HOMEWARDS

After Homer

Father, you are his son. Look, wonder, perfect display.
 I used wits and watchfulness, devised sad homecomings.
 Not wise or righteous. Evil doom. Deadly anger. Is she not
 the child of a mighty father set at odds? Son rash, unconsidered
 made sunset. People came heavy with wine, reason assembling
 men. Bade them returning home over the sea's broad back.
 Fell foul, wished to keep all sacred, appease heavy anger. Fool.
 Goddess, the purpose is not to be lightly turned aside. High word
 passed between, leapt from seats in monstrous uproar, divided
 night, brooding mischief against each other, devising grief.
 Morning came, began to haul down the sea. Half of the people
 held back, half of us went aboard, began our voyage. The ships
 sailed fast, smoothed the sea. Underworld waters called, longing
 to be home, but return so soon was not the design. They fell
 in with wishes homewards. Join us, ponder the long sea-journey,
 sail north and close, keeping that island on our left. Asking
 for some sign, a mid-ocean passage to escape disaster, a fair wind,
 our vessels raced the teeming sea-paths during the night, reached
 harbor, passed that great stretch of sea, moored ships off the coast.
 Such was my own return, dear child. I heard no news upon the way.
 I know nothing of the others, which among them returned safe
 home, which among them perished. True, I have heard certain
 things from my own house. I will tell you now. I will hide nothing.
 Home safe with glorious child, the far-famed son, he too came safe.

The sea, the son, far away though your home may be. Death paid
 a heavy price. I fear for my father, for me. I have no choice but to bear
 what comes. Who knows if he will not return himself to befriend
 you, care for you. Even now I dare not think it is too hard, beyond
 my grasp, past hoping for. Word passed your lips - bring a man safe
 home, no matter from how far away. I for my part would gladly pass
 through a sea of troubles and then return to my country,
 see the day of homecoming rather than reach my country early,
 my own hearth. True enough, death comes to all, even love.
 Grim doom of distressful death. Care deep, speak truth
 before death. Seek knowledge, homecoming.

NB: All text taken from Walter Shewring's translation of *The Odyssey*, then erased and remixed.

Olatundji Akpo-Sani is an internationally renowned poet and performer. He grew up on the cultural fringes of both black and white America belonging to both but never quite fitting into either. His work investigates the spaces between seen and unseen, the myriad facets of love, and the voices that inhabit these monoliths. He has been published in the Barcelona Review, Illiterate Magazine, and the Boulder Poetry Scene Zine amongst others. He is author of five books of poetry and his most recent book, *Post Surrealistically Challenged*, is available at BaobabTreeWriter.com and The Garden Lounge Creative Space in Newtown.



THE MANY FACES OF GOD

When I dream
I wonder what you look like

Are you the whisper of compassion
or the strong hand of justice

Placations whisper
or laughter's echo

Sometimes I hear you in a rainbow
your meaning like a pot of gold
a perception of vibration

When I was young
I dreamt of being your servant
I was naive

I stood at the altar
believed when they
quoted scripture like the devil

You were there too
having a bad day
Confessing your sins
flagellating desire
and humanity
Pontificating about
the somnambulance
of simplicity

continued overleaf...

Olatundji Akpo-Sani

THE MANY FACES OF GOD

...contd

I did not understand
the cannibalistic transmutation

If each little wafer
each drop of wine
is indeed divine

Why do we need alarms
or church bells

Prayer's a conversation
between the unholy
messages written
in the skin tones of humanity

I used to dream
you were harp strings and piano wire
Muscles massaging wind
bent light and waves

You are stained
but beautiful glass

Justification is easy when
the many facets of justice
become a mirror

Love is simple
righteous and fearful
in your light

And now I see
we are all John Malkovitch
Lenny petting his mouse

A sacrifice for each other
creating thrones from language
adjusting definitions like soft cushions

While ignoring your face in the mirror of crowds
we manufacture tears and wails
create a cacophant jubilation

The sounds of winning frightens me
This madhouse orchestra
pretending at purpose
reels from babel's curse

REMNANTS

Signs stating the safe
physical distance capacity
of the train
loom large
as I board on my way to Sydney

The number's long forgotten
so no one knows
how many is too many

The conductor is still obliged
to remind me that masks
are mandatory
even though
no one is wearing one

It feels insidiously rote
this pointless repetition
A reminder that
not too long ago
the frenzy
to punch in and
punch out
of every location
was a job

Keeping up with the hotspots
morning, noon, and night
Both hoping and not hoping
for the text message that read

"You were shopping between 10 AM and 3 PM and are deemed a close contact. Please isolate to protect your community."

It meant you either
had to spend a week alone
Or you might have
just killed yourself
and your entire family

The torture of fear
forced isolation still weighs heavily
and we all bear scars

Our PPE precautions and
used facts have
donned and doffed
science and truth
to fit one point of view
or another
so many times

We have birthed islands
of single use plastic and
sewn fields of distrust
just to keep the fragility of life
at arm's reach

When we needed it most
a hug was painted
as a death sentence

continued overleaf..

REMNANTS

...contd

A kiss could carry
 the horror of dying
 sedate with a tube down your throat

What a sad fate
 to shun that which is fragile
 in order to keep it safe

And before you call me crazy
 because i think it's weird
 that so many countries
 fell in line so quickly

or our financial systems
 have become a game of
 bait and switch

society an empty house of cards
 just waiting to be blown down
 by the hurricanes of our own hubris

Tell me
 when will we be able
 to talk about
 the fear still hidden
 just below the surface
 of physical contact
 or the collateral damage
 of our mental health

Who gets to bring up
 the injuries
 so often overlooked or
 the sticky subject of
 knee jerk reactions
 for the sake of profiteering

I want to touch my neighbors elbow
 Gently tear their attention
 away from glue tube
 and instagasm
 So I can ask these questions

But the conductor says
 we are supposed
 to remain socially distanced

And no one really knows
 just how many people
 will fit on this train
 before it gets dangerous

Paris Rosemont is a widely published, internationally award-winning Asian-Australian poet. Publications include: *Verge Literary Journal*, *FemAsia Magazine* and Red Room Poetry's *Admissions*. She is delighted that her poetry finds eclectic homes, from thought-provoking literary journals to underground Glaswegian zines! Winner: *New England Thunderbolt Poetry Prize 2022*. Shortlisted: *Hammond House Publishing International Literary Prize 2022*; *Born Writers' Award 2023*. Longlisted: *Liquid Amber Poetry Prize 2023*; *Joyce Parkes Award 2022*. Awarded: *Atelier Artist-in-Residence Ireland 2024*; *Kathmandu International Artist in Residence 2024*; *Varuna Shanghai Lamplight Residency 2023*; *WestWords/Copyright Agency Fellowship 2023*; *Varuna Emerging Writers' Residency 2022*. Paris's niche is performance poetry. She has performed her original poetry in cabaret shows including *Mad Bitches Inc.* at the Sydney Fringe Festival 2022, *Poetry Jukebox Live* (commissioned by Randwick City Council) and the groundbreaking world premiere of *Slam Messiah* at *Riverside Theatres, Parramatta* in 2022, where she was commissioned to write and perform original poetic works in response to movements of Handel's *Messiah*, alongside a 60-voice choir and chamber orchestra. Paris's debut poetry collection, *Banana Girl*, will be published in late 2023. To find out more about Paris, please visit www.parisrosemont.com



ANOTHER FIRST KISS*

WHEN COMES the time for me to slip this coil
of flesh—claimed by Death's everlasting kiss
I'll gladly step away from love's turmoil.

It matters not if I am grieved or missed,
for in this life you could not love me well—
to mourn me in my death would be too late.
Death beckons me: its song a lonely bell
and I—a dark swan searching for her mate.

DON'T CRY for me when all you caused was pain
each time you trifled with my eggshell heart.
I shall not wish to meet with you again
unless the sands of time skipped back to start.

KISS ME, my love—let's kiss away the past;
NOW LOVE me right—till Death cleaves us apart.

* After song lyrics by 'They Might be Giants'
This poem employs an English form: the Sonnet

Paris Rosemont. Photo credit: Leslie Liu Photography.

GRANDFATHER'S CLOCK

You stand—short and stout—much
like my grandfather, who gave you to me
when you died.

A time-keeper; no longer keeping
time. Your hands stopped moving
decades ago. They are painted
neon: glow-in-the-dark green
so you could always be seen. Petrified
in a mid-tock arabesque
of six thirteen. AM or PM, I wonder.
Surely the morn: of the little I know
of you, I know you woke up to the wassail of a koel each dawn.

Except for that morning you didn't.
Rusted slivers of the clock's innards
line its glass belly like ashes. My thumbprints disturb
dust that has settled over it like a fine muslin shroud.

Even without a pulse, I keep this memento.
Other things I inherited from you:
your punctuality
your gentleness
your snaggle-toothed smile.



Photograph courtesy by <https://pixabay.com/users/holedulidu-5493056/>.

KA Rees writes poetry and short fiction. Her poems and short stories have been widely anthologised. Kate was short-listed for the 2016 Judith Wright Poetry Award and she is a previous recipient of the Barry Hannah Prize in Fiction. Kate was a 2019 Varuna fellowship holder for her manuscript of short fiction and the national winner of the 2019 Joanne Burns Microlit Award. She was a resident of the 2021 Sydney Observatory program where she wrote a suite of poems set under the southern night sky. Kate's pocket book of poetry, *Come the Bones* (Flying Island) was released in 2021.



HABITS OF LIFE

I
Stream music,
frog & leaf-fall
tadpoles
 in creek hollows—

The world has a nasty habit
of ending.

II
On your ankle, a leech
small as my toddler's
smallest nail
bloods
 as it sucks.

III
Green dance of
soft-leaved plants,
each egg bee lays—
pollen & nectar
 rain in November.

IV
Bright mushrooms spawn
marbled through litterfall, skin-
same as found in stores but
 gills—palest of blue.

KA Rees

'The world has a nasty habit of ending'— truncated line from
Joanne Limburg's *The Synagogue at the End of the World*.

Stephen Edgar has published twelve collections of poetry, the most recent being *The Strangest Place: New and Selected Poems*, which won the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Poetry, in 2021. His previous three books, *Transparencies*, *Exhibits of the Sun*, and *Eldershaw*, were all shortlisted for the same award. He was awarded the Philip Hodgins Memorial Medal for excellence in literature in 2006 and was joint winner of the Colin Roderick Award in 2014 for *Eldershaw*. He lives in Sydney.



Stephen Edgar

HERE AND NOW

A rustle in the leaves. One lorikeet
Emerges on a bending stem
To dangle,
While feeding upside down among the sweet
Grevillea flowers at a reckless angle.

In real time, the shadows under them
Make copies on the courtyard bricks.
A skink
Lies practising its brilliant stratagem,
To stare into the sun and not to blink,

A miniature bronze sculpture, till it licks
An errant ant with perfect aim.
The sky,
Drying in blue enamel, tries to affix
One cloud in place before it passes by.

A curtain cord taps on the window frame
Arrhythmically in a faint breeze,
As though
Too quick to hit the beat, making the same
Mistake a few times, then, instead, too slow.

A sort of dreamlike present tense—which frees
The mind from the entanglements
Of nerve
And muscle, all those hinged complexities
We're made of, with their claims on those they serve—

A sort of disembodied present tense
Pervades this setting to suspend
The day,
As though you were what you experience,
Part of the elements through which you stray,

Persuading you that this will never end.

SPECTRE AT THE FEAST

Seen from the deck's
 Blue eminence, where the hillside falls away,
 Garden on leaf-screened garden seems to reach—
 One long estate that my distraught
 Attention lazily inspects,
 And wanders through—down to Balmoral Beach,
 And Hunters Bay.

It calls to mind,
 This scene, something by Streeton maybe, trees
 And shoreline, shoals of splintered light which flare
 In patterns that a vagrant breeze
 With casual artistry designed.
 The garden party, though, has treats to share,
 And guests to please,

Of whom I'm one.
 And turning from the view to view the flux
 And intermingling of participants,
 What code, I ask myself, instructs,
 By what unspoken rules are run,
 The steps and permutations of this dance;
 And what conducts

Out of the press
 Of this incessant chatter and good cheer,
 So effortlessly practised with an art
 That seems both artless and sincere,
 What cuts me loose to dispossess
 The body which stands talking, taking part,
 While, floating clear,

Some element
 Of mind looks back on the unfolding show
 As though it's past, or like that pageant called
 From the thin air by Prospero.
 But that is me, it's evident,
 The spectre at the feast, slightly appalled
 To undergo

This weird abstraction
 Time and again, the figure time suspends
 To contemplate as though he were not there
 The very action he attends.
 But as for that, well, here is action.
 The hosts' son makes an entrance with a pair
 Of his student friends,

To improvise
 On drums, guitar and keyboard casual jazz,
 Jammed on the first-floor balcony. They play
 With a cool presence and pizzazz
 That says there is no otherwise
 Than this, which lavishes, look, here, today,
 All the day has.

NO OTHER WORLD

A black and squirming indeterminate mass
 She seemed at first, hard to tell head from rump.
 The swollen abdomen was obvious,

And there were limbs, but which of them were legs
 And which the arms was anybody's guess.
 It brought to mind for a moment that performance

I saw once on TV: two little boys,
 Or childlike figures, grappling with each other
 And wrestling, tumbling furiously in a clinch

Across the stage for minutes. When it ended,
 Up stood one adult man, to bow and shed
 The costume inside which he'd been disguised.

And so she rolled in labour. Then between
 Two parted limbs out slid a glutinous blob,
 Greyish, elastic, slippery, which she caught

In her enormous hands so delicately,
 Midwife to herself, and, turning over,
 Lifted up to her mouth, as for a kiss,

Her tenderly pursing lips engaging those
 Of this new creature. Well, it *was* a kiss,
 But good sense too, and instinct, since its face

Still wore a stocking-mask of wet placenta,
 Which she would ease away with little sips.
 And then, how gently for so huge a beast,

She laid it on its back. Was it alive?
 Ah, yes, its forehead creasing, and the twitch
 Of one diminutive thumb. A long fond look

And she resumed her task, taking a foot
 And sucking clean the tiny toes. Meanwhile,
 Outside the barred enclosure, the zoo staff

Offered encouragement—"Good girl! Good girl!"—
 And cameras clicked and filmed. To such a cramped
 And public spectacle was she reduced.

I wonder did she see, like Rilke's panther,
 No other world beyond the bars, or was she
 Somehow able to look clean through the press

Of lights and voices into memory,
 If she had other memory than here,
 Though no more than a green hallucination.

Perhaps not. In a clearing in Rwanda,
 The grave of Dian Fossey lies, her face
 Split open like a peach by a machete.

Around her, graves of numerous gorillas
 Are scattered, and not all of them, no doubt,
 Met violent deaths, though poachers claimed a few.

Digit, her favourite, put up quite a fight,
 Killing one of their dogs, but in the end
 They speared him, left his corpse with the head hacked off.

They made two ashtrays of his severed hands.

John Robert Grogan (aka: JR) is an Irish-Australian poet based in Sydney, Australia. Life in country Ireland and his global wanderings have cultivated a curiosity and love for the natural world, and the connectivity of all things.



THE TIME IT TAKES

Cicadas serenade the setting sun,
a cappella for the heat and the long
days. I dwell on my inherent love

for this evening's air, the mysteries
of the flightful, and the twilight
creeping in above the washing line.

A rimy thought climbs atop a soapbox
sings for attention, and before I wash
the sea salt and sunset from my scales

I am forced to remind winter
of the gestation still there for us all,
how recent years need escaping.

I only just embraced the holidays,
dropped the workplace nine hours
up the coast and started living once again.

The firm would have us think our time, as theirs,
have us waste each precious moment and then,
we'd be on a rope, guilty for considering bliss.

Don't forget the unspeakable,
found in the veins of the paperbarks,
and the unfolding clover to the light.

We will find ourselves, high in the wind
beneath the sea eagles, in the quiet
between heartbeats,
the origins of pages and the rising sun.

John Robert Grogan

Shey Marque is a poet and former clinical and research scientist with interests in cellular memory. She has a PhD in Molecular Pathology from the University of Western Australia, and a MA in Writing from Swinburne University in Melbourne. Previously the Coordinator of the KSP Writers' Centre, she is currently Deputy Chair of WA Poets Inc and a Board Member of Writing WA. Her poetry appears in major literary journals including *Island*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Westerly*, *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, *Overland* and *Australian Poetry Journal*. She won a QLD Poetry Festival Emerging Poet Award in 2018, the Blue Nib Poetry Chapbook Prize in 2020, and twice won the KSP Poetry Prize, with shortlistings in numerous others. Most recently, she was awarded runner-up for the Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize 2023. Her collection, 'Keeper of the Ritual' (UWAP 2019; <https://uwap.uwa.edu.au/products/keeper-of-the-ritual>), was shortlisted for the Noel Rowe Poetry Award, and her current manuscript 'The Hum Hearers' was short-listed for the Dorothy Hewett Award 2023. She lives on Whadjuk Noongar boodja in Boorloo/Perth, Western Australia.



IRRECOVERABLE CHILDREN

*from Romania's Cămin Spital Pentru Copii Deficienți
(Home Hospital for Irrecoverable Children)*

Ceausescu's child lived in a state hospital crouched on the Carpathian mountain, & across from the cobblestone square

an ebbing people, spill of river & its skin that shone. He looked out upon unseeded ground through the locked, iron-barred

window of his loft, beyond the barbed-wire fence to the real children within shouting distance, in chill-proof boots and fur-

lined jackets, fingers buried in the warm hands of their parents, hurrying, wading through the cries of the morning & the river

eventually answered shushing the sounds of birds, dogs & boys who all calmed their reflexes, except for the ones who couldn't

be soothed, muttering under their breath, shouting gibberish to no one, stress scent of sweat & urine. The mess benches writhed

with a hundred naked children banging food bowls, rocking, shrieking, punching themselves in the face until tranquillised

with unclean needles. Claudiu was the tenth of a ten-child woman denied birth control, misbirth, no choice but to *let him*

raise it. Eighteen & four feet tall, he was sent onto the streets, the more completely impaired going to a home for old men.

continued overleaf...

Shey Marque

IRRECOVERABLE CHILDREN *...contd*

Sleeping rough at train stations, he asked for nothing & got it,
the reflex to cry long lost. The woman in his dreams came

again & again wearing a blue pinafore, her hair in a messy bun.
She tossed bread out of a third-storey window, yelled *fetch*.

He watched police patrolling. They kicked at an old cigarette
packet to see if it was empty, a pile of clothes to see if it moved,

felt inside its pockets for rent. Claudiu stood, so as not to appear
loiterly, flipping a hand to milling dogs like they were taxis.

BAISHAKH IN KATHMANDU VALLEY

for Saru

That moment, as if a dog shaking out tension, the ground wriggled
beneath us. The whole congregation fell to their knees simultaneously.
For the briefest second we must have each wondered the same thing.
If searching for a lesson, know that windows are better for looking
through than for exiting, that grown men would sooner break their
own legs rather than pause to reflect. I saw a man run from the shower
into the street, shampoo still covering his head as he sat on the
ground crying, while I rode into the rain with my daughter on the back
of my scooter. A young woman was digging herself from underneath
rubble just in time to birth her baby. Whenever we dig we kill many
insects. Houses were swaying, falling. Every five minutes I pulled
over to watch, for thirty seconds or so, the time it took for the next
aftershock to subside. Crying people appeared suddenly out of the
dust, but I could do nothing except ride focused only on two metres
of visibility and buckling bitumen – u bit men/mute bin/bun time.
Spaces arose in awkward places, tent cities where there used to be fields
and parking lots. We clung onto the edges of an orange tarpaulin in a
thunder storm for three weeks, cement in our lungs, to keep it from
blowing away while children huddled beneath. Grass started growing
inside the house. We were still a month away from the dancing, and
another to see me creep up behind my mother on the sofa and shake it.

the street cracks open
what is falling in the field
rises in the road

Irrecoverable Children (Longlisted, Fish Poetry Prize 2022)

Baishakh in Kathmandu Valley (Shortlisted, Bath Flash Fiction Prize 2021)

SEQUELAE TO MISPLACED ELBOWS AND OTHER VIOLATIONS

i

The man who takes tea in a laddie dram glass,
despite his take-no-shit nose, does
seem less at ease in this country, or not even,
has closed down the dogs, getting drunk
 on needing to hurt the flesh
how it wipes him of duckings in the Clyde,
days in the hull, but it's done already and he lives
 only on retribution and a rear view
confused over time, trying
to pin down something beyond recall

ii

The nightly crusade for unwronging
two small boys – the not quite angels –
knees to boards, a scant definition of bodies
 hovering beside him, prayer hands
angled bones, their hinges canting
 toward what could be the absence of a table
until finally he sleeps, shoulder to shoulder
with their mother who doesn't and there's no telling
how repletely a two-o'clock city spreads
its dark across the room

iii

Twin shapes of shame just hanging there
suddenly too much to bear, she'll unbend them
from the floor ridden cold and blind-
 walk them back to bed
catching little toes on the corner of the stairs
but at this hour all screaming is done
on the inside, exiting
through waggling hands, nothing is spoken
at the breakfast table – it's difficult to eat
 arms rope-tied to a chair

iv

A swig of tea, the swallowing, the swallow's wing
in her throat, like a loose stitch
undoes the gravity, the imperative, the eye –
 all those unfunny things
are pulling silly faces in the wrong moment. Caught
in quick dissolve to domestic actuality
the morning tastes not of charred bread and dripping
 but nicotined fingers and metal
her hands closing over her face, while he reads
the light as it curls like butter in the diaphanous air

Sequelae to misplaced elbows and other violations (Longlisted, Fish Poetry Prize 2022)

Erin Shiel lives and writes on Gadigal land in Newtown, Sydney. She has had poems published in journals and anthologies such as *Mascara*, *Meanjin*, *Cordite* and *Australian Love Poems*. In 2022 she won the South Coast Writers Centre Poetry Award. Her debut collection *Girl on a Corrugated Roof* was published in June 2023 (Recent Work Press). She has worked in the health and community sectors, particularly in cancer prevention and early detection as well as in support services for children and families. She is currently training to be a counsellor and is enthusiastic about the role of creativity and poetry in therapy.
<https://erinshielpoetry.com/>



DRIVING OVER THE BRIDGE

It's time you did this on your own, you know.
 I hate my voice as it grinds through the same
 old argument: *set your own alarm, get yourself
 up, deal with the consequences of being late.*
 His floppy school hat hides his face. His torso

moulds into the shape of the seat with skinny
 legs hanging off the edge. The arch of the Bridge
 rolls overhead. Steel girders weave in and out
 with the clouds floating beyond. Hardest of hard,
 softest of soft. Like parenthood. Like the playlist

skipping from Hilltop Hoods to *Frozen*, Eminem
 to *Beauty and the Beast*. I have something to say.
 Hold on till the end of the song... but he's skipped
 to the next song without a break. I have something
 to say. Time is running out. We are nearly over

the Bridge. Don't spoil the moment of peace
 together, Kanye is on. Turning the last bend
 I look at him, seeing beyond fetid sports
 gear and social media scrolling to feel heart
 hurting love, hard as steel, soft as cloud.

The freckles have faded from his face, the legs
 are muscular, hairy, out of place in school uniform.
 What is it that I have neglected to say? He jumps out,
 rushing for the last exam. *Sorry I made you drive me,*
 he grins. *It's time I did this on my own, you know.*

Erin Shiel

NIGHT DISSOLVES

My toes grip the sand that squeaks
as I drag a stick to trace my path.
A lone bird bobs in the shallows searching
for a fish. Day never breaks in stolen space.

I am here to write my way home.

Is this brooding roof clear beyond the clouds?
The waves tipped with phosphorescence mirror
the cumulus. These inky dunes hide no one yet
my heart drums the skin that seals my ribs.

I am here to write my way home.

There are three lights on the prawners' nets
that close in around the transparent ghosts
whose bristled swimmerets fail to move
them fast enough. I am not part of this triangle.

I am here to write my way home.

Though they may feel the sand that blows
from my shadow, they cannot hear my souging
through the waves and wind, mourning for where
I come from, for soup, open doors, known faces.

I am here to write my way home.

The wind slaps my cheeks. The needling rain
swallows courage from a grown-up mist blowing
sideways. Giving in, I roll into a ball. My knees
rub my eyes but feel only socket and bone.

I am here to write my way home.

Day doesn't break. Night dissolves in liquid light.

After visual artist Philip Wolfhagen, Winter Nocturne III, 2006.ⁱ

ⁱ Philip Wolfhagen, *Winter Nocturne III*, 2006. See in R. Ian Lloyd and John McDonald, *Studio, Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity*, R. Ian Lloyd Productions, Singapore, 2007, p. 251.

ON THE FLOOR

There were the hours
I spent colouring
paper on the kitchen
floor so the indents
of the lino appeared.
Then tracing faces
I found in the patterns
of the carpet. Writing
circles and strokes
in dust on the fireplace
tiles took a morning.
In the afternoon
I followed the ants
carrying a crumb
of madeira cake
from the kitchen
down the concrete
back stairs. Squeezed
one till my fingers
turned white.
Watching them scurry,
I marvelled at power,
then pondered
cruelty.

Having hours
to reach the peak
of boredom
then tip over
into a micro world
reverie conducted
below ankle level,
off the radar
of adults,
was preparation
for now.

Dr. Willo Drummond is a poet, researcher, sessional lecturer, and supervisor in creative writing who lives and writes on Dharug and Gundungurra land. Her creative and critical work are engaged with themes of literary influence and creative cognition. Willo's poetry can be found in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *The Canberra Times*, *Griffith Review*, *Island*, and elsewhere. Willo was the recipient of a 2020 Career Development Grant for poetry from the Australia Council for the Arts, short-listed for the 2022 Val Vallis Award, and runner-up in the 2021 Tom Collins Poetry Prize. Her debut collection *Moon Wrasse* was published by Puncher & Wattmann in March 2023. The collection includes a sequence of poems in dialogue with Levertov's reading of Rilke's letters. <https://willodrummond.com/>



AN INITIATION

*To shape is to discover
To find is to choose*

A red leaf on the footpath
An apple carefully peeled

*A poem of a certain temper
(the sweetness of such flesh)*

Like a wish—or a promise—
Received in totality

On a certain silent evening
Over needlework, in Capri.

Note:

This poem is a cento in dialogue with Denise Levertov's lifelong reading of *Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke 1902-1926* (trans. Hull, 1946). It makes use of, and alludes to, material from several passages catalogued by Levertov as 'Initiation into the mysteries of poetry', well as Levertov's poem "The Rights", *Here and Now* (1957), and material from Martin Buber.

Willo Drummond

Debbie Lim's poems have appeared regularly in the *Best Australian Poems* series and in *Contemporary Asian Australian Poets*, among numerous other anthologies and journals. She received the 2022 Bruce Dawe National Poetry Prize and was shortlisted for the 2022 Peter Porter Poetry Prize. Her chapbook is *Beastly Eye* (Vagabond Press), and she is completing a full-length collection. She was born in Sydney, where she lives on Darramuragal land.



HONEY FUNGUS TO THE TREE

Armillaria

They were looking in the wrong places,
seeking a measurable shape: the silhouette

of a photogenic blue whale, the giant sequoia.
Not this—black fenceless thing, seeping

underground where no territories exist,
a bog of witchy bootlaces unravelling its

own edges, fingering for roots. They mistook
my face for the golden cluster of bells

I occasionally exhibit; sweet error of my name.
Now for you it's too late. You should have

bent closer to home: that webbing spanned
beneath your skin, those tarred veins underfoot.

This slow and steady pulping of what was
once your wise old heart.

Debbie Lim. Photo credit: Michael Hohl.

Note: The *Armillaria* fungus is arguably the largest living organism on Earth with a specimen found in Oregon, USA, measuring 9.6 km².

THE JELLYFISH

This town is full of jellyfish.
 Swaying down the wide streets,
 heads opening with brine,
 they carry their organs like strange fruit.
 Bearing parasols instead of hearts
 they travel in great beating flocks,
 holding only the vaguest of intentions.
 One can hardly trust a jellyfish.
 They converse so little and when they do,
 their arguments are mostly opaque.
 Always undulating. Their lack of a face
 simply perturbs—and there are so many of them!
 I will never understand the jellyfish.
 All drift, no bone. Though pacifists
 might say we share one clear wish in life:
 to move and be moved.



Photograph courtesy <https://pixabay.com/users/travelphotographer-3989469/>

Dimitra Harvey was born in Sydney to a Greek mother and grew up on Wangal country. She is the author of *A Fistful of Hail* (Vagabond Press, 2018). Her writing has appeared in *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, *Cordite*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *SBS Voices*, and anthologies such as *The Best Australian Poems 2017*, and *The Best of Australian Poems 2022*. She's been awarded the Australian Society of Authors Ray Koppe Young Writers Residency, third place in the Newcastle Poetry Prize, and Queensland Poetry's Val Vallis award, as well as multiple long-listings.



Dimitra Harvey

THE VALLEY

i.

On a plate beside my pillow — the fig
I didn't eat. Behind the house, black hills

are nosing into stars. Down the halls
and promenades of blue gums, owls

hunt gliders, ringtails — their round, doubled
syllables cool as pennies. I meddle

the fig open. Its insides are blush
and ribbed with seeds. I imagine its thick

dusk of juices flooding my mouth,
but I wait.

ii.

All afternoon, hot winds rifled
in the hills — thumbing through treetops

as if purses of tin coins. Now a koel
paces out the hours with a shrill pipe,

and light like finely milled sulphur drifts
in the valley. On the deck,

a butcher bird — her head and neck an executioner's
hood — hammers a skink in her beak

against a nail-nub in the railing. She swallows,
bids a single liquid note.

LEECHES

After scudding rain, the grass gushing, I find them beached on my porch — dozens of them — having wired their bodies up out of the flood, only to find they're stuck to the brushed

concrete, desiccating quickly. My distaste for them has evaporated over several months — my wet-eared horror of their almost occult power to ribbon into boots and glut, distended as clots. Often

finding one pulped behind my heel — less than a teaspoon of bright gore indistinguishable from my own. Seeing them like this — I pity them, their bodies fragile as threads

of raw silk. I know the urgency of hunger; of trying to survive desire; of fleeing one danger only to find you've fled into another. I'm thinking about leeches, and I'm thinking

about love — about the end of the world. How hunger is manufactured and peddled. How rapacity forges more rapacity. How a leech has two jaws, and fasts for months. How endings demand

more of us than pity, and more than love. The soil drains. I lift a leech from the concrete — still alive — and leverage them back into the grass.

GIANTS

for Tim

The dark back slipped through the surf and slapped down detonating colossal plumes. A headwind was geysering over the spit, flinging

grit sharp as tin raspings in our faces. We shouldered it. Waited out the minutes between each breach. The Tasman dark as neoprene, nothing

but white caps whisking the surface to the horizon until that huge body burst open the swell again, lunging skyward, lobbing

a grooved, moony belly across the water, the way a child, in fits of jumping, might finally toss themselves down across the bed. When

the oily rostrum breached a third time, the humpback spun a high arc above the water in the unmistakable radian of joy. I know what they say — such acrobatics

are a display of dominance or courting behaviour, a way to stun prey, to get a clear breath above rough seas. But even from our faraway lookout

on the Point — as small as we are, with lungs that can only cup a handful of breath at once — we could detect it: the pleasure and abandon in the dance.

Not long before, we'd blasted *They Might Be Giants* in the car, bobbed and swivelled in our seats as we slid along the coast road, the sky gathering

its storm in, rain out on the horizon like glistening bands of baleen.

Scott-Patrick Mitchell is the author of the poetry collection *Clean*, which was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards for Poetry and the WA Premier's Book Awards Book of The Year. In 2022, Mitchell was the recipient of The Red Room Poetry Fellowship and The Westerly Mid-Career Fellowship.



THE SWIMMER

after Portrait of Unknown Swimmer

Within water, we become multiples: a body inside a body. Leave your name on the shore. Swim and find new nomenclatures from the oceanic turbine of the world's churn: rip, spume, swell. Transcend self and extend past your own skin. Stroke salt's lung as whale, dolphin, shark. There, on the horizon, a sun shall set, sky shall bloom into dark expanse filled with constellations. You can navigate by them, find new lands, new names to inhabit. Be a buoy, floating. A light that blinks a path for liners to travel. Reduce aqua to a rectangle stung with chlorine and summer shouts and still you stroke aqueous tendons as you lap, Be named swimmer, diver, lifeguard. All the ways water can reimagine us. Drown in this multiplicity of being. When they take your photograph, for memory's sake, tell them you are anonymous, how you emerge from the darkness, aquiline. A figure who will live on, known only by the way you cut through the wet of this world.

Scott-Patrick Mitchell

DUET

1. *Aubade*

The bruise in the side of the sky is the indent
in my bed. Your perfume warmth loosens
as the birds play their chorale out into blue.

You: absconder before daybreak.
Untangler of our puzzle limbs, stealing
self from out of weft and sweat.

This is what a key costs – knowing
you will use it to leave before I wake
and use my skin to convince you stay.

The sky is a bruise the whole day
you're away. When night falls, the latch catches
as you return, starbright and hymnal.

2. *Nocturne*

Riddle in my sheets: where do you end
and where do I begin? Our lamplight
laughs throw light only as far as the other's

lips. A flare in your eyes. Outside, the crickets
are a symphony we half-hear over ragged
breath. The way a paper moon is drawn by

the graphite these bodies smudge. Our teeth
tear dark prayer as we dilate our vision,
a fission of skin devouring skin: such fire

usually begins with lightning. But we're
the only storm there is tonight. In the witching
hour, we spell each other with round mouth

vowels that howl in jasmine's pale scent.

UTOPIA

Golden hour:
 your bent knee, an archipelago.
 We perform togetherness
 by doing nothing, open
 phones so data streams in.
 Things that sync: a breath,
 a heartbeat, two lovers.

Conversation catches tide in our chests.
 We comment on the world beyond.
 Through glass, current. Thumb
 an anchor holding otherness in place.

Your hip, a cradle for my nape. Stomachs
 churn with want. Cat enters, finds undertow
 of warmth, an intersect, makes himself
 a nest. Purr amplifies the absence
 of any action other than rest. To say this
 will last forever is a premature truth:
 this poem isn't written yet.

Last glimpse of day: blush on window,
 curtain, paint. This no-place is liminal:
 we slide intimacy into the schedule,
 disrupt with goose bump skin, erupt
 with laughter, spume. This belonging,
 a horizon adrift in afternoon, lust.
 Tempest fills the room.

Tomorrow, laundry licking the line.
 But for now, a breeze, curled around us,
 naps on our salt limbed skin,
 cooling.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Simone King (she/her) is a poet, editor and policy adviser living on Wurundjeri country, Naarm/Melbourne. Simone's words have been published in Best of Australian Poems 2022; Rabbit; Cordite; Plumwood Mountain and Mascara Literary Review's 2002 *Resilience* anthology. Simone won the 2022 Blake Poetry Prize and the 2021 Woorilla Poetry Prize. She coedited *What We Carry: Poetry on Childbearing*, Recent Work Press, 2021 and has performed her poetry at Sydney Writers' Festival and Queensland Poetry Festival.



Simone King

ENTANGLED

Our dream-soft bodies wake to an ambered world.
Fires raze the range, smoke oranges the air.

On the south coast, our friends sit in soot and smoulder,
finger-sifting the flaked remains of their home.

My baby and I are safe here for now in this bush city,
rinsing bloody traces of the cord that tethered us.

Rescue workers on the news cradle charred koalas
as she drinks us both into a milk haze. I float

on oxytocin waves, free for a moment from worrying
about her spent inheritance. This grief has no geography.

It's here in the sick air we siphon, it's weaving south
through banksias to a beach ambushed under a sap

red sky. Later, we won't just visit grief like a town
we lived in for a while. It will be part of us, the way

Witchetty grub tracks etch under gum bark. And how,
even outside our chrysalis of skin, we still turn in –

my nipple, her lips. Her feathered head in my hands.
As she sleeps in my lap, I learn the map of her chest

with my fingertips, divining the conch of her ribcage,
a pulsing heart and her lungs, porous and pink as morning.

Note: 'Grief has no geography' and 'visit grief like a town we lived in for a while' are phrases from Felicity Plunkett's poem 'With'.

Juan Armando Rojas, Mexican-American transborder poet, has published eight poetry collections including *Como luz de río / Like River Light* (2019) and *De caña de maíz y miel: 12 haikus de Ohio/On Cornstalks and Honey: 12 Ohio Haiku* (Full/Crescent, 2018), translated to English by Jennifer Rathbun. His recorded musical-poetry journey, *Aurora Boreal* is available in most music streaming services. Rojas was the "Poet in Residence" at the University of Coimbra, Portugal (2010) and has participated in international poetry festivals, most recently in Iraq, Egypt and Colombia.

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Salwa Gouda.

Salwa Gouda is an Egyptian academic at The English Language and Literature Department in Ain-Shams University. She is a PhD holder in English literature and criticism. She received her education at Ain-Shams University and at California State University in San Bernardino. She has published many academic books including *Lectures in English Poetry*, *Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism* and others. She also contributed to the translation of *The Arab Encyclopedia for Pioneers* including poets and their poetry, philosophers, historians and men of letters.

LIKE A ROSY PRELUDE

The dunes rise

In the sunset

An eagle glides through the clouds,
In the distance,
The sun lights its majestic temple,
In the distance,
A lion defends his daily agony,
In the distance.

There is a cool wind

A hundred thousand tablets of clay,

A language only in the wind rose,
A fervent song rises,
In the distance.

This afternoon

Flying over the river

There is a necklace of braided dragonflies
That desires to illuminate everything.

Spawned upon the wind

You are the nymph of the sun

Today your wings have sprouted

In the twilight

My river will fly.



Juan Armando Rojas

IN THE SUNSET

A dragonfly that perches on the river
Is waiting for the fragility of the wind.

In a language that springs from a fountain
Is praying and repeating his name,
He says it slowly

Almost silent
Over the horizon
In the anteroom of the night
Until sunrise
When the dawn smiles at him

Under the morning sun
Is repeating their ninety-nine names
On the irises of his thirty thousand eyes
He learns to read the scars of the desert.

That morning
Before taking flight
He is decorated,
His beauty influences the moon
The cadence that springs from its wings
Prolonged arpeggio

A wind leads to rapture
When the sun begins to repeat their names

RAISE THE FLIGHT

As soon as dawn breaks
You are a raging wind at noon
You jump like an eagle into the void
Like a hunting hawk in battle
You are a gust of crazy wind
The sun that warms me and gives life
That is why as soon as dawn breaks
Raise the flight.

You will walk on the wandering steppe
You will walk wrapped in rose petals
You will capsize in the lunar heart
When I sing in the desert of your shadow
On your lunar slopes, I will sit down to cry
Deep sigh, under a light
As soon as dawn breaks
Land on the sand of your skin
Raise the flight
As soon as dawn breaks
Raise the flight.

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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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