

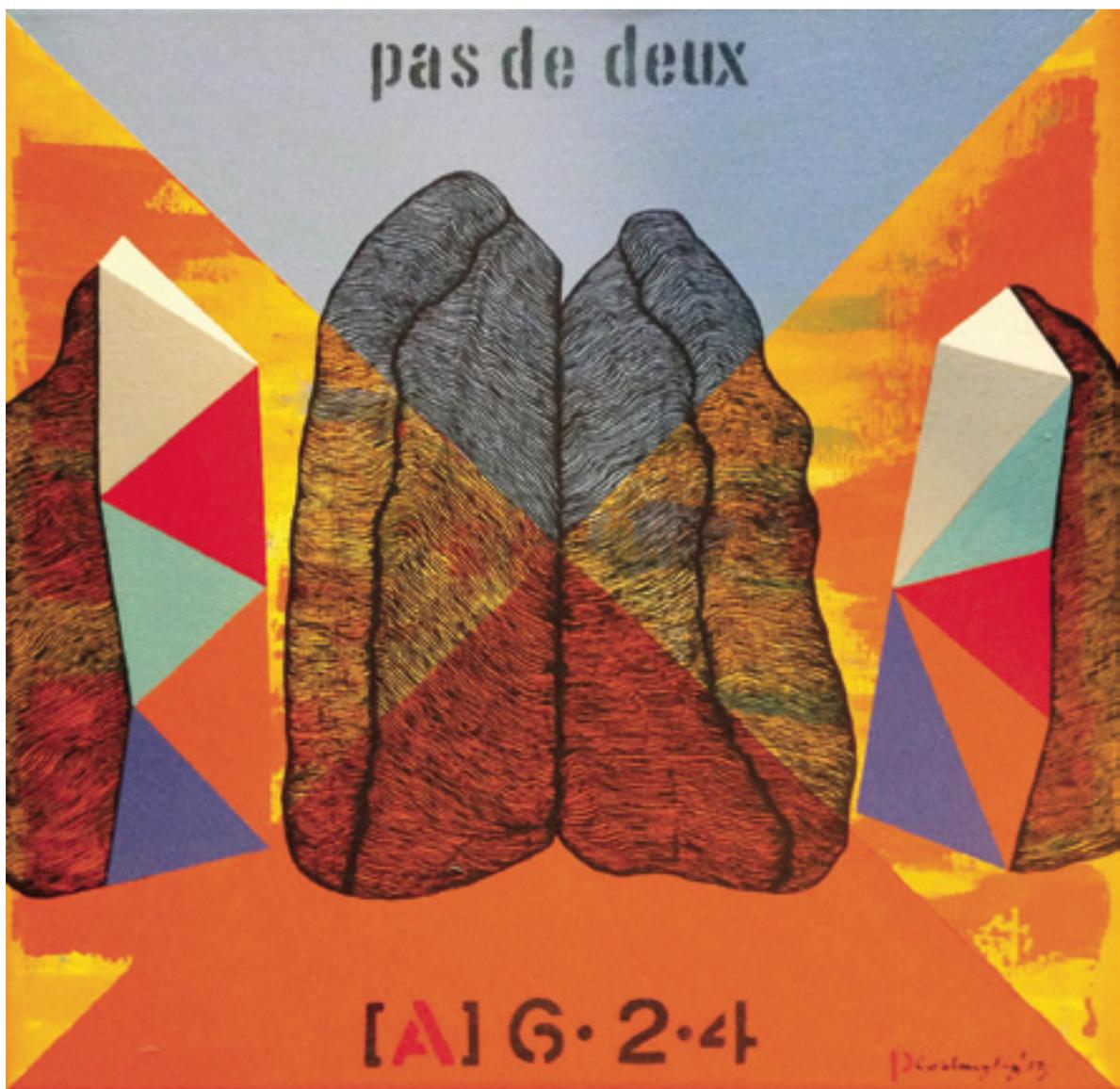
Australian Poetry Journal

Volume 4
Issue 2

pas de deux

[A] 6.2.4

12/2004



Australian Poetry Journal

Volume 4
Issue 2

Publishing Information

Australian Poetry Journal
2014 Volume 4, Number 2
apj.australianpoetry.org
A publication of Australian Poetry Ltd

Editor: Michael Sharkey
Designer: Stuart Geddes
Publications: Bronwyn Lovell & Jessica Friedmann
Interns: Jessica Hirst, Grace Lovell & Lauren Draper

Australian Poetry is the peak industry body for poetry in Australia, with a charter to promote and support Australian poets and poetry locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Australian Poetry Journal is published biannually. Address editorial correspondence to Level 3 The Wheeler Centre, Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000 or by email to editorapj@australianpoetry.org

All submissions must be accompanied by an entry form available on the APJ website; online submissions are strongly preferred.

Australian Poetry Ltd attains worldwide first publication rights in both printed and digital form for the distribution and promotion of the *Australian Poetry Journal* as a whole.

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ISSN 2204-3632

A complimentary subscription to the *Australian Poetry Journal* is included with membership to Australian Poetry Ltd.

Individual copies of the journal (including back issues) can be purchased directly from Australian Poetry Ltd., or in independent bookstores nationally.

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p66: Photograph of Yu Jian by Liu Chang. Courtesy of Simon Patton.

p68: Cover of Chinese magazine *Today* [Jintian]. Courtesy of Simon Patton.

p88: Photograph of Claire Gaskin in her twenties by unattributed photographer. Courtesy of Claire Gaskin.

p110: Photograph of Helen Power, Hobart (192?). Joseph Eccles. Inscription on verso: 'Miss Helen Power. This photograph belonged to Miss Eva Mary Allport'; this, and manuscript poems reproduced by permission of the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart. Catalogue No. AUTAS001125883439.

p140: Man, reading newspaper in the garden (1928), Richard Courtney. State Library of Victoria – H2009.40/242

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Foreword

Michael Sharkey

Welcome to the second issue of the journal for 2014.

Although we advertised no set theme for this issue, we received some outstanding contributions that addressed the politics of language, the language of politics, and even the poetry of politician-poets. Sergio Holas, Gina Mercer and Robyn Rowland invite reflection on the language we use to record historical memory and political opinion. Dan Disney and Kit Kelen challenge Australian poets to witness what 'community' really entails. Mitchell Welch takes another tack, exploring the tension between politics and poetry in published poems by some notable Australian and world politicians. The distilled thought and emotion of some of these politician-poets may agreeably surprise us; that of others may provoke recollection of Mark Antony's cynical invitation, in a speech to further his political ends, 'If you have tears, prepare to shed them now'.

We continue exploration of poetry translation, with poet and translator Simon Patton's memoir of first acquaintance with the poetry of his Chinese contemporary Yu Jian, and the two poets' ensuing friendship. In the first of a series of interviews with Australian poets, Claire Gaskin describes her upbringing in a house where books were uncommon, and the twenty-year gestation of her first published collection under the mentorship of an outstanding teacher and editor. Tasmanian poet Sarah Day recounts her discovery of the work of compatriot Helen Power, whose extraordinary World War I poem first captured this editor's attention. Power's writing career was interrupted for many years, until a late flourish drew accolades from senior poets who wondered how her work could remain obscure. Sarah Day's profile of Power is

a welcome addition to our celebration of under-appreciated poets' work. On another tack, Oscar Schwartz's online quiz, 'bot/non-bot', has entertained many readers and provoked interest in the generation of robotic poetry: for now, we offer his 'take' on it.

We received poetry submissions from the UK, Europe, North America and New Zealand as well as from Australians living at home or abroad. Some poets told us that this would be their first appearance in a literary journal. Readers of the e-version of this issue can look forward to supplementary voice and sound recordings and collage-poems related to poets' travels in Japan, India, Australia, and French Romanticism.

Reviews include appreciative investigations of the work of Geoff Goodfellow, Carol Jenkins, and Todd Turner—poets as unusual as unlike in their approaches—and an incisive appraisal of the work of Bronwyn Lea, my precursor as editor.

I record here the passing of several noteworthy poets in 2014: film maker, painter and poet Ken Taylor (b. 1930); poet and artist Rosemary Raiche (b. 1935); and poet and critic Martin Harrison (b. 1949). The staff of *Australian Poetry* and the *Australian Poetry Journal* extend sympathy to their families and friends, and to those of novelist, short story writer and composer of children's poems Liam Davison, killed with his schoolteacher wife Francesca in the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17.

Finally, my thanks to administrative officer Liz Kemp, who has joined the publishers Allen & Unwin, and publications manager Jessica Friedmann, who oversaw the production of the journal and directed its development since inception.

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Toby Fitch
Flooze

a drawn young crowd of sloe gin gods
marbles the terraced view below
an ocean of Skye her huge bespectacled eyes
the colour 'blue moon snow'

rosy rubes of the local watering hole stem
slenderly decked-out in vintage white
corporate bouquets ephemeral
mahogany columns elegantly strewn

as if in ruin irises blip like digital water
marks under carpets of hair a copper Sun
of dark ilk his crystal face arresting the wet
Greens & filmy Greys in silk

as he ropes his gaze around the arena for
another dish of golden tears

Stacey Lerner
An Ending, A Beginning



Launch Audio

David McCooley
Yield



Launch Audio

Chris Mooney-Singh
The Ten Gates of the City



Launch Audio

Rob Walker
the song of an onsen



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Acknowledgements
Piano: smilingcynic
Clarinet: stefsax
Shakuhachi: robwalkerpoet
Thanks to ccmixer.org

Essay

Poets in Power

Mitchell Welch

If more politicians knew poetry, and more poets knew politics, I am convinced the world would be a little better place in which to live.

—John F. Kennedy

All poets adore explosions, thunderstorms, tornadoes, conflagrations, ruins, scenes of spectacular carnage. The poetic imagination is not at all a desirable quality in a statesman.

—W.H. Auden

Ahead of the 2008 United States presidential election, two poems by Barack Obama were unearthed from a 1981 issue of the Occidental College literary magazine, *Feast*. The press immediately dissected them and reached a broad consensus: the day job was a wise choice. There was at least one half thumb up, however, from critic Harold Bloom who thought the poems were ‘not bad’, and drew a favourable comparison with D.H. Lawrence on the basis of a shared chthonic sensibility (‘The apes howl, bare / their fangs, dance’). There was a brief flurry of interest then in poems written by US Presidents and other world leaders, but back on Australian shores, another rare collection of poems dating from 1981 remained buried deep in the dusty stacks of the Southport Branch Library. These were twenty-six poems collected under the title *Hopes, Dreams and Reflections*, and they eventually emerged in the lead-up to Australia’s 2013 federal election, though not with anything like the splash Obama’s made. These were strange odes indeed, penned by a breakout real estate mogul and self-styled millionaire activist known at the time as F. Clive Palmer. Never has there existed a more complete and concise argument for someone to keep their day job (not something I would ordinarily recommend for a real estate agent).

Clive’s poetic voice is, as you might expect, positively Bjelkeian. You can almost hear the white shoes tapping along to the singsong rhythms that conceal the vacuum of his imagination. Concerted efforts have been made to reach beyond Queensland’s borders for inspiration, and he often invokes the spiritual icons of his youth—Lennon, McCartney, Ono, Dylan, Gandhi, and Biko. Some of these poems are political (‘Robert was a Kennedy / He wasn’t you or I / He was a soldier of peace / Why did he have to die’), while others are aspirational (‘I dream of Peace / of flowers in the sky’), and some are imaginative (‘Black is the colour of my skin / sadness is the bitterness of despair’). The subject matter ranges from war and peace, to peace and love, to love in all its incarnations. In fact, the word ‘love’ appears more than forty times in sixty pages, twice rhymed with ‘dove’. Every poem parses like a Hallmark card written by Sovereign Island’s own resident Dr Seuss.

Palmer and Obama—worlds apart on most measurable axes—join the pantheon of politicians who have practised both of the dark arts: statecraft and poetry. Their poems foreshadow the sterile grammar of twenty-first century political discourse, but this wasn’t always the case. An elusive magic can still be found in the work of some of the modern world’s most prominent leader-poets: Mao Zedong (‘Air after rain, slanting sun: / mountains and passes turning blue / in each changing moment’) or Josef Stalin (‘Shine on, up in the darkened sky, / frolic and play with pallid rays’), for example. No less stately, though perhaps less magical in

spite of his Nobel Prize in literature, are the poetical works of Winston Churchill, including 'Our Modern Watchwords' c. 1898: 'The shadow falls along the shore / The searchlights twinkle on the sea / The silence of a mighty fleet / Portends the tumult yet to be.' To the reading ear, the cadence of this early work is almost indistinguishable from the even-metered, metallic radio voice of his later wartime rhetoric, but thankfully Churchill was never encouraged as a poet. Unfortunately US President Jimmy Carter was, perhaps compelled by the darkly poetic precedent set by Thomas Jefferson ('Life's visions are vanished, its dreams are no more') and Abraham Lincoln ('Here where the lonely hooting owl / Sends forth his midnight moans, / Fierce wolves shall o'er my carcass growl, / Or buzzards pick my bones'). But Carter possesses nothing like his forebears' finely-tuned doom sense, and his 1994 collection, *Always a Reckoning*, is less a chapbook than it is a minimalist history in micro-chapters broken to bits by arbitrary enjambments.

However naïve his approach, Carter is far from the worst nation-leading poet to approach the open-mic of the world stage. Neither are his presidential predecessors the creators of its bleakest visions. The worst and bleakest poetry of global politics can be attributed to Radovan Karadžić, typified in this excerpt from an untitled poem that was translated and reproduced by news agencies around the world:

I created the world to tear my head off
Judges torture me for insignificant acts
I am disgusted by the souls who radiate nothing
Like a small nasty puppy puny death
Is approaching from afar

Karadžić, of course, was the flamboyant and ruthless President of Republika Srpska during the Bosnian War of the 1990s. A prolific and decorated poet, he has been quite succinctly described as employing a 'self-romanticising macho fantasist aesthetic' to control his 'poetic-military complex' with an iron fist. He continued to publish ultranationalist poetry during his thirteen years in hiding, wanted for war crimes (presumably the 'insignificant acts' of his verse) including the atrocities at Srebrenica. His fugitive poems became puzzles pored over by the intelligence agencies of the world, and eventually he was discovered posing as a pony-tailed new-age guru of Human Quantum Energy. He is currently on trial in the International Criminal Court.

Reading Karadžić, we might find ourselves disturbed by the poetic form's potential to be co-opted as a medium for extreme nationalist propaganda, each poem an abstract for the totality of state-sanctioned terror. At the other end of the spectrum, we might read Clive Palmer's shop-worn meditations on harmony and love, and find ourselves tempted to dismiss the poems of the political class as merely a benign pastime. In the Australian context, most samples fall between these two poles, occasionally skirting the borders of political ideology. These extremes imply a spectrum that runs from dangerously convictive to dangerously stupefying, and somewhere in that field of data, a de facto argument arises for the close reading of poems written in the halls of power.

§

The first local example that will spring to mind is probably the party-political poem, the vehicle for barbs traded across the floor of Parliament, usually driven by each party's resident wit. Indeed, there have been reams of doggerel trotted out in all the Australian assemblies: limericks, clerihews, facetious odes, all of them constructed for political point scoring, all built on the same tired frames of idiom and cliché. Take, for example, Federal Labor MP Clyde Cameron's parliamentary performance following the Menzies Government's narrow victory in the 1961 federal election, which hinged on the flow of Communist Party preferences to Queensland Liberal member and ex-jackeroo Sir Jim Killen, an otherwise shrill opponent of the red menace:

I'm magnificent according to Ming [Robert Menzies]
 And with Communist preferences I feel like a king.
 So do what I say, not what I do
 For I'm Denis James Killen, the Red Jackeroo.

Parodies like these can be found right throughout Hansard, and they are almost always as irksome, though perhaps not quite as droll as Bob Katter Jr's infamous bush poetry ('I have no time for the men of the city who prance and pose; / My heart's out there with the men of the Gilded Rose'). Katter is reportedly a not-too-distant relative of the third highest-selling poet in history (after Shakespeare and Lao Tzu), the Maronite-Bostonian spiritualist poet of the early twentieth century, Kahlil Gibran. But Katterisms and partisan doggerel aside, there is a rich vein of poetry running through Australia's political history, and the story starts way back in the colonial parliaments.

Before the advent of film, radio and television, the poetic form (along with music and theatre) mediated our connections to the wider world. In the colonial era, it was the primary vehicle for culture, and crucial to the establishment of social norms. As an oral form, poetry was able to transcend widespread illiteracy to deliver entertainment, education and moral instruction. The meters, cadences and rhymes we recognise in the popular works of Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson were carefully sharpened hooks, just like the pop melodies that succeeded them, and they were buried deep and early in Australia's vernacular culture by the early balladeers. Poets were the movie- and rock-stars of the colonial era and, like Reagan, Schwarzenegger and our own Peter Garrett, some of the biggest celebrity names cashed their cultural capital for votes and entered the colonial parliaments.

Adam Lindsay Gordon, for example, joined the South Australian House of Assembly in 1865, but his political career was short-lived; five years later he walked into the scrub behind his Brighton home and shot himself. The events are not necessarily correlative, but neither can we assume they are wholly unconnected. Gordon, while admired for his exceptional classical education, generally avoided addressing the house and was described as a circumlocutory stammerer. On one occasion, the chamber's gas lighting failed during an extended ramble on

squatters' rights, and both sides of the house booed him in equal measure under the cover of darkness. One can only guess what cruel shapes his poetic imagination might have projected into the dark of that rattling chamber.

In the years between his election and death, Gordon penned melancholy poems such as 'Gone', collected in 1867's *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*, which is an important early example of the emerging unromance of the Australian poetic voice: 'Feeble and faint, and languid and low, / He lay on the desert a dying man'. Gordon remains the only Australian commemorated in the Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey (later joined by Alfred Lord Tennyson, who has a connection to Australia's governing class via his son and amanuensis, Hallam, Governor of South Australia and the second Governor General of the Federation).

An interesting counterpoint to Gordon is Dowell O'Reilly (father of political activist and writer, Eleanor Dark), who joined the New South Wales Legislative Assembly (1894–1898). He also stood (unsuccessfully) as a Labor candidate in the 1910 federal election. O'Reilly's parliamentary career was arguably more fruitful than Gordon's, O'Reilly having successfully introduced the first bill for women's suffrage in New South Wales. His writing career did not, however, follow quite the same posthumous trajectory as Gordon's, although echoes of a shared melancholy can be found throughout. And although O'Reilly's works have been collected and published several times since his death, his most haunting poems, like 'Sea Grief', remain relatively underappreciated ('The everlasting boom of broken waves / Like muffled thunder rolls about the graves').

Gordon and O'Reilly are only two of a cohort of colonial parliamentarian-poets too numerous to list in full. Worth highlighting is the four way political-poetical rivalry that took place in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in the mid-nineteenth century between Daniel Deniehy, William Wentworth, William Forster and Henry Parkes. All four were men of letters, poets of varying talents, and politicians of note. None was shy of throwing stones. A radical republican ('Thou patient Moon of Memory's dreary sky, / Oh, pray for me') and renowned as a literary critic, Deniehy publicly derided Wentworth's vision for an upper house based on hereditary lordships ('May all thy glories in another sphere / Relume, and shine more brightly still than here'). In reference to the concept of an antipodean peerage, Deniehy coined the famous phrase 'bunyip aristocracy'. This rivalry ran alongside another deep rift between William Forster, a Premier of short tenure, and Henry Parkes, five times the Premier. This was an enmity based both on prior political dealings, and on Forster's fierce public criticism of Parkes' poems. Here Deniehy was diplomatic, favouring Forster for his poems ('Wine waxes in power in that desolate hour / When the glory of love is dead') and Parkes for his politics.

Indeed, William Forster's opinion on Henry Parkes' poetry was not held by him alone. The father of Federation may have had an apostolic beard in common with his American contemporary Walt Whitman, but the Rip Van Winkle look is as far as the comparison stretches, Parkes' literary works being generally considered less than sublime. 1885's 'The Beauteous Terrorist', for example, was a versified biography of Sophia Perovskaya, a Russian aristocrat turned anti-Tsarist revolutionary from Crimea. Rather than buoying the historical elements of her story with anything approaching a poetic sensibility, Parkes tethers mostly dry historical data to

the anchors of an arbitrary structure and, despite its promising title, Perovskaya's story fails miserably to transcend these twin strictures of fact and form:

The judges, sworn to guard the right,
 Interpreted the tyrant's bent;
 Though cleared by witnesses of light,
 'Twas hard to save the innocent.

The senate in its ordered state,
 Might free – its voice inspired no awe
 Acquittal did not liberate –
 The autocrat annulled the law.

Many poets galvanised by or entrenched in the governance of the colonies played central roles in Federation too: Louisa Lawson (mother of Australian suffrage, and of Henry) published feminist poems and ran pro-Federation newspapers *The Republican* and *Dawn*. Edmund Barton, though never known as a poet in his own right, was related on his mother's side to Banjo Paterson, and even published a verse of his own in the *Bulletin*.

Alfred Deakin, kingmaker of the movement and thrice Prime Minister in his own right, has hundreds of verses preserved in the special collections of his namesake university. Most of these are occasional verses: birthday sonnets, wedding sonnets, anniversary sonnets, etc. But every now and then, a dark and captivating voice emerges: e.g. 'I have been in the pit / Till the rankling bane of it / Fanged into my lifeblood / And festers there now'. This untitled poem is dated 5 October 1895, and the date can be cross-referenced with his diaries to determine the root of his gloomy outlook. For several days prior to writing this poem, Deakin has scribbled 'bad cold' and a scratching of barely decipherable words including 'death'. Of course, this is no ordinary cold, but the kind of nineteenth century flu that threatened to drive its bearer over the edge of mortality. This encounter with human frailty is heightened by its context, so close to federation—in Deakin's mind, the reconciliation of the *Zeitgeist* and the material world. In this poem Deakin confronts not only his own death, but the denial of his place in history, the death of a destiny he presumed was foresworn.

§

Of course, Deakin pulled through, and the years following Federation were also crowded with poet-partisans. A small flock was drawn to the nation's newly constituted breast in Melbourne, while others remained in the states. One notable comer to the new parliament was Labor member J.K. McDougall who wrote the anti-war poem 'The White Man's Burden' in 1900, and in 1919 was tarred and feathered in the streets of Ararat by ex-servicemen after the Nationalists ran a smear campaign that used his reworded poetry to paint him as an enemy of patriots and soldiers ('Ye fall in alien places, / On foreign wastes ye lie / Stiff-limbed with putrid faces / Turned livid to the sky').

Meanwhile in Queensland, Randolph Bedford, an early precursor to Clive Palmer, was elected to help abolish the Upper House. Like Clive, Bedford was a voluble entrepreneur who made (and lost) fortunes in mineral and material wealth. Like Clive, he was known for radical ideas both in politics and business, his analogue to Palmer's mythic *Titanic II* being a proposed fourteen million acre cattle station destined to remain a vast mirage. Unlike Clive, Bedford was an accomplished orator who was known for his stirring radio broadcasts, sharp contrast to the ever-growing oeuvre of morning television Palmpropisms, those jumbled word-chains that leave us all with a 'feelingness of hopelessness'. Bedford was, not surprisingly, a better poet, though no less prepossessed by love as his subject: 'I told her of the load of everlasting love I bore'. Bedford's skill was the product of enduring literary friendships with characters such as Vance Palmer (no relation), Zora Cross and Lionel Lindsay. Perhaps, in terms of the company you keep, it is worth keeping intellectual company as well as nickel holdings.

Not all politicians, and certainly not all poets, share Bedford's and Palmer's wealth and privilege. It is important to acknowledge some of the powerful poetic voices that resonate throughout this period despite the system's best efforts to silence them. The first women (Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney) entered the parliamentary fray in 1943, and Neville Bonner became the first indigenous member decades later in 1971. Enid Lyons dabbled in song lyrics, collaborating on patriotic ditties like 'Tight Little Island', released by Van Diemen's Records in 1940, but by the time diversity began to work its way into our democracy, the social function of poetry was declining and the art form was seen as an ever-more obscure habit. The marginal voices of the early twentieth century had to make themselves heard outside the neoclassical echo chamber of Parliament House.

One such voice belonged to Oodgeroo of Noonuccal, the poet-activist from Minjerribah who was central to the campaign for the indigenous constitutional reforms of 1967. In 1983, then still known as Kath Walker, she ran for a seat in the Queensland state elections as a candidate for the Democrats, but was unsuccessful. Even though she never claimed a seat of her own in the big house, Oodgeroo was influential and consistently held the Canberra elite to account, particularly during one notable encounter with then-Prime Minister Menzies in the mid-sixties. Always the consummate gentleman, Menzies offered Oodgeroo a drop of something fortified—sherry, brandy, or port, depending on the account—prompting her to remind him that he was technically committing an offence; it was illegal at that time to offer alcohol to an Aboriginal person. As in her poems, with graceful restraint and stunning rightness, Oodgeroo made white Australia's short occupation seem an absurd spike in an otherwise uninterrupted continuum of black history's freedom.

Menzies himself, responsible for so many versified exercises in party-political wit, penned some relatively earnest (if unexceptional) undergraduate elegies and sonnets in the *Melbourne University Magazine*, which he edited during the First World War ('Laden with secret and song from the chaos of worlds long ago'). For the most part, however, the extended period of conflict and depression was the domain of poets outside the political sphere. In this period, future statespoets read, absorbed and mastered the accumulating Australian canon, and eventually

found themselves in power mid-century. In this era, the role of the intellectual in Australian politics enjoyed a revival and a new egalitarian spirit. Australians were well served by a compulsory primary education system that, even before the end of the nineteenth century, had produced a literate, even well read society. Increasingly in the twentieth century, Australian works of verse and fiction were incorporated into the syllabus in high schools as well as primary schools. Poetry's status as a primary medium of culture, despite already being in decline, had become so ingrained at all levels of Australian society, that a keen mastery of its functions could put members of the increasingly literate working class on an even intellectual footing with the 'university men'.

Les Haylen was one member of this new school. In 1945, the former news editor of the *Women's Weekly* joined the Labor backbench, ostensibly to subsidise his successful but poorly paid career as a playwright. Dame Mary Gilmore, poet and socialist, was a family friend and regular correspondent. The most challenging of Haylen's unpublished poems, which are collected at the National Library of Australia, owe much to his close association both with her fierce ideology and her dedication to realism. But he also turned a critic's eye back upon the craft, often parodying in his works the breed of egoism and pure aestheticism that he saw as signifying a troubling turn in Australian poetics ('The lizard laggard long bellied eye twinkled / Sailor like ran up the walled place'). Perhaps his most moving poems, like J.K. McDougall's before him, were his anti-war efforts. During Vietnam, after leaving institutional politics, Haylen printed and mailed hundreds of copies of his poem, *My Christmas Card*, which celebrates a Christmas miracle—the breaking of a long drought—and reads like a string of seasonal thanksgivings, at least until the volta:

It's raining on the Mekong
Where the yellow waters hide
The body of a peasant,
His rice knife by his side.
It's raining on a woman
And her maddened mother-cry
For the baby at her bosom,
Too young, too young to die.
It's raining on the jungles
Where the grinning corpses hide,
It's raining on the ocean
With dead men on the tide.

Contrast this with the work of one of his opposite numbers, Wilfrid Kent Hughes, a soldier, Olympian, self-described fascist (per a series of 1933 articles in the *Melbourne Herald*) and successful Victorian state parliamentarian before joining the Menzies Government as Minister for the Interior in 1949. In World War II, Hughes was first a prisoner of war in Changi, then a slave labourer to the Japanese forces in Manchuria. During his internment he wrote *Slaves of the Samurai*, an epic poem in thirty-one cantos, published in 1946. It contains the following didactic lines:

The simple lessons of mankind can be
 So clearly read in every history.
 Ideals, without a strong right arm, are less
 Than voices crying in the wilderness.
 A strong right arm is nurtured not by sloth,
 Pursuit of pleasure, or by pride of cloth;
 But by self-discipline and sacrifice.

The political narrative that lies in the ideological gulf between these two poems is in itself an argument for academic interest in the form. With the warring ideologies of the twentieth century wound conceptually through the text, the parliamentary poem becomes an artefact of a pivotal time and place in Australian history—the great philosophical crossroads (and many collisions) of the late modern Parliament. Poems by politicians from this era have been largely ignored by historians who might find them too esoteric, or irrelevant to their purposes; by literary critics who can't abide politicians' discourse, even when attractively enjambed; and by political scientists, often too focused on the big picture systems and structures of politics to zoom way in on the knots of psychic data at the power nodes of their statistical nets. These are, after all, first-person accounts of modern history unfolding, composed with the electricity of the moment still coursing, all prejudices laid bare between spare and telling lines.

Even when the sharp edges of ideology are sheathed, the poems of the political class in this period uniquely record the sensual experience of power, perhaps no more artfully than in the poems of Governor General Paul Hasluck's *Dark Cottage*: 'No memory of heat / nor foreboding of the cold but in unfelt surrender / to seasonal doom'. Hasluck was already an established poet when he joined the Menzies ministry in 1951, and on his appointment to the cabinet he received a letter from Miles Franklin:

May I congratulate you and say how inspiring it is to have a real writer, above all a poet, as a Cabinet Minister. Our first? – unless we have to accept Sir Henry Parkes. In any case, some day we may have a Minister of Fine Arts, and a wool man over it could be inadequate.

Unfortunately, Franklin's wish was never realised. Just as quickly as it emerged, the mid-century renaissance of parliamentary poetry began to recede, and our current Minister for the Arts is neither a wool man nor a poet, but a lawyer who believes in bigotry as a human right. Perhaps tellingly, the last enduring poet of note to emerge from Australian politics was Peter Kocan, the would-be assassin of Labor Leader, Arthur Calwell ('Though peering at the path ahead / I can't pretend to see the faintest light').

After the golden days of Haylen and Hasluck, the literary flame guttered on a little longer in the federal arena: Labor Senator Terry Aulich published a 1976 collection called *Acacia Road* in which a 'motel skulks beneath an orange mountain'; Greens leader Bob Brown published a slim retrospective in 2010, titled, *In Balfour*

Street: 14 Poems from the 1970's ('A flapping wing thing / in the air / ruffles the photons / which fall to my mind'); and Labor MP Susan Ryan published a series of poems in a 1986 edition of *Australian Poetry*, including an inventive sequence titled 'Found poems from TV reports'.

Our last poet-Prime Minister was Gough Whitlam, who showed great potential in the few examples of juvenilia from the magazine of the Canberra Grammar School that are now held in the collections of the University of Western Sydney. Gough was classically trained, and many of his poems are translations: Homer and Horace from Greek and Latin, respectively, Ronsard from French. One of his own compositions (presumably after an excursion) is 'An Ode to the Institute of Anatomy', the macabre museum of methylated snakes, bisected marsupials and criminal skulls whose building now houses the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra. Whitlam's firm grasp on language by its roots is evident in his precision in describing light: 'There cut-throats' brains are kept in pond'rous vases / And lizards' bowels float in lucent cases; / Around them hyalescent waters flow / And orbs electric cast a lurid glow.'

But, laugh or cry, Clive Palmer is one of the few published poets remaining in the Federal arena, alongside Liberal MP David Coleman who published a handful of poems in the UNSW magazine *Unsweetened*, and Greens Senator Penny Wright who in 2006 published a collection called *Journey in the Wind*. Unless any others step forward, it falls to these three very different poets to carry the torch.

§

The narrative of the poet-politician in the twenty-first century seems to be the story of an ever-dwindling rump of outliers gradually spreading out. The ALP and Greens seem to preselect many poet-candidates for both state and federal elections, but generally in unwinnable seats. Perhaps they, like Auden, suspect the consequences of the poets' finely-tuned death drive. There have been mayors and councilors writing verse across the country, and there remain a few practitioners hiding in plain sight in the state parliaments. In Queensland, the party-hopping, punk-band-fronting 'rebel MP' Aidan McLindon (successively Liberal National Party, Queensland Party, Katter Australian Party, and Family First) has committed at least one original poem to Hansard despite the objections of Mr Deputy Speaker: 'Order! Honourable member, I find the word 'porkies' unparliamentary'. In NSW, Nationals member, sheep-farmer, sheep-farm poet and author of *Cubbaroo*, Ian Slack Smith, left the flock in 2007.

Perhaps the highest-ranking poet left in power is Bruce Atkinson, Liberal member and President of the Legislative Council of Victoria. In 1994, two years after his election to the Upper House, Atkinson published *Not Everyone's Cup of Tea*, which broaches some interesting themes: the mutual boredom of ill-matched dinner guests, the soldier-like virtue of partisans, the silkiness of more breasts and thighs than might reasonably be expected from the pen of an elected official. Among them is this unexpected meditation on hesitation and choice:

McDonalds is my saviour

The Salvation Army major
and a lady dressed in leather
are competing for my custom.

One promises future happiness
and the other says no waiting.

To avoid a choice between
two different kinds of love
and the high pressure selling
I retreat to the sanctuary and
fulfillment of a nearby McDonalds.

Given Atkinson's history of crossing the floor, this poem reveals, with its facetious logic the personal anguish of the individual in the party-political system. Had he been elected to the lower house, perhaps the speakership would have been his McDonalds, but as it stands the President of the Legislative Council must cast his vote, and on certain issues Atkinson has proved his independence in deciding which side of the chamber is selling salvation, and which side is dressed in leather.

Like Les Haylen before him, Atkinson is aware of the tension between politics and poetics, and also engages in some sophisticated navel-gazing, particularly in the aptly titled 'Propaganda', which equates the vital power of the poetic voice with something approaching authoritarianism. Perhaps Mao, Stalin, or even Karadžić was on his mind. But ironically, the poet quickly erodes his own assertion: 'the poem / is too quick / in its conclusion.'

Sergio Holas
degrees of separation

The key question of metaphysics, according to Heidegger, is that which refers to the origin of entities: why is there something instead of nothing?

—Francisco Varela

I

what european words didn't exist
in the aboriginal languages

what aboriginal words didn't exist
in the european languages

those inexistent words
are shadows between
you
&
me
our degrees of separation

II

so there is something
instead of nothing
something that exists as shadows
outside language
en el lado de afuera
shadows outside
outside

III

i am their tracker
i follow shadows
i follow the shadows of words
those words that do not exist in my language
i track i am their tracker
of that which is
on the side which is out
i track them outside my language
afuera de mi lenguaje
outside

Mike Ladd
Adelaide

You old quincunx.
Colonel Light playing tic tac toe
on the Kaurna's pages,
that little brownsnake of a river
winding through its parklands frame.

Over your eastern stairs the sun appears,
filtering through skylights,
the footfall echo of your arcades,
to end with a long bath in the west –
your curve of beaches
which are summer's collective.

Clever, pretty, but lacking confidence,
exposed here on your plain.
We always have to talk you up,
get your festival clothes on.

I like you best in November
when you spill buckets of jacaranda,
April too, when the slow light cools
into shouts in the stadia.
Even now, after a week of 40 degrees –
it's raining at last,
upstairs at the Exeter I can hear
chuckles in the gutters
and applause from the rooftops.
Beyond the brown haze of your suburbs
we smell desert,
so we love to see the water run.

Adelaide –heimat of sandstone Terraces,
gargoyles, lacunae, suffocations.
Once I thought you were too small,
but after all these years we fit each other:
here in front of Bonython Hall,
my first memory – a pantomime giant
came down through the floodlit trees
chasing Jack and his golden harp.

Place is voice as much as view:
'Legs like Payneham Road'.
'A pash at Windy Point' –
It's better up there than Los Angeles,
that hot glitter, all the way to the Gulf.

Chris Palmer

Growing notes for banksias

1

A book says the one called Wallum
grows as a small, gnarled, twisted tree
under more favourable conditions.

2

The eminent naturalist whose name you bear
likened the country to the back of a lean cow.
You helped give Botany Bay its name.

3

Even as a young plant
the Old Man Banksia
resembles an old man.

4

Giant candles, illuminating the south-west.

5

They say your leaves are alternate, sometimes whorled
that your dense inflorescence is subtended by a bract.
And your cotyledons have acute basal auricles.

6

Generations have made a sweet liquor of your flowers.
I look on your muted struggle and drink.

7

The wind burnishes your grain
the sun burns you into being
and your being is burned into artefact.
Tourists know you as coasters and pencil holders
ornaments and photo frames.
Small eyes are glued just above yawning follicles
that speak of centuries.

8

You broke the desolation of King George Sound;
became the clouds the explorer Eyre never saw.

9

Your passive smoking is nothing less than addiction
and every year your seeds disappear into blackness.
Jumping spiders fill the spaces like confessionals;
(many are the sins of an ambush predator).

10

Eucalyptus and melaleuca are your associates
but dryandra is the voice that was always in your head.

11

Clinging to the coast as if watered by the sea
some of the largest I've seen
line the land's edge
framing old age and unacred silence
elemental changes in the light.
You define a continent
in the shape of Australia.

Rod Usher
The Third Eye

In Zen the spade is the key to the whole riddle
— Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki

To call a spade a spade
makes a man half-happy
wood and steel made
for working hands
lever's favourite lover
ender of Neanderthal kneel
finder of new potato
worm's doppelgänger
none of the fork's sly tines
the pick's pointed anger
or the fussiness of the rake.

Fudaishi, wise man of China,
had a deeper take
fifteen hundred years past:
'Empty-handed I go, and
behold the spade in my hands'
which to those at his feet
must have provoked shock:
he might as well have said
'A rose is a rose is a rock'.

Therein lies the leap
one Jung thought too steep
for the Western mind-set
inundated by intellect
addicted to appearance
seduced by syllogism
dual to the death.

Inhaling an Eastern breath...
 the spade is a turner of earth
 turned by the turning Earth
 predisposed to nothing
 designated only in dictionaries
 hide-and-seeker
 smiling in the closed shed.

Call Fudaishi off his head,
 as many have before, absurd
 nihilistic, an old man
 bereft of common sense
 but perhaps he heard
 the wooden horse neigh
 saw the stone statue dance
 by illogical happenstance
 beheld with empty hands.

Haiku Version

With its face buried
 in the dark earth, is the spade
 a Yes or a No?

Essay

**Speaking
against Silence:
Notes toward
raising our
voices**

Dan Disney and Kit Kelen

In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible.
—George Orwell, ‘Politics and the English Language’

When people who are less fortunate come to the door, are there imperatives for those born by luck into a safe place? Or is the world simply too small today for hospitality to be extended to those hoping to escape persecution and the imminent threat to life? Are there too many humans in the world for the lucky few to act hospitably? What role do those humans we call poets have when such questions of humanity are to the fore?

§

In his book *Communitas*, Roberto Esposito probes etymological fissures; deep in the folds of ‘community’, he locates in the Latin *munus* the kin concepts of duty and obligation. But lurking deeper still, within ‘obligation’ there is a surprise: alongside *onus* and *officium*, Esposito discovers *donum*—or gift. Consider the cognates ‘municipality’ and ‘munificence’: this etymological non-alignment causes Esposito to suggest that participation in a community is ‘the gift that one gives because one *must* give and because one cannot not give’. But what are we giving, obligingly, when career politicians manufacture slogans such as ‘Turn Back the Boats’? When language is spun so that ‘asylum seekers’ (an already-problematic term) become Orwellian ‘clients’ or ‘transferees’, then surely the onus on those with a voice is to speak? But how to speak, and how to engage the silent majority?

We address our questions directly to Australian poets. The objective here is not to rehearse or rehash arguments against specific policies or governments: discourses against dehumanising politics in Australia are being made eloquently elsewhere. Our hope rather is to encourage a plural, multifaceted conversation about what kind of community we want. Indeed, our community is defined by how we treat each other and others and, may we say, recently by the expediencies of political agendas based more on waste management than human decency. And let’s not exaggerate our circumstances: Australia has not altogether shut the door on foreigners or on parties wishing to become Australian, nor indeed on refugees. But there are specific economic and political motivations behind appearing to be tough on people seeking asylum in our country. Those populist ideas that a queue is being jumped or a ‘line being drawn’ elicit mute complicity. A silence is propagated when governments refuse to report details of refugees arriving (or, as the case may be, and who would know [?], not arriving). In a climate of unknowing, engineered purposefully to heighten fear, self-interest will always trump decency.

§

As indicated by two recent publications, we are not alone in wanting to raise dissent over the vision of mainstream Australian politicians: *Southerly 73:1 – The Political Imagination* (edited by Ann Vickery and Ali Alizadeh) and *A Country Too Far: Writings on Asylum Seekers* (edited by Rosie Scott and Tom Keneally) were both published in 2013. Of the latter, and writing in *The Guardian* newspaper, Wendy Bacon

tells us that the book ‘bears witness to a deeply felt angry dissent among a minority of Australians about our treatment of asylum seekers’. John Mateer is one such dissenting voice, and impugns political opportunism in Australia so as to deepen discussion of who (and why) we are, and what (and how) we want to be. Writing of the madness of an *ethical* sleeplessness in ‘One Year’, the poet wanders

night streets under the eyes
of quartz-white Anzacs and invisible neurotic possums,
I haunted the suburbs, driving through industrial estates,
waiting inside 24hour supermarkets

for the voice in my head to cease prattling in Afrikaans,
for me to stop being a *luftmensch*

and start being a citizen unafraid of the silence that sews twitching lips shut

(*The Ancient Capital of Images*)

The poem follows with an exhortation, that ‘simply being awake/ is not insomnia: “It’s political”’. Indeed, ‘One Year’ is a slap, or a sleeping-pill-in-reverse, rousing readers from a collectively-accepted nightmare. Mateer cannot allow himself to feel comfortably at home amid rights-of-passage narratives, where obligations seem to have been already fulfilled. Texts like ‘One Year’ take up a speaking position to express bewilderment at an abhorrence ... what is being done in our name and (allegedly) in our best interests?

§

Washed ashore in the land of the Phaeacians, Odysseus prays to the unknown god of the stream:

Hear me Lord, whoever you are. I come to you as many others have come, with a prayer. I am a fugitive from the sea and from Poseidon’s malice. Any poor wanderer who comes in supplication is given respect, especially by the immortal gods. I am such a man, and I now turn to you after much suffering and seek the sanctuary of your stream. Take pity on me, Master, I am your supplicant (*The Odyssey*).

This man who calls himself Nobody prays to an anonymous god: for this an act of openness is required. To ask, one must be open to the encounter and open to receive what is offered through that encounter. And to give, to allow, to accept? In so many ways, we who are here—we of amorphous origins—have become or allowed ourselves to become the gods of this place. Only an act of hubris remains deaf to the kind of plea an Odysseus makes, to the kind of plea made by those who arrive on our doorstep fleeing death and persecution. Woody Guthrie’s lines come to mind: ‘You won’t have no name when you ride the big airplane/ All they will call you will be deportee.’ Those who refuse to hear the pleas of the friendless stranger hide behind their namelessness, refusing to rise to a higher collective plane of care and compassion.

Fay Zwicky's 'Picnic' surveys what the scene can look like within a *munus* proffering sanctuary to its Odysseus-figures:

Meat balls, hummus and tabouli
mingled with our sizzled sausages
on paper plates. Coke and juice.
Someone had found work.
Someone had been accepted as
a lab technician. Someone's husband
still in detention three years on.
Did she get to see him?
No, couldn't get time off,
after school the kids alone
and so on.

Under a far-off tree their fathers,
uncles, brothers brooded, a still
silent circle squinting into sunlight
smoking, looking straight ahead.
Nobody seemed to be thinking of
a better world, nobody was asking
for more than a place to sit quietly
and wait

(*Picnic*)

The poem seems to pick up and diverge from what Orwell, describing politics, names as a 'mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia' (*Selected Essays*). This is poetry as a kind of anti-politics, a linguistic serum against the toxicity of political weasel words. The question to be addressed now is, *How should we speak against lies masquerading as vision, and against the ensuing silence of acceptance?* And how to frame a conversation that begins in idealism and then moves overtly toward the ethical?

§

Delivering his 'Lecture on Poetry and Society' in 1957, Theodor Adorno argues toward an explicitly social function for poetry that involves 'the subjective expression of a social antagonism'. Adorno valorises poetry as antidote, keeping language humanistic-not-systemic, vivifying-not-rote. The best art, according to Adorno, inoculates us against being psychically enchanted, hypnotised into compliance within ideological superstructures. Elsewhere, Adorno has cause to state how 'it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home' (*Minima Moralia*). What seems clearest is that, if we are to be worthy of the name, poets *must act as if still exiled*, and wear as a badge of pride the expulsion from unthinking conformity imposed when states were first thought of. Poetry has a natural affinity with exile, with foreignness, with the view from outside, the view of the margins. Viewing 'home' as

unheimlich, we poets must use our myriad styles to (as per the Russian Formalists' dictum) make the stone stony again.

§

The head-in-the-sand policies of the major Australian political parties are wrecking lives of people who need to be welcomed, helped, and healed, not harmed. That these same people sew their lips shut in protest at their treatment—one of the many ways self-harm happens in so-called 'detention centres'—is an enduring indictment. The conspicuous and media-sanitised display of this damage is, in turn, harming the morale of our community, and still a larger question persists: how should our actions be determined? Should ethics be decided by focus group or fiscal cause-and-effect such as, say, when economists calculate for us the long-term savings of not acting? The impoverished moral logic that fights doing something about climate change comes from the same mode of myopic thinking that stymies all possibility for our nation to evolve and deepen a moral conscience. Let's acknowledge a fundamental point here. Conscience and community are more to us than nation, than borders, than paying bills, than lifestyle. Indeed, this is not just about community, but culture as a mode of cultivation, in the etymological sense and, figuratively, as a mode of care-bound honour. As Yeats avows, without culture 'a man [sic] may renounce wealth or any other external thing, but he cannot renounce hatred, envy, jealousy, revenge. Culture is the sanctity of the intellect.' (*Collected Works, Vol. III*). Let us acknowledge that a nation will be worthwhile to the extent that it provides intangible but fundamental assets such as inclusivity, pluralism, conscientiousness, and the right for all to fair treatment and the chance of well-being.

§

When Esposito flips his term *communitas* into its reversal, *immunitas*, a version of recent Australian responses to those who seek asylum shifts through the fog of political rhetoric and into clearer focus: immunised against making a contribution but not inoculated against that most contemporary of maladies, affluenza, the immunitarian takes from, instead of taking part in, a society that is instrumentalised to the logic of exchange. This essentially strikes at our collective, ethical hearts; in contemporary iterations of our 'Clever Country', just how kindly have we become, if indeed kindness can be counted as a kind of intelligence: community as acultural *Terra Morale nullius*? The political vision for a 'Fortress Australia' requires that we donate our ethics in exchange for being regulated and automatised, the denizens of a gated community. Is this who and what, and how we want to be?

§

In his poem '2001', Geoff Page traces the odyssey of asylum seekers arriving in a place where weasel words work a mesmerising logic:

*We will decide
Who comes to this country –
And the circumstances
In which they come.*

How like a piece of poetry it was,
the roughening iambics,
those sharpened 'c's', like angled pikes,

the two-beat lines that got us going –
except line 3 which had its extra
fist banged on the table

(Seriatim)

In the first stanza, Page embellishes nothing of John Howard's policy speech (which won that government a third term in office), and the poet merely lineates the entitled, arch tone of the dogwhistler. And in 'Turning', John Kinsella turns his attention toward the catch-cry that we 'Turn Back the Boats!':

Caligula said to himself: the sea
can throw up such nasty surprises,
there's room for only one god
on the high seas. I will guarantee
safe passage for those who take
the test, who kiss the bootstraps
of my troops, who worship me.
When Neptune sent his boats
Caligula scrambled his forces,
put the empire on war footing,
bunkered down in Canberra,
said he was doing it for love
of humanity, love of his people
(crikey.com.au)

Each of these examples offers its own resistance: the thin end of a wedge, or a hurled shoe, or a quarrel with the logic of immunitarians who equivocate and tune platitudes to nod, and nod off, to. Foremost, then, let us agree, after Mateer's poem, to stay loudly awake.

§

Were it not talking of the spread of Fascism across Europe, Bertolt Brecht's 'In Dark Times' might as easily map the malfeasance of successive Australian governments:

They won't say: when the walnut tree shook in the wind
But: when the house-painter crushed the workers.

They won't say: when the child skimmed a flat stone across the rapids
 But: when the great wars were being prepared for.
 They won't say: when the woman came into the room
 But: when the great powers joined forces against the workers.
 However, they won't say: the times were dark
 Rather: why were their poets silent?
 (*The Irish Review*)

For the last two centuries, Australia has been anti-podean, wrong-footed, an 'elsewhere', and any Australian using the colonial linguistic artefact cannot claim otherwise. We propose to wrong-foot those who would use the English language to dehumanise asylum seekers and, in doing so, do great harm to the Australian community, to its great possibilities. If resistance is our most ethical mode, then the time to speak is now: what is Australia if not a colony of (comparatively speaking) recent settlers? In the 'sunburnt country' of 'sapphire-misted mountains' etc, the vast majority of the current population is extra-territorian. If we are not simply mongrels, in the other sense, then let us mobilise our indignation.

§

Note

This essay accompanies the authors' invitation to Australian poets to contribute to an anthology of writing on the topic of asylum seekers. The invitation is posted on the Australian Poetry Ltd website (australianpoetry.org/competitions/writing-to-the-wire-anthology).

Karen Knight
Questions I've saved for Google

Can a conductor die on the 22nd of orchestra?
Does a star clover plant have elevated blood sugar levels in its heart-shaped leaves?
What is a halo climb?
Is red the colour of the earth's veins?
Do pet birds dream of rocketing out of their spring loaded cages and flying to a
lighthouse of sky?
Is there such a thing as winged sea lavender?
How many ways are there to cook a kohlrabi?
Can one drown in a battlefield of blood?
Do you turn right after the one-lane bridge to get to Paradise?
When does a beach ball escape from its prison of plastic?
Why does the air lull itself into a flesh-like solo?
Why do we cling to seaweed Summers?
How can we fly with the autumn leaves?

Janette Pieloor
You weren't available

I rang to tell you it was my son's birthday today,
tell you I'd rung him early, a toll for that fat day
and how he was the first to be fitted into a father's
arms; how he was my alien. He reminds me *I say
this each year, at the exact time*: he always laughs
then, indulging me, but you weren't available.

I rang to tell you I'd treated myself to a sugar hit
coffee in a dim lit restaurant: I'd walked in as if
a heroine in a mystery novel, then sideways read
my book there as if it held secrets; that the couple
next to me popped champagne, asked me if I'd like
a glass. Of course I said yes, but wiped the rim first.

I rang to tell you I bought myself a chocolate bar,
that it melted on the way home, next to the chunky
meat pie from our favourite bakery; that when I got
back, handsome José came to aerosol those paper
wasps from the deck and throw their nest away,
that it made me sad, but you weren't available

Penny O'Hara
at the library

they let her in without a fuss without a smile and they all know her name yes even this one who she's never seen before today. she has attempted to explain but she can tell from the expression in their eyes they'll never really get it well her kind of work is pretty specialised. she always gets there early gets a place. she settles in before the monitor and types disquiet persecution letter to the govern M E N T in letters pages high and in her break she slips outside and shouts a protest at the office block an audience of one. then later in the afternoon the voice comes on the dong dong dong she closes down rewinds her scarf and goes. it's getting cold. out near the toilet block she rearranges bundles bags. she fits them in their crevices she lays them down. she settles them like heads on pillows in that rattling cage.

Heather Taylor Johnson
 What Splendour! What Filth!

Ginsberg, I've got you now. Harbinger of my late youth
 you rest in shades of green made from the blue of the Pacific's rim
 and the yellow of your free-form piss. Buzz on then.

I dream of Boulder's coffee shops and the tiptoe sound
 of the city's creek sliding over pebbles and moss and you
 taking off your glasses to sleep. Today I see trees

in a whole new way: branches point to heaven
 like penises digging holes in clouds;
 I want to kiss that bird's sexy beak.

Small, small giant, it must be twenty-three years now.
 I was only a flower blooming so hard petals were bound to spill.
 Tiny deaths turned me on as much as they terrified me.

You, you, you were still alive, walking with Whitman
 in a supermarket dream and I think I heard your pen scrape once-
 somewhere there was a tornado, somewhere

an old man's guts were getting kicked in -
 this was your America. I see why we hammer
 in 'home' as if it might fly away.

Bang the gunshot and the birds
 Bang the stars
 Bang Walt Whitman

You were only telling the truth with your lusty tongue
 and all the smells that lingered on. I'm dreaming of my own river,
 where you wade with me, pointing to dragonflies fucking in air.

Stuart A. Paterson
Watching Endless Re-runs of 'The Crow'

for Jasen

*Just another sentimental tribute
to a dead movie star. A cigarette*

winks out with these words as the earth shifts
minutely on its heartbreaking axis,

not in Los Angeles or Washington,
but the front steps of Renfield Street Odeon

now where living & our sense of being real
return, reluctantly & frail.

Time-filtered words, life's not like in the movies,
old mascara running down the world's wet face

in streams, because it was, & too exact,
that perfect stunt of fiction turned to fact.

Such performance needs no second takes,
no coming back, no rotoscoped effects.

Amazement, later, in a crowded Glasgow bar,
at his death twice over, actor & character,

the make-up still in place, the camera lens
recording what can never be rehearsed.

You're not really supposed to die up there
like in real life, bullet holes should disappear

& a sunset be walked into before
the end credits roll. At the Odeon door

we'd stood in silence & the pouring rain,
getting used to a very end, & ran

through a night tilted briefly the other way,
the stars projectionists, the world's screen grey.

Marjon Mossammaparast
manjil, earthquake 1990

nasrin was twenty-nine and bearing for eight months
the third child, one hour after midnight asleep in
her caspian village. she was locked like everything

around her - that strange sea, north's mountains
ringing her tired land, the door to the children's room
when africa first nudged arabia and the whole house

sank into the liquid soils. her mother was pressed
between the persian carpet and the roof. i don't know
the rest to tell you, but luckily the husband survived.

Peter Lach-Newinsky
Nocturne

It's chilling up to a three-dog frost
as the full moon's sheen stretches
its cold milk glove over the slope lost
to tense wire & tree shadows
that loom more felt than there.

My dead head lamp throws out nada
but a blob of mousey grey, so we follow
Steve's spotlight play & twenty two
combing winter's lawns like stalag two.

Suddenly it's the exiled old man roo
at six feet near the manna gum
by the upper dam wall, sad eyes glum
&, turning to the intruding light
like a euthanasia advocate on Insight,
slowly lopes off into the night.

Scurrying, sitting like dead ducks,
rabbits dot the white-out fields as
Steve picks them off on high-beam.
It's four each for the casserole's steam
after a gut & good night's hanging.

Two does, four embryos each,
shiny dark planets in drag teach
the dog a treat. The fur soft as
forgiveness, heads cute as long-eared
babies or Disney, what can we say
but sorry, salivate as we survey
those tasty bodies tuned to the moon's
old tides of mania, fecundity, lust,
that hare-brained triple goddess
of these continent-killing rats?

joanne burns
watch tower a reconnaissance

scene I

you slump in darkness gazing at
a screen websites of a sleepless
night absorb the growing yawn a
droopy eye glimpses a presence splayed
along the desktop tower an inch or two
away a shape vigilant as silence:
a huntsman spider, yes — it has no
password has it stolen yours

scene II

you creep into the kitchen for
a plastic bag to transfer this intruder
somewhere outside [you fear a trenchant
tenancy] before it slips or leaps away into
the torchless dark no luck it's moved
on ~ you google its behaviours, ways of
catching huntsmans no, you don't want
to paralyse it with hairspray, handy hints!!

scene III

you fetch a quiet black broom and tiny
 torch the floorboards underneath the carpet
 creak ah there it is — up on the highest
 bookshelf sprawling across the crime fiction it
 has bypassed rejected twenty thirty other shelves
 kafka borges duras cortazar nin bernard edward
 lear et al and settled right above ‘the silence
 of the lambs’ amused amazed you leave it there
 and creep back into bed your partner seriously
 still asleep you lie awake all thumping heart
 what if the spider’s moved into the bedroom
 pausing on the picture rail above, about to drop
 down on your faces no no you’re up again

scene IV

you rush slowmo into the bathroom
 turn on the light the furtive traveller's
 now exploring toiletries — syrian soap
 st luke’s powder for prickly heat its
 trademark icon of an upright cobra
 with an arrow through its head you
 are determined this spider will exit
 through the window now you coax it
 round the ceiling tickling the walls with
 soft broom hair like a swish of palm fronds
 it almost drops down on dusty memorabilia:
 minnie & mickey mouse toothbrushes rose petals
 nesting in the olive oyl jug her surprised black
 eyes then sudden as a bird or a quick breath
 it’s out the window stillness spreads like gel
 of cool voltaren no living creature has been
 harmed in the writing of this poem except
 perhaps the poet

Alice Bellette
Sister

acrylic finger nails
drum on the table and
pick at a rogue blemish.

if you are by the book,
i burned that book and with
it, my bridges behind me.

my sister, my sister,
skimming the surface,
your eyelashes sparkle

with tears and/or glitter,
you are a portrait of
tabloid reckoning.

Brenda Saunders
Memory, Remnant, Recollection, Trace

— *sand-blasted glass window panels*,
Julia Sylvester 2008, Nillumbik Art Centre

Sharp-cut the grinder stamps his name
Jaga Jaga from the outside looking in
a sound held on the tongue
of the old people

Our hero's story passed down in detail
— river landings, confrontation

Skirmishes branded in Kulin memory

Words line up to chronicle the history
trace names and dates in dry point
read from the inside looking out

— knowledge etched in mission script
tell of long days sloping the pen

Forged in heat and sand, glass holds truth
up to the sky
hard as a window cold to the touch

Andy Kissane
Southerly

Only that which narrates can make us understand.
—Susan Sontag

Let me introduce Joshua. I have decided
to begin with a close-up of his amber eyes
twinkling behind plastic lenses. His glasses
are quite thick and not at all flattering
for an eleven-year-old boy. A nerd. Joshua
quizzes me about apertures and anamorphosis,
his curiosity lighting up the room.

He has shiny black hair that tends
to kink up at the back of his neck.
His classmates pull his hair when they pass him
in the corridors. They call him greasy head
and oil can. They claim they have enough gunk
to lubricate the chains of their bicycles.
They wipe their hands on their trousers and laugh.

On the bus ride home, they use Joshua
for target practice. It is truly amazing how far
some boys can spit. Five boys own
the back seat, while another holds Joshua still
in the middle of the aisle. They dredge up
globules of sputum from deep in their throats
and propel them at Joshua. The sticky

white saliva contrasts starkly with Joshua's black
hair. Some of it clumps together like gruel,
some of it runs down and fouls
the collar of his white shirt. I film it
from the front of the bus, zooming in
on the visible pain on Joshua's face,
then the glee on the faces of the bullies.

I know from talking to Joshua that Fridays at lunchtime are the worst. He won't tell me what happens, he simply stares at his shoes. So I arrange to meet my daughter's teacher to discuss her spelling problems on a Friday, just before lunchtime. I carry my camera in my bag. Afterwards, I film my daughter

and her friends playing hopscotch. I wait until I see the boys. They are dragging Joshua towards the Disabled Toilet. It's so easy to shift the viewfinder onto their procession. They carry him like a trussed pig, stopping twice to yank at his arms as if they hope to liberate them from their sockets. My anger smoulders

like white-hot coals. I can barely contain it. A boy punches Joshua in the stomach. Another kicks him. They grab his shorts and pull them down. Someone opens the toilet door and the steam rushes out. Joshua's glasses fog up so he can't see. One boy yells, 'It's your turn now'. They push him inside, slamming the door.

'Let him eat bacon sandwiches', one of them says as they run off, laughing so much that they're in danger of crying. I film it all in one long take. It's the hardest thing I've ever had to do, to film this and not intervene. The Principal denies that it happens at his school, that children can do this.

Yet I have the barbaric montage, these frames of technicolour truth. And a silence I will end soon— walls of brick and barbed wire tumbling, tumbling down.

Essay

A Turing Test for Poetry

Oscar Schwartz

Imagine you are given a poem that you have never read before. After reading it, you want to know who wrote it. You ask the person who gave you the poem who the author is, because you would like to read more of their work. You are told that the poem you just read was generated via computer software.

Do you suddenly feel differently about the poem you just read? Does this new information undermine the experience you had reading the text? Do you attribute authorship to the computer? If not, why not? And if so, do you say that the computer had been creative, that it had written poetry?

This scenario is an enactment of a question I have been researching for the past 18 months: Can a computer write poetry? Because this question prompts a number of more fundamental questions – What is poetry? What is creativity? What is language? Are they uniquely human? The first difficulty I have faced is finding a strategy for answering my primary question (‘Can a computer write poetry?’) without my research becoming too broad or impressionistic.

In 1950, pioneering computer scientist and mathematician Alan Turing published *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*, in which he posed the question, ‘Can machines think?’ Rather than defining the terms ‘machine’ and ‘think’, a task that Turing considered perilously ambiguous, Turing outlines another closely related question derived from a Victorian parlour game called the imitation game. The rules of the imitation game stipulate that a man and a woman, in different rooms, communicate with a judge via handwritten notes, answering the judge’s questions. Reading these answers, the judge has to determine who is who. The judge’s task is complicated by the fact that the man is trying to ‘imitate’ the woman in order to lead the judge into the wrong identification. Turing postulated a scenario in which the male contestant in the game was substituted by a computer. If this computer were programmed to play the imitation game so that an average interrogator would have no more than 70 per cent chance of making the right identification after five minutes of questioning, then it would be reasonable, Turing argued, that the machine could be said to possess intelligence. That is, Turing suggests that the question, ‘Can machines think?’ should be replaced by, ‘Are there imaginable digital computers that would do well in the imitation game?’ This approach to the question ‘Can computers think?’ has become known as the Turing Test, and has been commonly interpreted as providing an operational definition to the problem of computer intelligence, making intelligence verifiable through testing.

Due to the formal similarity of Turing’s question and my own, I wondered whether I might be able to appropriate the Turing Test as a methodology for answering my question about computers writing poetry. That is, if a computer is able to generate a text that, when read, possesses inherent qualities that make it indistinguishable from human poetry, then it could be argued, via the logic of the Turing Test, that computers can write poetry.

In February 2014, Benjamin Laird and I launched a website called *bot or not* (www.botpoet.com), which provides the user with the opportunity to take a ‘Turing test for poetry’. The website provides an online enactment of the imitation game, in which the user is the judge, and poems take on the role of the contestants. The user is presented with a poem from a database at random. The header text at the top of the page reads, ‘Was this poem written by a human or a computer?’ Beneath

the header text is the title of the poem, and beneath that, the body text of the poem. After having read the poem, the user is presented with two buttons: one that says 'bot' and another that says 'not'. If the user thinks a computer wrote the poem, they select 'bot'; if human, 'not'.

bot or not is comprised of a database of 306 poems. 48% of the poems on the database are computer-generated ('bot' poems), and the other 53% are written by humans ('not' poems). The database of human poetry spans a broad spectrum of time, form, subject matter, and levels of expertise. There is poetry from ancient Greece, and poetry published on the Internet in February 2014. There is poetry from the canon, experimental poetry of the avant-garde, and amateur poems taken from blogs and poetry-sharing websites. Finally, the website enables submissions, meaning that interested users can submit poetry of their own.

Selecting the bot poems for the database was more complicated, as it required a definition of 'computer-generated poetry'. On the website, there is a page entitled 'What is a computer poem' that provides the definition Benjamin Laird and I developed for this purpose:

What we mean by 'computer-generated poetry' is text that is generated via an algorithm, which is executed by a digital, electronic computer, and is intended, by whoever it may be, to be read as poetry.

This definition is further refined in the submission section of the website, which calls for users to submit their own 'bot' poetry. The instructions for submissions state that a computer poem must be algorithmically generated via a computer with minimum to zero human interference. In order to ensure this is the case, the method by which the poem was generated must be supplied along with the poem before it is accepted. So, for every bot poem on the website, there is an associated algorithm, or method by which that poem is generated. For this reason, the authorship of a bot poem is attributed not to some specific computer, but to a 'method' that could be used on any computer.

bot or not went online on 14 February 2014, and gained international attention. By the end of May, over 40,000 people from 127 different countries had taken the test, and the average poem on the database had been voted on approximately 500 times. Since people began playing with the site, the poems on the bot or not database can be organised into a scale from most human to least human. To reflect this, we created a leaderboard for the bot or not website. The leaderboard was divided into four sub-headings:

1. The most human-like human poems
2. The most computer-like computer poems
3. The most human-like computer poems
4. The most computer-like human poems

Under the headings are the top 5 poems from each category, the top position held by the poem with the highest percentage of votes in that that category. For example, on May 25, 2014, 448 people had read and voted on William Blake's poem, 'The Fly', 87% of whom believe that a human wrote the poem. This makes 'The Fly' the most human-like poem in the database.

Title	Author	Method	Votes	Bot (%)	Not (%)
<u>Most Human-Like Human Poems</u>					
The Fly	William Blake	Human	448	13%	87%
Untitled	Shelby Asquith	Human	436	15%	85%
Longing	Sara Teasedale	Human	440	17%	83%
I, Being Born a Woman and Distressed	Edna St Vincent Millay	Human	449	18%	82%
Alone	Edgar Allan Poe	Human	452	18%	82%
<u>Most Computer-Like Computer Poems</u>					
Poem	botpoet	Jgnoetry	465	90%	10%
Personal Space	botpoet	Jgnoetry	459	86%	14%
The Activist	botpoet	Jgnoetry	429	84%	16%
Peanut Butter Brittle	botpoet	Next tweet	425	79%	21%
Blah blah	botpoet	Jgnoetry	443	79%	21%
<u>Most Human-Like Computer Poems</u>					
A Wounded Dear Leaps Highest #6	Ray Kurzweil	Ray Kurzweil's Cybernetic Poet	416	31%	69%
	Janus Node	Janus Node	447	31%	69%
some men	Google	Google search Algorithm	2838	33%	67%
Untitled	Racter	Racter	416	37%	63%
Haiku	Janus Node	Janus Node	468	38%	62%
<u>Most Computer-Like Human Poems</u>					
cut opinions	Deanna Ferguson	Human	458	76%	24%
Red Faces	Gertrude Stein	Human	451	69%	31%
Cinema Calendar of the Abstract Heart 09	Tristan Tzara	Human	424	67%	33%
Study Nature	Gertrude Stein	Human	411	65%	35%
ukulele	Aaron Koh	Human	215	64%	36%

In the original formulation of the Turing Test, Turing argued that if a computer could be programmed to fool 30% of human judges, then it passed the test. The data collected from the Turing Test for poetry confirms that there are computer-generated texts that surpass Turing's designation of 30% and, in fact, have convinced over 60% of users that they were written by a human. The imperative question then becomes: What does the data collected from the *bot or not* experiment mean? Can it be taken, on its own, as verification of the fact that a computer can write poetry?

At this point, it is important to call attention to the fact that while the Turing Test for poetry appropriates Turing's methodology for comparing human and machine aptitude, the intention with which the methodology in *bot or not* is used is fundamentally different to that set out in *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*. A clear

distinction between the original Turing Test used in the field of Artificial Intelligence, and its appropriation as a form of humanistic inquiry, must be clearly maintained. In *Reading Machines: Towards an Algorithmic Criticism*, literary critic and computer scientist Stephen Ramsay argues that when computational methods are appropriated by the humanities, their function ought not be to prove hypotheses but for 'the cultivation of those heightened subjectivities necessary for critical work' (Ramsay, x). The Turing Test for poetry is the appropriation of a practical, instrumental, verifiable mechanism, which then enables critical engagement, interpretation, conversation, and contemplation within the humanities. Or as Ramsay explains, 'it is the dream of Descartes tempered by the dream of Leibniz' (Ramsay, ix).

Finally, the Turing Test for poetry does not designate what humanness in poetry is, but what the perception of humanness within the poem is. That is, the most human-like human poem in the *bot or not* database is, ontologically speaking, equally as human as the least human-like human poem. Therefore, every poem on the *bot or not* database, with its associated percentage of users who voted on it, becomes the location of assumptions about what makes a text human. In this sense, the Turing Test for poetry represents 'the dialectical interplay of emotion and logic' (Ramsay, 7). When a user reads a poem in the context of a Turing Test, what is being read is not the original poem, but a text transformed into an alternative vision in which we see a new aspect that enables further discussion and debate.

With all of this in mind, I have prepared a small Turing Test for poetry for you, the reader. In addition, beneath each poem is space for comments, in which you can write the reasons why you think poems are either 'bot' or 'not'. The purpose of this extra comments section and rating system is to allow you to consider how the act of reading poetry feels different when reading for humanness. Does it change your conception of poetry? Of language? Of creativity? How does it make you feel about your own language, your own consciousness. Ultimately, the purpose of this Turing Test for poetry is not to try and illustrate how much you know about poetry but whether you somehow possess the ability to perceive humanness in a text. It is an existential exercise as much as it is literary and, therefore, requires no prior training.

There was a time when the provenance of all written language could be known to be human. In the age of digital simulation, this is no longer the case. Computers, with their unlimited power for simulation, are forcing us to re-evaluate our relationship with language. Perhaps it will change the act of reading forever?

1 To his Watch

Mortal my mate, bearing my rock-a-heart
Warm beat with cold beat company, shall I
Earlier or you fail at our force, and lie
The ruins of, rifled, once a world of art?
The telling time our task is; time's some part,
Not all, but we were framed to fail and die—
One spell and well that one. There, ah thereby
Is comfort's carol of all or woe's worst smart.

Field-flown, the departed day no morning brings
Saying 'This was yours' with her, but new one, worse,
And then that last and shortest...

2 Cocaine

a phoenix rising
from an extremely
incriminating photo of us
friendly reminder unrelated side note
i became pregnant with me
actually my giant face is nearly sold out of
irony, sincerity, vagueness, kafka, racism, feminism, kant, buddhism,
internet names of mind leaping over obstacles set by adults
reality in my internal universe in transit
an exhausted observing male teenaged individual
is the intrepid orange cat

3 A Mounted Umbrella

WHAT was the use of not leaving it there where it would hang what was the use if there was no chance of ever seeing it come there and show that it was handsome and right in the way it showed it. The lesson is to learn that it does show it, that it shows it and that nothing, that there is nothing, that there is no more to do about it and just so much more is there plenty of reason for making an exchange.

4 Call Me Ishmael

Circulation. And long long
Mind every
Interest Some how mind and every long
Coffin about little little
Money especially
I shore, having money about especially little
Cato a little little
Me extreme
I sail have me an extreme little
Cherish and left, left,
Myself extremest
It see hypos myself and extremest left,
City a land. Land.
Mouth; east,
Is spleen, hand mouth; an east, land.

5 Smoke

Imagine now the dark smoke
awaken to fly
all these years
to another day
notions of tangled trees
the other side of water
I see it is already here
sequences of her face
see it is shared
and old friends passed their dreams

Results

1. Not: Gerard Manley Hopkins
2. Bot: A compilation of algorithmically re-assembled tweets
3. Not: Gertrude Stein
4. Not: Jackson Mac Low
5. Bot: Ray Kurzweil's Cybernetic Poet

Gina Mercer
The Alleged Poem
(Composed in early 2014, the poet alleges)

Our Prime Minister alleges that
the national broadcaster, known as
the Australian (allegedly) Broadcasting Corporation,
is suspected of committing un-Australian activities
in allegedly broadcasting allegations
against (suspected) Navy personnel
in the case of certain alleged asylum seekers
who are suspected of broadcasting
allegations of alleged mistreatment
to the ABC's alleged journalists.

The allegedly Foreign Minister has ordered
an investigation, she alleges, into
the allegations made by the (allegedly) national broadcaster,
an investigation she alleges will be free
from left-wing bias and sloppy reporting
though she alleges she knows (with rigorous accuracy)
the results of said investigation
before one investigator has even been appointed,
such is nature of the alleged allegations.

In future, the (suspected) Prime Minister decrees,
all of the ABC's alleged journalists must only allege facts,
or what they allege are facts, in the alleged interests
of the suspected reputation, imputation and refutation
of the (allegedly) Australian government.

(Or is that another baseless allegation by the alleged poet?)

Chloe Wilson
Miss Unknown

Why not Anastasia, why not
a Romanov – Sir, we pulled this one
from the river – would you prefer
the alternative, a pubescent skeleton

tangled like my sewing [FOR LOVE
AND FOR THE FATHERLAND] –
why not – let me go – who would dare
manhandle the last grand duchess?

Sir, she's spitting – you want to know
why I will not speak Russian – how can I trust
the language in which the executioners
addressed my mother, my sisters,

the last words they heard, the last words
I heard before the bayonet slipped
through the meat of my foot – ah! – the ghost
of the pain flies up my thighs

whenever I dare to remember – why not –
I can tell you what I saw, that I was deaf
except for a single shrill note –
they say I must be a peasant – I have the face

of a potato – and I say test me, go on I
dare you, try to trick me with questions,
because what don't I know? Hear the lilt
in my German (Ich bin eine Prinzessin!)

you say she must have been someone
why not who I am, you pulled me
wet-wool heavy, streaming water,
from a river black with cold – who

but an aristocrat could feel despair
like that? The chattering teeth, the chattering
gossips who take up residence
inside my thoughts, why not the girl

with the nightmares, confined
in this asylum, scrubbed clean
like a potato – they know me, my relatives,
see the family traits embroidered

on my face [FOR LOVE AND]
Sir? ‘Don’t get excited!’ – as though
I don’t know how to behave, I who once
froze in the gaze of the camera, knowing

one false move could make two faces
or four hands appear, another
Anastasia inhabiting the image
with me. You know they said

they found Mama’s finger but I never –
they say they found the charred bones
of our corsetry but it’s a lie they
were never accounted for, why not –

I can tell you they were lined
with diamonds, emeralds, sapphires,
rubies, hard stones, precious.
We sewed them into the seams

ourselves we weren’t experts –
who else but a duchess
could be such a poor seamstress?
But we managed – hold my photograph

next to hers we are the same girl,
why not poor Anna, I remember
heavy feet on the stairs, the stench
of terrified, hungry men. Their blood

was up. Where’s Anastasia? Why not
a Romanov – here – let me find you
some evidence – watch me split
my mind open like a Fabergé egg.

Ron Pretty
Wind Under the Door

in Ken Taylor

it's too strong, the wind: it has
blown him away, out of the tree house
in the sweet acorn, down
from the hillside, the fallen trees,
the logs naked on the ground,
red soil and clover, out
of the arms of sarah, who
loved him all the bare wooden walls
winter fogs & upswaying
daffodils, blue flash of bower male,
lorikeets winging the rainbow:
all this and more she loved him,
his charcoal love of her on paper
breast & buttock & dark-rimmed eyes
on her leaving: she took
his soul to ireland, a shell
remained on the mountain
shocked at the entropy he saw
in morning mirrors. only
the wash of memory, wind
under the door, the elusive
perfume it wrought, the lines
he had written for her,
reading them over, dreaming
the winter nights how he missed her,
words flowing and paint despite
the cold bed, empty kitchen, the search
for breath gone missing, but the wind
swaying the stolid accords: he knew
the wind pushing the door,
he knew the night it came
to chill his heart.

Andrew Lansdown
Dove Tanka Triptych

1
Dove Landing

A backbeating dove
landing alongside its mate
on the birdbath rim
has one slender slat missing
from the grey fan of its tail.

2
Dove Stepping

Like a lumberjack
negotiating floating logs
ineptly a dove
stepping with little slippings
across the new-cut bamboo.

3
Dove Drinking

A sudden flurry
and the dove on the birdbath
is gone, gone into
the paws and jaws of next-door's
low-hiding high-leaping cat.

Lynn Davidson
The afterlife of elephants

Here is the elephant at the bank
idly stirring up dust,
idly touching your shoulder.

Here is the elephant
thundering along the concrete expressway
on four unbending feet.

Here is the elephant hanging
from a whisky bottle, which is what happens
when you take him for a Grant's.

Here is the elephant with his landscape body –
those distant terraces up close reveal themselves
as ragged gouges from the rainy season.

Or perhaps it is inside the elephant
where the articulation of water occurs. Which is all
for the good. He is heating up as he gets older.

*

Here is the elephant
we have come far to see. Silk ripples
from the great wall of his spine.

Here is the elephant
to teach you about rhythm.
Watch the silk, it is rhythm's after-image.

If I were to write the deepest thing
inside me it would be this
elephant sound.

His eyes are so elephant
when he looks at me while
hooking up hay and feeding it into his mouth.

I try for detached
but really, I wish I could throw a beaded shawl
of water so delicately across my back.

*

The elephant is on his way, quick
open the window before he gets here
while there is still room for elbows and hinges.

Here is the elephant
breaking the spine of Contemporary Scottish Poetry.
There's nothing about bagpipes in there, elephant.

Did the elephant have to come
to the story-telling centre? I point to a busker
outside, playing flamenco on a uke. He ignores the bait.

So. Here is the elephant.
See how his heavy trunk droops, forgotten,
as he stares and stares at the mysterious paper sculptures.

The elephant does not know that he is also swaying
and people are stumbling back.
The elephant thinks he is standing still.

Here is the elephant.
There is no need for cats to give loneliness form,
because here is the elephant.

Ali Jane Smith
Another Literary Life

after Laurie Duggan

An old new and selected on the kitchen bench
beside a bowl of prickly chokos
I can't bring myself to peel, slice, cook and eat
despite the melting welfare state and icecaps.
I'm reading an approachable analysis of the debt crisis
while the children are preoccupied with scraping
the crusted remains of breakfast from their dressing gowns.
Today's lunch is good-enough fishcakes
a celebrity chef's recipe, potato replaced with sweet potato –
a vine I've always meant to try and grow –
to lower the glycemic index. I consider at times my life
a lucky escape from non-being. The audible traffic
shuffles between places mentioned in Blue Hills
a line, a burst of internet window-shopping, another line.

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B.W. Shearer
A crowned queen

A rainbow lorikeet sits
In a huge cactus flower
Like a crowned queen
Gobbling flies and bees
Like tributes
From her admiring subjects

Brendan Ryan
Cows in India

The first time I saw cows in India
I wanted to round them up.

Yard them, milk them, close the gate
on a paddock, watch them nod along a cattle track.

Instead they wandered down alleys
up steps, along ghats, singular as saddhus.

They ate what was given – scraps, left overs,
plastic, cardboard, even slurping their tongues

into huge woks of curries as they shambled
onward, forever onwards, although

I have seen a Brahman meditate in the middle
of cyclists, rickshaws, buses and beggars. Unlike

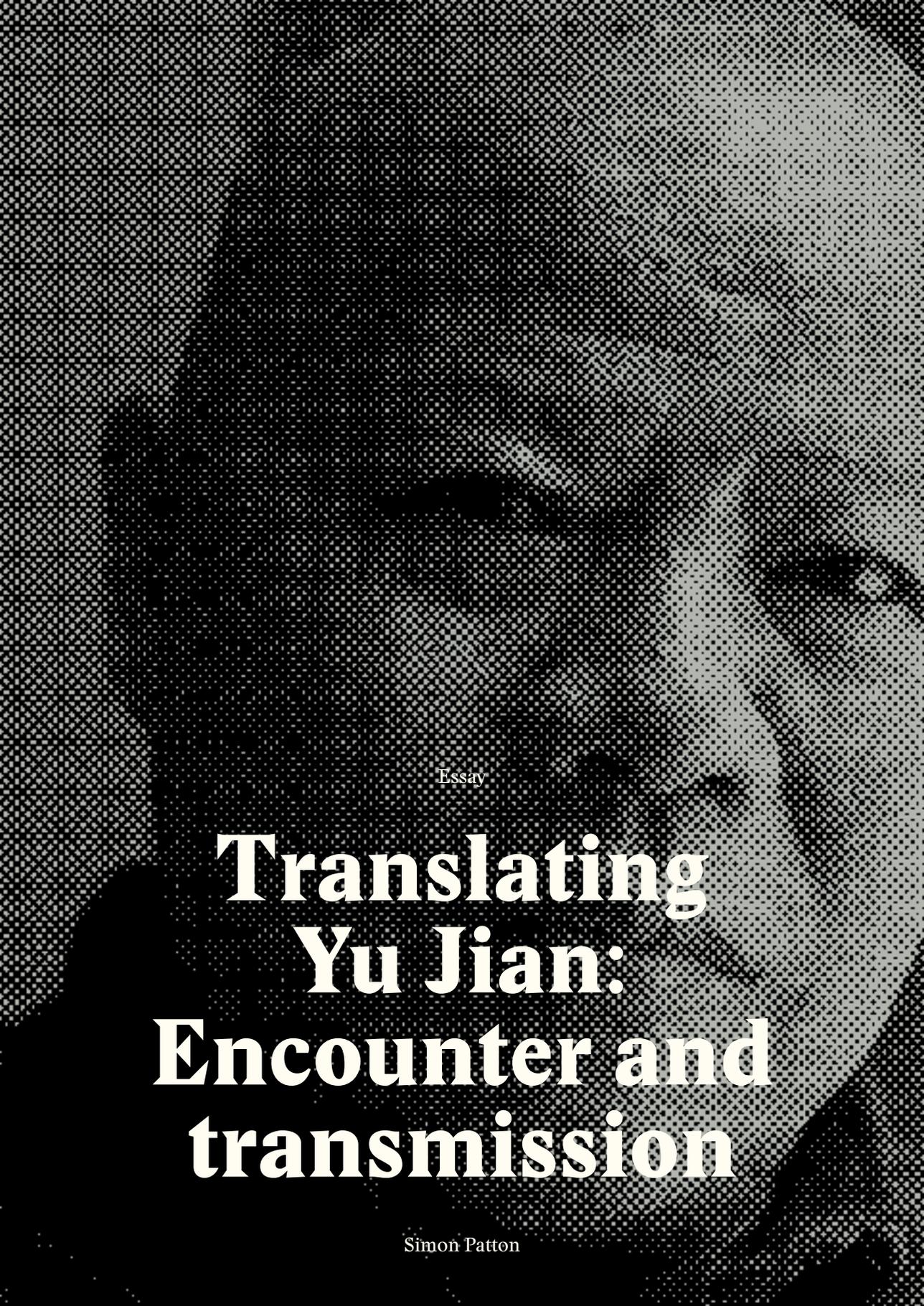
Holstein Friesians, the Indian cow is neither jumpy
or ear-tagged. They possess a quiet that is mundane

as flicking a fly with an ear. I've seen them dead
at roundabouts, have had to back away

from the trembling eye of a water buffalo.
I travelled to India, not looking for answers

just fences, gates, that farm
the cows in India lacked.

The first time I saw cows in India
I wanted to round them up.



Essay

**Translating
Yu Jian:
Encounter and
transmission**

Simon Patton

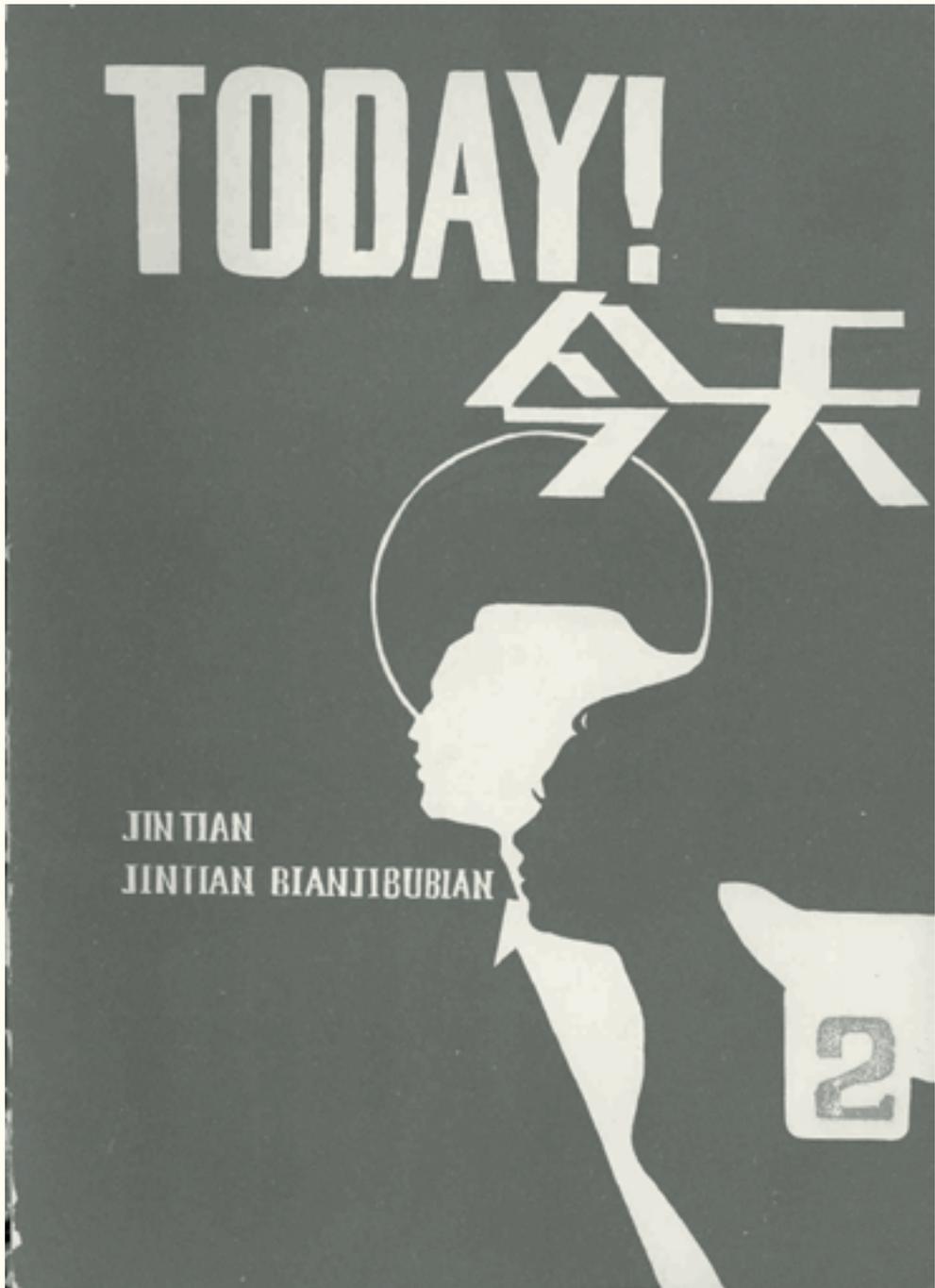
In English, it's called 'fate', and in Chinese it is known as *yuanshen*.

I have the vaguest of memories, from a time when I must be very young. I am in a strange house, one that I will never visit again, watching slides on a screen. Somehow, without me really being told, I am aware that the slides are of a place called 'Japan'. There are images of buildings, temples perhaps, that capture my imagination, but in no violent, life-defining sense. The sky in the slides is of a particular blue, more luminous in its own way than the one I see in daily life, and there is a quality to the general landscape, in the shapes of the hills, that is attractively intensely other. This memory sits isolated eternally from any supporting context, and the long passage of time has shed no further light on it but, in retrospect, I can see that this inexplicable slide-show from my childhood is, quietly yet categorically, a sign to me of the way I will go, only seemingly by accident, on my path to translation.

Naturally, I am frequently asked why I began studying Chinese in the first place. Why do any of us do the thing that becomes the centre of our lives? The question implies a deliberate decision and, while an act of initiative—enrolling in a Chinese course in my second year at university—was necessary to set me on my way, other factors, much less tangible, played their part as well. Accurately, if ungrammatically, *I was decided to tackle the language* by a range of forces that, in a way, I tried quite strenuously to avoid. Poetry played its part: my copy of Wang Wei's selected poems in English, a very slim book in the Penguin Classics series translated by G. W. Robinson, was certainly another factor that nudged me into making my choice. There is clearly more than a hint of the scholar-recluse in my make-up:

Hills empty, no one to be seen
 We only hear voices echoed —
 With light coming back into the deep wood
 The top of the green moss is lit again.

Whatever the case, my decision at first was little more than an experiment. This experiment was subject at all times to modification, even annulment, but it was gradually strengthened in the course of time by a whole series of mainly fortuitous circumstances. One of the most important of these was the loan from a teacher of a copy of an underground magazine called *Jintian* (which means 'today'). This hand-printed journal with its bold cover, cheap paper, faint type and, (on page 23) clumsy ink-blots, epitomised the spirit of Chinese poetry in the early 1980s: it was all about finding a voice for youth in a world dominated by Sombre Old Men laying down the law about 'party-lines' and 'spiritual pollution'. By chance, my copy happened to be a special number on poetry, and most of the poets featured in it went on to become important names in China: Jianghe, Shizhi (Guo Lusheng, later to go mad), Mang Ke, Shu Ting, and Bei Dao. What was even more exciting was that I—a mere beginner in Chinese—could, with the help of a dictionary, understand a lot of what they wrote: although lyrical and sometimes challengingly elaborate in its imagery, the language was that of young people writing for young people and I felt, even as a linguistic outsider, that I was included in its wavelength. One poem, by Bei Dao, has become famous



for its brevity: entitled 'Life', it contains a single Chinese character, wang. This means 'net'. As an angsty young man I could certainly relate to that! The fact that this poetry was being mercilessly attacked by the Chinese literary establishment for its 'mistiness' (i.e. its lack of a clearly defined ideological stand-point) also contributed to my identification, and I decided to become a student of Chinese post-Mao poetry.

My Chinese received an enormous boost at this point because I had found something that I desperately wanted to understand beyond the ‘doctored’ readings I studied in textbooks. Chinese newspapers, magazines, and journals were full of articles on the subject of this dangerous new literary trend in China, and for this reason, more and more poetry by these controversial young writers was appearing in print. If I’d started my Chinese a few years earlier, I would have missed this upsurge of excitement in Chinese poetic circles and would have been hard pressed to find something to my liking in the poetry of the 1950s or the formulaic offerings (sometimes written to fill ‘poetry quotas’) of the poetry of the Ten Years of Chaos, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1977), a revolution that amounted to a destruction of anything genuinely cultural. Perhaps I would have turned instead to China’s classical poetry and devoted myself to Wang Wei. Mine would have been an entirely different destiny.

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There is a timely encounter at the heart of translation. It is a meeting between two people, two temperaments, two languages, two cultures, two historical moments. Sometimes, it is nearly like romance; there is an aura of romance about it. For this reason I am convinced that translation is fate or *yuanfen*. Of course, a translator can choose to translate anything put in front of her, but the result is almost certain to be, in some absolutely vital way, lukewarm, half-hearted, a *tour de force*. It is one thing to understand what the words mean in a narrowly cognitive sense; it is a different thing to live them, from the inside, as your own, as if you too participated by some mysterious coincidence in their origin.

In Chinese culture, *yuanfen* is a term with highly specific resonances. A whip through some of my dictionaries gives us a few clues about what it covers: ‘relationship by fate; predestined relationship; natural affinity among friends’ (*Far East Chinese-English Dictionary*); ‘(1) (Buddhism) destiny; luck as conditioned by one’s past; (2) good luck to meet s.o.; (3) natural affinity among friends’ (Lin Yutang’s *Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage*); ‘lot or luck by which people are brought together’ (*A Chinese-English Dictionary*). Sentences cited to illustrate these meanings include ‘So we’re together again. It must be fate’ and the less likely ‘Smoking and drinking don’t appeal to me’, which literally means something like ‘Smoking, drinking—with them I have no *yuanfen*’. Sometimes translated as ‘predestination’, it possibly boils down to being in the right place—and in the right frame of mind—at the right time. It requires a fortuitous set of circumstances to bring the writer of a piece of literature worth translating into the orbit of someone who is both able to perceive its potential and who has the time, the inclination and the linguistic ability to do that quality justice in another tongue. The obstacles are endless, especially if the writer of the Chinese text is a living person!

In 1954, when Yu Jian was born, I didn’t even exist. One day in autumn in 1966, when I was probably playing with Lego blocks, Yu Jian was helping his father to burn, in secret, every book in the house that wasn’t written by Mao Zedong, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin or Joseph Stalin. In 1971, when I was too young to listen to pop music let alone read poetry, he became fascinated

with traditional verse after finding a brief guidebook to ancient-style poetry in a dilapidated village temple. In 1979, when Yu Jian was reading *Jintian* and when he published his first poem under a pseudonym in a magazine in Hong Kong, I used to meet with friends at a wall within school grounds that we privately dubbed 'Democracy Wall'. When I began learning Chinese in 1981, Yu Jian had his first taste of Western literature and saw an exhibition of German expressionist painting in Beijing. When I finally finished my arts degree in 1986, after numerous distractions and deferments, he was being widely published in China and even managed to get a rather unlikely poem about an underground 'salon' into China's leading poetry magazine at the time. In the year 1994, when translations into English of three poems by Yu Jian were included in an anthology published in Hawai'i, I found myself sitting in the University of Melbourne library looking for inspiration. My *yuanyuanfen* was about to catch up with me.

Weak sunlight was falling across the table, and I was flicking through the May issue of *People's Literature*. On page 91, down in the bottom right-hand corner, there was a heading that read 'Six Poems: Yu Jian'. The first of these poems bore what was, for those times, an extraordinary title: 'The Beer Bottle-top'. I began reading. I became puzzled, but not because I couldn't follow the meaning of the language. It was like nothing I had ever read in Chinese poetry before:

unsure of the best way to address it just now it occupied a place at the
 head of the banquet table
 the custodian of a bottle of stout absolutely indispensable with an
 identity all of its own
 signifying twilight conviviality and the depth of froth in a glass
 it jumped clear with a pop at the start of dinner the motion so strikingly
 similar to a bullfrog's
 the waiter even suspected that it actually was a frog
 thinking that something in the cooked food on the table had come back to
 life
 he is annoyed at his misunderstanding and immediately shifts his
 attention to a toothpick
 but he is the last one after him the world gives it no further thought
 there are no further entries on it in any dictionary no original meanings
 extended meanings transferred meanings
 while those dishes previously arranged in submission before it signify a
 set of Sichuan flavours
 the hand of a general touches the napkins roses bloom an allusion to
 nobility
 in an eccentric arc it exited this occasion an arc not its own
 no brewery ever designed such a line for a bottle of beer
 it now lies on the floor with the cigarette butts footprints bones and
 other rubbish
 an unrelated jumble an impromptu pattern of no use to anyone
 its plight is even worse a butt makes the world think of a slob
 bits of bone bring to mind a cat or a dog and footprints of course allude to

a human presence
 it is sheer waste its whiteness nothing more than its whiteness its shape
 nothing more than its shape
 it falls beyond the reach of our adjectives
 I wasn't a drinker then I was the one who opened the bottle
 and for this reason I noticed its unfamiliar leap its simple disappearance
 I suddenly tried to imagine the pop it made as it jumped into space but
 couldn't
 me, an author of a book of poems and a body weighing sixty kilos
 all I did was bend down and pick up this distinguished small white object
 its hardness the teeth-like serrations of the rim cut into my fingers
 so that I felt a sharpness in no way like that of knives

(Translated by Tao Naikan and Simon Patton)

What was it about this poem that struck me? Looking back, trying to feel my way back into the me I was then, I think that, first of all, it was the unusual, direct approach. I was used to three modes of contemporary Chinese poetry: blatant propaganda, richly imaginative lyrical indirectness, and experimental poetry of the most undecipherable obscurity. 'The Beer Bottle-top' was clearly none of these, and yet it had, I felt, a curious power all of its own.

Secondly, there is an intriguing metalinguistic, metapoetic element in the text. The poet becomes aware—almost to the point of being overpowered—of his inability to handle his bottle-top in language. It gives rise to no associated meanings, and he can do nothing to 'work it up' in poetic fashion. In effect, he realises that he has stumbled across a kind of signifying blind-spot or symbolic gap: this everyday object partakes in no network of connections, inspires no 'flight' despite its leap through the air into space. This 'refusal' of significance itself becomes the paradoxical subject of the poem.

Finally, the use of conglomerating short phrases separated by blank spaces within lines had a peculiar effect. I'm not sure if I can analyse this accurately, but it seems to work this way: each new phrase modifies the one that immediately preceded it and, in the same movement, takes you towards the next development. There is a kind of tautness in this that refuses to allow for any relaxation in the poem's development or in the reader's attention: you stay with it, monitoring the constant backwards-forwards development until the text brings you to that inexplicably eerie last line, 'so that I felt a sharpness in no way like that of knives', a statement that suggests an uncanny confrontation with a thing that we have always taken completely for granted but which we are now seeing *for the very first time*.

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So, this was my fate, my predestination, my natural affinity for a friend. And what a strange business it was to become. The main thing I remember is the *buzz* I got from what I was reading and the desire to convey that excitement in English as a relayed gift to readers who would never be able to read these poems in Chinese.

This impulse to transmission that occurs in the moment of encounter is another intriguing aspect of the translation process; the excitement is infectious and demands to be communicated.

After writing the above, I came across a quote from the German philosopher Fichte that helps to explain this impulse to transmit. He writes:

The idea is not the ornament of the individual . . . but seeks to flow forth in the whole human race, to animate it with new life and to mould it after its own image.

This could equally apply to the poetic idea, especially when it is realised with a high degree of insight, flair, and freshness. Even in daily life, you can feel this same urge to transmit when you hear something that strikes you as contributing even in a small way to our understanding-enjoyment of being, briefly, Earthlings. I remember with vividness *to this day* riding on the CityCat down the Brisbane River from St Lucia to West End and hearing a man say to his companion ‘I never grew up, but I never stopped growing’. He felt the interest in this formulation striking enough to pass on to somebody else, and I, within earshot but not intended as a receiver, gratefully absorbed the message and continue to pass it on to others to this day. The thought that what we often call ‘growing up’ amounts to the beginning of an inflexibility masquerading as maturity is certainly one worth pondering.

In a very real sense, then, poetry can accomplish this conservation-transmission of energy. The enthusiasm that accompanies the *realisation* of a certain truth—and here realisation means both the occurrence of the thought and the discovery of a set of words that manage to embody it—is stored and so made available to others across time and space. The French translation theorist (and passionate admirer of poetry) Georges Mounin regards poetry at its best as that which conserves and transmits an ‘otherwise untransmittable’, and that is why it is such a valuable institution in world culture. However, in the case of translation, governed as it is by rules of copyright, the act of transmission cannot proceed solely on the basis of heart-felt admiration. I had to get the poet’s permission to make my translation of his bottle-top poem (as well as some others I had gone on to discover) if I wished to share it publicly. My enterprise could have foundered here, before it had even had a chance to begin. I contacted someone in China who I thought might have an address for the poet (there was no email then) and fortunately received both a reply and valid contact details. I then composed a letter, in very inelegant Chinese, and crossed my fingers, hoping I might get a response. Eventually, when I was close to giving up all hope, it came. This is what it said:

Dear Mr Ximin:

Hello, Sir!

I received your letter. Recently, I have been away in Beijing and it is only today that I have read your letter: many apologies for the late response. I agree to your translating my poems ‘Giving the Crow Its Name’ and ‘The

Beer Bottle-top' into English and to publishing them in Australia. I also agree to our sharing any royalties 50/50. I am deeply grateful to you for your interest in my creativity [wode chuangzuo], and I will send you my book of poems and some other material in a separate letter. Please let me know when you receive them.

I shake your hand and wish you a Trouble-free New Year!

Yu Jian
27 December 1994

(Ximin is what I call myself in Chinese and approximates, very roughly, 'Simon'). Needless to say, I was delighted with Yu Jian's response. I had negotiated the preliminary legal formalities that would make it possible to continue my work in a potentially public way. At the same time, this was contact: we had established a tentative relationship and there was a real prospect of development. Yu Jian would send me his first book and some photocopies of more recent writing, and I would have to write to him a second letter, possibly containing some questions in it about things in his poems that I couldn't understand. And this is exactly what happened, and what went on happening, and what has now been happening for roughly twenty years.

I don't always have such luck. Previous to my encounter with Yu Jian, I had been in touch with another *Jintian* poet by the name of Gu Cheng. We exchanged letters once or twice, and I visited him on Waiheke Island in New Zealand in 1990. Our connection came to an abrupt end in 8 October 1993 when the poet murdered his wife and hanged himself. Another literary figure, Ma Yuan, a writer of meta-fictional short stories, proved much more elusive. I managed to get a letter passed onto him with the help of his first wife and eventually received a response (with no return address on it). He was happy for me to translate his work (in the end, nothing came of this), but it was clear that there was no question of a correspondence. The nature of the encounter at the centre of translation admits a myriad of responses, many of which are far from favourable to the project. In Yu Jian, I was exceptionally fortunate.

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Some people may think that you can translate in cold blood, on call, simply applying your linguistic and literary skills to any text put in front of you. I have learnt the hard way that this is not the case. Of course you can go through the motions and achieve an adequate result, but the performance is unlikely to *convince* anyone. Possibly this fact has interesting consequences for what we think of as 'poetry': is the crucial thing the language, or is there something else at work like a force or a tuning for which the words are fundamentally a medium? In this context, Chinese writings on literature, painting and calligraphy often refer to *qi* or *xing* as a kind of essential excitement that happens to a human being in the process of artistic creation. The words of a poem (or the lines or strokes a brush makes with ink on paper)

record the passage of this intensive state and conserve it, at least for a certain time, so that a reader/viewer has the possibility of experiencing this same 'heightening' second-hand. Viewed in this light, it is not enough simply to be able to understand the words; you need to be able (but is it an ability or a gift?) to tune in to this enigmatic shift in awareness that led to the assembly of words in the first place. It's a bit like being able to tune in to a certain wavelength or getting a joke: some kind of essential disposition may be required without which the task somehow falls flat. Some form of essential conviction is lacking, and without this, no alert reader is ever sincerely convinced.

Perhaps this may help to explain the dissatisfaction we all often feel when reading poetry in translation. Many translations are also victims of a kind of Grand Inquisitor that, like a form of super-ego, many translators internalise to the point of complete submission. This Inquisitor is a nit-picking, bilingual judge who constantly whispers in the ear of any translator trying to make poetry out of a poem: *No, the Chinese means x according to any dictionary you choose to consult or You can't use y here!* As a result of this nagging monologue, the finished product is most likely to resemble a more or less literal amalgam that, while placating (but never satisfying) the never-ending criticism of the Inquisitor, will probably frustrate even the most tolerant and open-hearted of poetry readers.

The only effective answer to the Inquisitor, then, is the fortuitous coincidence of fate, wavelength, and sufficient translation ability. It is only in the combined force of these qualities that any would-be translator can find the right kind of courage (not reckless, not extravagant) to take risks when risks are necessary for the sake of the poetry. To translate a poem into anything less than poetry can only be counted as a bland non-success. Respecting the voice of the Grand Inquisitor and being satisfied—because it renders the literal meaning of the Chinese text *adequately*—is both a betrayal of the poet and of those readers in English who had the gumption and the patience to sit down and take up the translation in the first place.

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After many years, I finally managed to meet Yu Jian in person in 1999. Through another act of *yuanfen*, I had been offered work in Hong Kong with *Renditions*, a journal that specialises in Chinese-English literary translation. Since Hong Kong is only two hours from Yu Jian's home city, Kunming, I decided it was time to take the plunge. It proved impossible to meet the man without thinking about his numerous poems on friendship, especially 'Distant Friend':

distant friend
 I've read your letter
 what you must look like is something I've thought about, too
 it'd be best if you didn't look much different from everyone else
 when I think you'll come and see me some day
 I can't help worrying a little
 I'm afraid that when we meet we'll get some sinister ideas

choosing our words carefully
 each of us trying to get the upper hand
 I'm afraid we'll have nothing to say to one another
 after we've said what we have to say
 life is pretty much the same
 whether you live here or you live over there
 we read pretty much the same novels
 whether you live here or you live over there
 I'm afraid I won't be able to talk about national issues
 and will feel sleepy in your presence stifling yawns
 I'm afraid I won't get your sense of humour
 and will sit there like a stunned mullet like some figure carved out of
 wood
 I'm afraid that you'll be manly and dignified graceful and personable
 I'm afraid that you'll be on your best behaviour refined and courteous
 that I won't know where to look
 and that I'll often mishear what you say
 one moment rubbing my thighs
 the next scratching an ear
 distant friend
 making friends isn't easy
 if you kick open my door
 and say out loud: 'I'm so-and-so!'
 then I'll just have to respond:
And I'm Yu Jian

(Translated by Tao Naikan and Simon Patton)

This took our relationship into new territory and initiated a whole new series of events. Yu Jian lost the hearing in one ear when he was very young, and he also takes pride in his local accent rather than speaking the so-called 'standard' language, *putonghua*. As a foreigner, this can make even basic communication pretty difficult at times. Nevertheless, the pain has been worth it: language has to be lived in the bones, in context, and my contact with Yu Jian as a vibrant Chinese personality wrenched me away from the temptation to treat translation as a specialised linguistic task rather than as first-hand contact with a challenging, individual experience of the world.

Despite these difficulties, we managed to forge an enduring partnership, cemented to some degree by a shared love of cultural exploration. Yu has a boldness that I lack, and it is a pleasure to follow on after him as he barges into some new place where we're probably not meant to be (he does barge in a most directly physical sense!). He's shown me parts of Yunnan province that I have been very fortunate to see, including the Old City of Dali, walks in Cangshan Mountain, and a boat trip across the huge Erhai Lake to the town of Wase on a day that just happened to be market day. We have also (I don't know how it was managed) taken a speedboat to the enormous carved Buddha at Binglingsi in Qinghai province, and

made two visits to the Buddhist Kumbum Monastery near the provincial capital of Xining. In return, Yu Jian came out to Australia in 2001 for the Sydney Writers Festival, and afterwards we made a 40-hour bus-trip from there to Uluru where we stayed for a few days, taking in Kata Tjuta as well. All of this is way out of my comfort zone.

Dealing with a living poet in this way can result in unforeseen developments: you can start to influence what the poet writes about. For example, during Yu Jian's visit to Brisbane, I took him to a football match at the 'Gabba, something no doubt few contemporary Chinese poets have seen. This excursion eventually found its way into a poem entitled 'Brisbane, 10 June 2001':

on this night, there was a Li Bai-type moon in the sky over Brisbane but in
 the seating down below
 there was no moonlight sitting with 35,000 white people inside a football
 stadium
 watching a match is exciting there are shouts a team called the Lions is
 battling it out
 with a team called the Bombers in the dazzle and the passion of the flood
 lighting I pat my pocket to make sure my passport's safe
 the full moon is mercilessly wasted there is not a word of Chinese in the
 crowd
 I'm a long way away from home

The sinologists of the future will probably puzzle over this a bit! The poem is about a game of AFL football and proved to be an historic occasion for Brisbane: they won the match and went on undefeated through the rest of the season until they met the Bombers again in the Grand Final, a match that they also won. For Yu Jian, however, the centre of gravity is the full moon that happened to be shining that night, a source of poetry in itself and a reminder to him of Li Bai's well-known quatrain 'Quiet Night Thoughts' about moonlight and homesickness: 'Lifting my head / I watch the bright moon, / Lowering my head / I dream that I'm home'. He has suited a perfectly alien circumstance to his own purposes.

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Dictionaries are, without doubt, an indispensable tool for any translator, but what is a dictionary and do we have to believe everything they tell us? To my mind they are really more or less repositories of the choices and ingenious discoveries over many decades that legions of (mainly anonymous) translators and other users of language have seen fit to make. They are a compendium of common practice that seems to hold good in general circumstances. What a translator needs to remember, however, is that 'Every word is a new word in a new context'. I suspect that this memorable phrase is not, in fact, strictly true. Actually, most words are sad examples of the inertia of language and our tendency to use it with insufficient presence of mind. However—and this applies to any poetry worth its salt—every word has the *potential* to transform itself into a new word in a new context, and translation

requires both sensitivity and nerves of steel when it comes to this point. Yu Jian, for one, is not afraid on occasion of bending the meaning of words to suit the promptings of his creative impulse. There are several examples of this in a poem titled 'Goldfish'. Towards the middle of the text, for example, the Chinese contains the word *daici*. Open any reputable Chinese-English dictionary such as my all-time favourite, the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute's *Chinese-English Dictionary* (1978), and you will find the word glossed simply as '(linguistics) pronoun'. If I were readily intimidated by the Grand Inquisitor of Literal Translation, I would switch my brain off at this point and render the relevant lines as follows:

You may set out from this word —
 and reach destinations in which in real life they would die —
 replacing it with a number of exquisite **pronouns** — such as goldfish =
 piano —
 then think up a link between red pianos and sea-water — between Chopin
 and bulls —

Experience suggests that the nagging voice of the Inquisitor is so implacable that some translators may be satisfied by this choice; after all, it is sanctioned by every dictionary you might care to consult. However, applying our intelligences to the overall environment in which the word occurs, it is obvious that terms such as 'piano', 'sea-water', 'Chopin' or 'bulls' can't be considered to be, by any stretch of the imagination, pronouns! Many readers would at this point feel a loss of confidence in the translation. This is obviously not a 'mistake' on the part of the writer; rather, he seems to want to use the Chinese term in a more fluid way. If we dissolve the word into its components, *dai* + *ci*, it becomes clear that Yu is interested in activating the literal sense of this pair: *dai* means 'take the place of' and *ci* is more or less equivalent to the English 'word'. It is for this reason that we chose to translate *daici* as 'substitute-words', a choice our Grand Inquisitor would definitely not approve of but by which you as the reader would certainly feel less stymied. Why should the readers be left in the lurch, thinking, once again, that the inscrutable mystery of the Orient has eluded them?

Another example of this fluid usage from the same poem lends support to our handling. Further along in the text, we come across the line 'we must call it "goldfish"—then, just like a goldfish, it will develop like a photograph—in an aquarium filled with clean tank-water'. The tricky thing here is the verb, *xianying*. When I turned to page 749 of my trusty *Chinese-English Dictionary*, I was again presented with a very clear-cut definition: '(photography) develop'. From this it is clear that Yu is trying, in a fairly understated manner, a parallel between fish swimming around in a tank and photographs being developed in a pool of developing solution. Yet this meaning, clear to the translator, is not conveyed in a literal translation of the line:

we must call it 'goldfish' — then, just like a goldfish, it will **develop** —
 in an aquarium filled with clean tank-water

The trouble is that the word ‘develop’ on its own has multiple meanings, and perhaps only a critic of the text would have the patience to hit on the photographic meaning of the verb in this context. As translators, our solution was to make the photographic meaning explicit by adding the words ‘it will develop *like a photograph*’ to make this meaning—perfectly clear to the Chinese reader—apparent in order to spell things out. However, as is so often the case, things don’t stop there. In Chinese, the elements of the verb *xianying* are *xian*, meaning ‘show, display, manifest’ and *ying*, an intriguing term that, depending on context, can be rendered in English as ‘shadow, reflection, image, trace, vague impression, photograph, picture, film’ and so on. Accordingly, then, given Yu’s fondness for literalisation, the verb here also takes on the sense of ‘making an image manifest’. This adds another layer to the meaning of the poem; just as a photograph bathed in a chemical solution makes an image appear, language too is a way of summoning something out of nothing, or evoking from the flux of linguistic meaning something tangible, recognisable, discrete.

By now, of course, the Inquisitor is purple with rage and He will have His revenge. Critics of our translation will, without much ado, demonstrate that our word-choices are simply incorrect and will ‘domesticate’ to a damaging degree the meaning of the text. Such risks, however, are part and parcel of the translation process for a translator willing to take responsibility for what she translates. It is not enough to bury the Chinese text in an inadequate (but ‘correct’) English translation and leave it at that. No, committed translation has to take responsibility for what gets put down on the page: if there is nonsense, then the nonsense is there for a very good reason: it is essential to the dynamic of the text. This makes the task of translation all the more difficult: the translator has to recreate the source text on the basis of a lucid interpretation: it’s not just a matter of ‘understanding’, in a purely intellectual manner, what the poem ‘means’, but it partakes of that dimension. Without arriving at a satisfying ‘inhabitation’ of the Chinese poem, the kind of thoroughgoing identification/interpretation that gives rise to a wish to convey that experience to others, translation becomes little more than a facile decoding that could never hope to induce in an English-speaking reader anything like the unique, infectious excitement of the writing that supposedly prompted it.

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No doubt it takes a lifetime to learn a worthwhile poet’s work. My initial instincts with regard to Yu Jian’s work have turned out to be sound in their way, and yet such gifts of instinct have to be followed up with knowledge: without disregarding my own understandings, I have to make an effort to get a good idea of what the poet himself thinks he is doing. Yu Jian has produced a series of essays on poetry, and the more I read of these, the more my understanding broadens. A dense article finished in 1995, ‘Retreat from Metaphor’, offers many insights into his practice as a poet. For example, he writes:

The layer[s] of accumulated metaphors [around] words [*cide yinyu jidian*]
means that [*shide*] a poet is unable to make use of a word [in terms of] its

original naming. All he can do is to remove the metaphorical concealment of the word [*yinyu dui zhegeci de zhebi*] in the manner of clearing away rubbish [*yi qingchu laji de banfa*]. Poetry is the process of clearing away the rubbish of metaphor.

There are some pieces of rubbish, however, that are worth holding on to. At the bottom of a bulging archive box in which I keep my Yu Jian material, I have a dusty top from a bottle of Cang Er-brand beer. It dates back to my first meeting with the poet in 1999. This simple object, with ‘a sharpness in no way like that of knives’, perhaps continues to exist ‘beyond the reach of our adjectives’, but for me, it has gathered a vast store of unique associations, yet to be exhausted.

Johanna Emeney
The Surgeon's Secretary Is also His Wife

She calls late
with the results of pre-op tests.

It's night,
and we've been waiting all day
in the dark.

she can't gloss
all the text on her own—
Invasive, lobular, negative nodes,

and her husband is sorry
he couldn't answer his phone;
he's been operating since 3.

As we speak,
he's probably up to his arms
in another woman.

James Norcliffe
Nina Simonestraat in Nijmegen

We never found it
except on the map:

a grey street
in a grey city
on the wrong
side of the highway.

In her red shoes
she would have walked
her anger down
to the river,

and then on
to the market:
potatoes, rutabagas
apples and pears,

ordinary fruit
from northern trees
very ordinary fruit
with strange names.

Paul Brooke

Ancient Remedies for Drawing Out a Tapeworm

Drink a quart of absinthe.
Hope for sight.

Starve for three days.
Place a bowl of warm broth at mouth.
Wait patiently.

Sit in a bath of milk for two hours.
Don't tense up as it tries to swim free.

Eat a cigarette.
Try not to throw up.

Sit on a piece of liver.
Do not move around too much.

Make a tea from walnut husks.
Drink slowly near a roaring fire.

Never show any emotion.
Ever.

Never tell friends.
Or neighbors.
Or anyone for that matter.

Sing to it in the morning.
In the shower.

Take it for drives.
Through the city.
Try to lose it at the rest area.

Bring it extravagant gifts.
Summer sausage works too.

Buy it its own apartment.
With soft-sided furniture.

Read it bedtime stories.
Tuck it back in.

Tell it 'I love you.'
Even if it is a lie.

Geoff Page
Elevation

for Evan Hanford

Of course, it is an illness —
and also damned annoying.
Day by day and bit by bit

you're handing up a life.
The lithium does not quite work.
Today, you are a rockstar;

next week, the Nobel Prize.
For all its reach of glass and sky
the ward here is a wizened one,

escaped by increments and via
the exercise of charm —
a default home as well, of course,

to be regained when needed through
a sudden song-and-dance routine
put on for the police.

Marijuana? Sure, no problem.
Rum? Well, just a bottle.
What would fucken doctors know?

Bipolar never was much fun —
the downs and ups, the ups and downs.
Time now for ... exuberance,

for gunning up the freeway
with trouble in the tank.
Your head though's not the only worry.

Week by week and month by month
the body you grew up with
is wincing under pressure:

kidney, liver, fighting back
like armies in some brave retreat.
We hear the telephone again,

your parents and remaining friends
thinned out by déjà vu.
A nurse must place the call.

It's not your fault — but even so
collectively we're dreaming now
(and, yes, a bit naively)

of medication, common sense,
docility perhaps,
some sure employment of your gifts,

a triumph we might see and touch.
They're all professional in here.
The risk is that you've now become

their most accomplished patient.

John Carey
The Quick Brown Fox

'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog'
is a found poem of sorts in a lyric metre
fit for a Tyrolean walking-song and, of course,
an efficient pangram with few repetitions
and no strain on the syntax. It is also
a popular success without peer, better known
than any line of Yeats, Auden or even the Bard.
As a child, I traced it on a slate till my fingers stiffened
and it filled the nightmares of millions of blindfolded typists.

Like many another masterpiece, it was penned by A. Nonymous
or U.N. Certain, though many names have been whispered,
from Albert the Prince Consort to Ho Chi Minh.
More likely, it was some brisk entrepreneur
of the pre-post-industrial Age, like a Pitman
of shorthand fame or one of his clerks
in a false collar and an eyeshade
or perhaps there is truth in the Stalinist claim
that a Cyrillic version evolved from the struggles
of the Dactylographic Collective of downtown Tblisi.

We are learning again to shrink from Romantic excess
and see the poetic 'T' as a pre-Raphaelite self-pleasurer
or, at very least, a florid North American in a bow-tie.
So let us pause to honour the authors
of 'the quick brown fox' et cetera.
Lucky it wasn't mauled by some brutalist editor
who liked to strip out articles and adjectives
till it all sounded like the name of a Navajo chief.

Jordie Albiston
prime

a *prime number* is that which is measured
by an unit alone once I am that
thing computed by isolation this
continues infinitely bell-ringer

cloud-spotter those infinite epics once
I am without counterpart head-knocker
door-locker those beautiful wars those in-
divisible days wilderness wilder-

ness the day divided by only once
you are an unit alone proceed pro-
ceed endlessness endlessness toe-tapper
paint-slapper taking the silence making

the silence rhyme we have yet to meet prime
numbers *prime to one another* are those
measured by an unit alone as a
common measure once we are prime to one

another not yet together measured
by dearth this continues finitely lack-
lovers mock-singers a couple of case-
moths clinging to November's end until

suddenly it is November again
ensemble ensemble days of alone-
ness dissolved over time odd numbers both
you & me measuring that which is prime



Interview

Interview with Claire Gaskin

Vivian Gerrard

Claire Gaskin knew from a young age that she wanted to be a poet. She was raised by Catholic parents. Growing up, books were precious to her, in part perhaps in response to her father's confiscation of any that were 'left-of-centre'. In a discussion of writing and its processes, Gaskin reflects on her books *a bud* (2006) and *Paperweight* (2013) and the challenges of working as a poet while a parent.

Gaskin is currently undertaking a Graduate Certificate of Literary Studies at Deakin University, and has been teaching Creative Writing in adult education for 26 years. She currently teaches Creative Writing at Melbourne University, at the CAE and community centres.

It is an autumn afternoon. Claire Gaskin and I have agreed to meet at a café before pick-up in Fitzroy St, St Kilda, opposite my daughter's primary school. As I drive from the city to the interview, the traffic sits like a car park, diverted to arterial roads from the main ones by road works. Stuck, I call Gaskin wondering whether we might meet in the school playground instead at 3:30? Rugged up in the cold, we sit on a park bench observing school kids careering around. Claire speaks in a calm voice, the cadence of which reminds me she is observing everything. Our conversation takes place in a location that draws us into the reality of being mothers and writers.

§

Why do you write?

I write to gain clarity. I write myself into existence. I write to actualise my experiences, to see them in black and white. I write so my inner thoughts can have an external reality, exist in the external world as one perspective among many. In this way it is not didactic or definitive. If you try to impose your will on a poem it is no longer a poem. My poems do not necessarily represent me. I write my poems so I can read them, see what they say, and send them on their way. Writing it down is the first step in freeing me from me. Sharing and workshopping it is the next step; then, when I publish, it belongs to others and they read it and interact with it. People write reviews, music, their own creations. It is no longer me or mine, and that is a relief. I am very interested in people's responses at the end of the process. I write without an audience in mind initially. The final work is the relationship, the exchange of ideas.

Of all the works you've produced, what's your favourite?

I don't know if I have a favourite. There are things I'm more proud of than others. I think your favourite is always the latest work you are working on, where your head is. I did a guest lecture at Melbourne Uni for Creative Writing, and sort of started by saying that I write my poems in order to forget them. It's something that John Ashbery says when he gets asked about specific poems: 'Oh I've forgotten that one'. He says, 'I write them in order to forget them': some sort of purging. So I experience that. I write it and I don't identify with it once it's out in the world. It's gone. But there are certain ones, I read over and think 'Oh yeah'. You get back into the space of it, but it's like you leave it behind.

Is there a poem you wish you could write that you haven't yet written?

Yeah, many.

Is there a cluster of concerns that you find yourself coming up against in your work inadvertently or intentionally?

Writing to me has always been about process, whatever I'm going through at the time, thinking, feeling, reading. So it's not conscious. Definitely, when I look back and when other people feed it back to me, I do know that there is—what did you say, that's a lovely turn of phrase?

A cluster of concerns.

Definitely, there's a cluster of concerns. I think a lot's about relationships and dealing with that breakdown of relationships or just my own life. I don't make things up. Maybe one day I will; I don't know. I mean, I admire that in fiction you can deal with an issue by creating characters to show a different perspective on that issue. I admire that. I think it's a great thing to do and even create role models that don't exist in real life, that powerful thing that fiction can do. Yeah, but poetry is not narrative in that way for me. It can be.

Who are your influences?

When I was working as a ward assistant at the Queen Victoria Hospital I would sit in the state library on a beeper and read Blake and go back and make a bed if I was beeped. I read Blake. I read Yeats. I carried Sylvia Plath around in my backpack as I travelled as a teenager round Australia, along with *The Last Days of Socrates*, and other Greek philosophy. I read the confessional poets, although I don't like that term. As a recovering Catholic, I grew up with the attitude that you confess when you have done something wrong. I do not think it is a sin to write out of the personal. I read the Surrealists, the Russian novelists, Virginia Woolf, all of Anaïs Nin, Simone de Beauvoir, and now I read contemporary French feminists like Luce Irigaray. I read (past tense) and read lots of poetry, of course: Lyn Hejinian, John Ashbery, and all my Australian contemporary poets. I tell my students that reading is an occupation, and a working writer reads at least three books a week.

In a number of poems, you appear to have conversations with, in addition to drawing on the works of, other writers. I'm thinking of 'Freedom from André Breton: a response to André Breton's poem 'Freedom of Love' and 'The words in brackets are from Dostoyevsky's Notes from Underground', and a handful in which you make reference to Pablo Neruda in a bud, and 'hippocampus after Sacks' 'The man who mistook his wife for a hat' and '(after Greer)' in Paperweight. There is a powerful sense of speaking back on behalf of women who have been objectified, marginalised and silenced by men that is common to much feminist writing and that runs through your oeuvre. Could you talk about why you have responded to these works and writers and how this response works with other poems in your books?

Yes, it is about speaking back to the under-representation of women as writers. Just speaking is important. It comments on silencing. The 'Freedom from

Andre Breton' poem is about having fun with the hyperbolic language used in the objectification of women. It may be common to much feminist writing because it is still very necessary to point out ongoing and persistent objectification. The poems with quotes from Dostoyevsky and Sacks in them are about having a conversation with those writers, in the margins so to speak. I am making a comment. The '(after Greer)' and 'Paperweight' poems are about honouring the legacy of those writers. I respond to these works and writers because all writing exists within, and not independent of, the whole body of literature. My writing is not in isolation.

The elements, particularly the wind, feature prominently in your poetry: in 'The wind doubts, 'we sit on a bench poems blowing', 'the breeze', and 'Just do the best you can', for example. The elements take on a bodily dimension, and life is in the breeze as much as it is in the breath. There is continuity, oneness even, with the earth. Yet, in other works, there is the insistence that 'I am not a landscape'. Can you comment on this apparent paradox?

'I am not a landscape' is another necessary response to objectification in the history of art. I don't think it is a paradox. It is a very different thing to represent than to be represented. In the first instance, you have agency; in the second, you are an object. Just look at any passing bus with a giant woman in underwear on it. Is that woman representing herself or being represented?

§

Would you agree that there is a recurring preoccupation and resistance to the reduction of women to roles or temptresses in your poetry? Jeanette Winterson referred to this phenomenon, in a recent Radio National interview, as a double-bind that women still find themselves in: being punished for their sexuality and held responsible for seducing and distracting men from their path rather than acknowledging men's more frequent role as pursuers. The 'the fall of man' captures this. You contest engaging normative expectations of how women should be. I'm thinking of the last line of 'hippocampus': 'you can only spot a deviation if you can identify a norm', and in 'darkness immovable', the lines 'dolls are scary / because they have no thoughts of their own / they can be possessed', and 'forgive me father for I have lived / I don't have to make up my sins anymore'—and 'Aphorisms' 16 and 27 of thirty-six aphorisms and ten-second love stories (after James Richardson and Kevin Brophy): 'Don't be good; be conscious' and 'I trust my doubt. I don't write for justice or justification but to keep free'. In a way, I see many of your poems as acts of self-possession.

Yes I would agree that there is a resistance to reductionism in my work. We all want our complexity acknowledged. Thank you for saying you see my poems as acts of self-possession. It is an attempt. Ironic that the title poem ends with 'my heart is a paperweight / on a fiction of self-possession'.

What is your process, when do you write?

I fill notebooks with stream-of-consciousness writing. I write lots and lots of rubbish. I tell my students you have to write a lot of rubbish to get a little bit of

good stuff. When I am writing, I write twelve pages longhand in a notebook a day. Out of that, I may get one good line of poetry or nothing. I go back over my notebooks once a week if I am writing well, or once a month if life has gotten in the way, and I pick out lines. I write these lines on a separate piece of paper, and then I start to order them, delete some lines. A poem may come out of this; if it does, I come back to it after a break from it and see if I still think it is a poem. I do this several times. Often six or so poems constructed in this way may finally amalgamate into one poem.

While I was bringing up a family, I did not have regular hours to write. I would write whenever I could steal time, anytime and anywhere. Now my children are grown, I still don't have regular hours. It may be first thing in the morning or last thing at night. My favourite place to read and write is in bed.

§

When did you start writing poetry?

I actually don't remember, but I know that it was something I did out of school. For some reason, I decided to be a poet out of school. I'm not quite sure why.

How old were you?

At about eighteen, I decided I wanted to be a poet. I went to a school in Broadmeadows where most people were going to the Ford factory. I don't know really where I got the idea. I had a really good literature teacher. That was it. I didn't want to be a nurse or a teacher. They seemed to be the only options provided. I decided—I look at it now. Where did I? I just had this thing about being a poet at about eighteen.

Were there many books in your house growing up? Did either of your parents write?

No. Oh actually, God, yes. My father always wanted to be writer but always procrastinated, you know, wrote very little, but he would spend lots of time with the door shut saying he was writing, sharpening pencils or whatever. He never actually wrote much. In terms of books, that's a big question cause my father used to confiscate books; so that's gotta make you a writer I suppose!

Gosh. Was that for religious reasons?

For religious reasons. Very right-wing fundamentalist Catholic. Still confiscated, up until he died, books off my mother if they had sex scenes in them. She had thirty grandchildren. It was like, I think she knows—yeah, so that's probably why I became I writer. It was very precious to me. You know, I just was always interested in books. It didn't affect my siblings so much that he did that, because they didn't experience it in the same way. I think it was because I had this love of books, and I'd bring a certain book, and if it was left of centre, any book that was left of centre, into the house, it would disappear. And he did that right up until I was an adult and even when I was an adult. When I went to visit them in Queensland he went through my luggage—yeah, and it's not like the books reappeared some other time.

Wow!

We had DLP meetings in our lounge room. My parent's idea of a family picnic was taking us along to a *Right to Life* rally, where children in strollers were holding dolls on nooses. That is an image that will never leave me. There was a right wing Catholic movement to ban certain works of literature from schools. Francesca Rendle-Short, has written a book, or memoir, a creative non-fiction memoir/novel [*Bite your tongue*, 2011] about her mother who was in that movement, and it's actually a great book, and it's got a great long list at the end of the books that the movement wanted to get banned.

Fascinating.

It ended up succeeding partly. It was mainly in Queensland. My family was very much of that thinking and that movement. There were books, but there weren't a lot of books at home, no. Later on, in my father's library I actually wrote a poem, ['Dad'], on listing the books by title in his library to show his paranoia—the titles.

Well it's not a surprise then to hear that he spent most of his time sharpening pencils: all the material was being kind of repressed and shut away.

Yeah.

Were you close to your Dad?

He was a very difficult person for me. He used to say, 'if someone is about to walk in front of a truck you have the responsibility to pull them back', as an analogy to explain why he thought he had the right to force his belief system on others. We used to have big discussions, long existentialist discussions, from quite young. So I think he sort of trained me in some ways in debate and was very into logic and defining terms. He was a nuclear physicist and English, and my mother actually didn't get the opportunity for high school. He was considered the intellectual but my mother was very astute in her observations and her practical knowledge. His biggest insult to someone was 'well that was an emotive argument'. There was a real repression of my mother. So there was always this sort of conflict.

You wrote a poem about your mum, 'Mia madre'. Did you speak in Italian with your mum? Did she speak in Italian?

Only when she was swearing—expletives—when she was throwing things or whatever but, other than that, no. So I know a few expletives. [*Laughs*] It's quite a contrast between my father's rationale, being a scientist—I mean being very religious, but seeing that as rational. My father prioritised principles over people. She rejected being Italian unfortunately. This extended to her coming home from the Coburg market complaining about the 'bloody wogs'. I found this funny. The poem is called 'Mia madre' to celebrate her being Italian. She expressed her feelings and she was very involved and interested in people. She made everyone feel like they had a special relationship with her.

She was probably compensating for his lack of expression.

Absolutely. Quite extreme. She'd be throwing things, and he'd say, 'Well, that's very emotive!'

Were you close to your mum?

My mother died in May of this year. My father died about four years ago. He was a really oppressive force, so that felt like a relief when he died, but my mother dying is very hard for me. We were very close. I spoke to her on the phone a lot. She lived in Queensland for the last nearly twenty years. I will miss her sharp wit, which was sometimes caustic in its accuracy.

Which part of Italy did your mum come from?

Northern Italy. Her surname was Tomerini, from Vevio, right up North. Vevio's a little town near Sondria, north of Lake Como. So I've been to Italy but not that far North. I'd like to go.

To what extent has your ancestry affected your poetry?

Maybe it's about marrying my father's Englishness and my mother's Italianness within me.

§

When you finished school and you became interested in the idea of being a poet, what was your next move, what did you then—what was your next stage as a writer after that? Did you go and study writing or did you—how did that work?

There wasn't what there is now. There wasn't creative writing as a thing in universities. Most people did an Arts degree. I mean there was one at Deakin, but that was in Geelong, and I thought that was so long away. But I had a place at Monash to do Arts, and then I deferred and travelled, and then when I went back, I didn't get through first year. Yeah, I never did that first degree. It's always been a bit of a handicap. It wasn't long after that I had children, and it was just about—I started teaching creative writing when my daughter was first born. She's 26 now.

There's a big demand for creative writing teachers now, isn't there?

It's great. It's getting bigger and bigger all the time. My classes at Sandy (Sandringham) beach are really popular. They book out and have waiting lists and I've been there eight years now. The same people keep coming back, so it's supposed to be like a ten-week course, an introductory course, but the writing life is a long life, and it definitely doesn't happen in ten weeks. People have projects—like with Mariam Issa. It takes years to finish a big project like a novel. People keep coming back. I think writers need a peer group and need that feedback and stimulation and motivation. People love it. And it's quite informal, really. We read, and I bring in readings. People bring in what they've written, and we workshop. It's a winning formula. And I love it. It's great for me. I'm immersed in writing all the time.

So does that dynamic support your writing as well?

Before I was doing so much teaching, I always felt the need to have a group of peers I could throw my ideas and work around. I think it's essential to have. It's been very critical. Yeah, I think you always need a group, peer. And I think that's been the case all throughout history. People work on each other's work. Meeting in cafés in Baghdad or Paris or wherever. Writers always have done that formally or informally. I think Creative Writing courses formalise that.

Yes. They've come under fire quite a lot, particularly the ones conducted in universities. The common criticism is that you can't teach someone to be a good writer, all you can do is—I guess you can be like a mentor, but you can't make someone a good writer.

I think you actually can. I understand the question 'What are you teaching?' when you teach creative writing. Teaching is you bringing things out in people. And I think if, fundamentally, people are prepared to write about what they're passionate about, what they care about—that Hemingway thing, write what you know, or what you want to understand, what you care about—then if it's honest, if it's authentic, it's going to be good. Even if there's imaginative experimental work, it's got to have that emotional drive behind it in my mind. You can encourage people to do that, and you can definitely teach principles around characterisation and structure. What I think is problematic in universities is then marking it. Marking creative work is problematic in my mind. I tutor at Melbourne Uni and you can do it, you can have criteria, and I think any editor of any journal would have criteria, but giving a quantity mark, I don't know about that. If you've got something, you want to develop, and you use it to do that. I mean, I'm studying at Deakin now, and I'm finding the shared material really stimulating. That's what's great about universities. You get fed all this material that can really trigger stuff and inspire you, give you ideas.

I'd like to understand more about what the criticism of Creative Writing is. I can see too, maybe, that some criticisms are really that people should read, not write, especially young writers starting out.

I read a piece recently in which a Professor of Creative Writing was attacking Creative Writing as a discipline.

I can understand that attack. You know, everyone wants to do their thing—I mean, does it discourage reading? To write is to read. Does it discourage reading to do creative writing all the time? I don't think it should. It depends on how it's taught. We're given reading and encouraged to read. I'm interested in what that criticism's about. It's always good to know what it is.

How has your writing evolved over time? Obviously it has evolved a lot, but what have you noticed as key developments in your work?

I think that's one of the problems of marking work, because obviously what I wrote when I was eighteen, and I'm looking at the work of people who are eighteen, nineteen—you have to allow people to have that apprenticeship time of writing rubbish. You've got to write a lot of rubbish, I think. Also, if something's really different, which I think mine was, it doesn't fit in with what's

pre-existing, so how will you mark it? But, yeah, I think my work's changed a lot. I think I wrote some really bad stuff, really angsty or whatever, but I think everyone should write really bad stuff, especially when they're starting out, and I think it should be really angsty. You know, over time you learn you can write that stuff, but you don't have to give it to your audience. Anything that comes out of that—it's a work of art, not your angst in the end. So I'd say it just got better, just practice and time. It's more refined.

Do you have someone who proofreads your work?

I did, very closely for my first book. When I was at Monash, when I was nineteen, twenty, I used to go to a workshop, which was one of my first groups of writers, and I had already done this work, so I went to that for three years. I was out at Monash doing, that and not doing the degree. It's funny: I could have done the degree while I was there too, but I went to the workshops with John Leonard, and he's a very good editor. He doesn't impose; he's not a poet, so I think he can look at different things and appreciate different styles without imposing a style. I think he could see what I wanted to achieve before I was achieving it. And then I worked really closely with him as an editor when I got a literary grant. It bought me the time to work intensively on it. *A bud* was published in 2006. Well, that was the first full-length book. Before that, there was a chapbook, but it took that intensive time working with an editor to get that work to a standard where it was even. I took twenty years. I'd write work, and because I was developing, there was never enough of the one standard at the one time, so the literary grant did what it's supposed to do. It bought me the time to finish a work. I really needed that to work intensely with an editor. I learnt a lot from John, which I think I apply when I'm working with people. I don't work with him anymore at the moment, but most of my latest book, *Paperweight*, he's seen but not all of it.

Michael Farrell published a review of Paperweight in the Australian (9 August 2014), in which he writes of the book as 'poetry of relation: between the visual and verbal, the human, animal and object... a restless poetry of life's process that acknowledges the role of death, and of words themselves in representing this process'. How have you found the responses so far to Paperweight?

It is great to get responses. I appreciate Farrell's in-depth reading. Ella O'Keefe reviewed *Paperweight* for *Cordite*, which is great. It's really gratifying that young intelligent and informed women are responding to my work. Bronwyn F. James wrote a thesis on *a bud*. I am happy when people pick up on the feminism, I'm delighted by that.

Ella O'Keefe's Cordite review draws our attention to the ways in which you as a poet 'sit with' your material, almost as though you were in meditation. There is a steadiness, a staying, with subjects that many would shy away from. You are also a yoga teacher. To what extent do practices such as meditation and yoga support your writing process?

There are common principles in yoga and the creative process for me. Yoga and meditation are essential to my writing process in that both are about sitting with whatever comes up. The more I meditate the more I write.

What sort of things do you have to have in place in order to get the writing process going? Are there some things that if you don't do those things you just can't start?

Yeah, if I don't have any space in my life. I need space. I always say that to students too. You gotta have unstructured time, dream time. If I don't have that, reflective time, it doesn't happen. Of course that's every creative person's struggle. Every family, I just think: how do you keep a creative life alive? You have to have unstructured time, free time, dream time without an aim. When I have that, yeah, the demands of work and family and earning a living or whatever... And money's a big problem for most writers.

Writing's probably one of the least lucrative things you can do in life.

Absolutely. And you know, I find that it's a non-material path, and you have to accept that you are not going to pursue what other people do, and that can lead to anxiety because initially—I don't really feel that way about it now, but initially, people look at you as if to say, 'What the hell is she doing?' because in a consumerist society, you prove your worth by what you accumulate, what you own. My family thought there was something wrong with me 'cause I wasn't taking the material path—to the point of talking to me like stupid people talk to disabled people, in a loud voice. They really thought there was something wrong with me. You know, I didn't have money.

You meet people at writers' festivals or whatever and they might have credentials as long as their arm, and they still struggle with money. One of the things I have come to realise over the years is if you can work only three days a week, you can keep a creative life alive, and have enough to eat—you have to eat. Not eating doesn't work.

Not eating doesn't help brain activity, does it?

Not eating, not paying your bills. If you're too stressed about money, you can't be creative. You know, you think you free yourself from money by not getting caught up in earning it, but you actually don't if you're worried about it all the time; you might get your electricity cut off. It's very hard to get the balance, I think for anybody.

Especially if you're a parent.

You know, I put my two daughters through that, and they both have very strong ideas now about not being artists. Poetry is one of the worst art forms in that way—I mean everyone says theirs is the worst, but poetry is meant to be the worst in that way. Look, I don't think anyone can strike a balance in their lives. You drop the ball in one area, and you pick it up in another, and it just becomes a kind of endless sort of 'What have I dropped the ball on?'

Claire Gaskin
Two Boolean Sonnets

apology

he tells me his wife is crazy
he stays for the children
he never forgot me
I am the love of his life he says
but I am not the centre of his life
he says that leaving me was the biggest mistake of his life
his apology is a gift or an opportunity
to be re-gifted rejection
wrapped up in his pronouns
his we is not him and me
his wife is crazy
aren't all wives crazy
I accepted his rejection
he expects me to

apology

he tells me his willingness is crazy
he stays for the chill
he never forgot me
I am the loyalist of his lifeline he says
but I am not the centrepiece for his lifeboat
he says that leaving me was the biggest mistrust of his lifeguard
his appearance is a gift or an opportunity
to be re-gifted religion
wrapped up in his prophylactics
his we is not him and me
his willingness is crazy
aren't all wives crazy
I accepted his relapse
he expects me to

Peter Bland
Cézanne's apples

Vollard complained
he had to sit like an apple
while posing for his friend,
but then Cézanne
scolded all his sitters
whenever they dared
to take a breath. About
this time he painted
paper flowers 'because
they never decay'. This
from a man who
could spot apples ageing
even as they met
his gaze. *Nature,*
he wrote, *is always dissipating*
and yet, in essence,
It remains the same. Again
and again Cézanne settles down
to explore the mysteries
of the in-between.

Rachael Petridis
The Strike 1950

This is a winter table.
Blackout
but for night's oil-lamp burning.
All eyes intent, faces serious,
a family studies in the wavering glow.

All silent in the reckoning
of steady measures:
geometry, algebra, physics,
subjects alien
to immigrant parents.

Mother is knitting, dishes done.

An untold future sits close in the grainy image.
Young brothers, shoulder to shoulder,
heads bent,
hair lush and thick, hands turning pages
in the shadowed chiaroscuro—
a lambent hush
like the silent breath of a Van Gogh interior.

Ian Gibbins
manipulandum

{ *one* }
through the intervening years
this time / this time

{ *two* }
with little choice / we twist / twirl
scrawl hasty inscriptions

oiled woodgrain smooth
a final caress / eventual departure

{ *three* }
lost for an instant / the indefinite flexibility
you patiently await

at least there are options
parahelic / contralunar / astrocircadian

is someone keeping score? counting
the cards? an ace? a deuce? a trey?

{ *four* }
approaching resolution / we decipher
a message from the past

unstated / the power of attraction
let us weave a story between us

except of course a rehearsal / mere
prelude / a misty premonition

all we require is confirmation / condemnation
some irrefutable evidence of abandonment

{ *five* }
a chain which links / winches / checks fast
a kind of boundary / a measure / a gate

can you track a sight-line conjured from
ironbark / a feather beside a rock?

then flies in a dusty spider web / pencil shards
untoward vibrations / crazed heirloom china

as though air had separated / folded apart / remembered
your childhood / your life beyond imagination

your word? a flick of the wrist / snap of your finger
and thumb / distant emotions? your leaving?

{ *four* }
the calls we anticipate / the response we come
to regret / hinges in need of oil / a lock / a door ajar

a crumpled bill of lading unsigned (undeliverable)
faithless mid-winter amnesia

if only you switched from left to right / knotted
more securely your coloured ribbon of recognition

silver coins with strangers' faces / greater than
glancing value / than doubtful currency for the future

{ *three* }
tumbling under the wake of an aerialist
I hanker after elliptic escape

the ground sinking away / resisting observation
can you hear my harness-belt rattle?

fragile / subliminal / your farewell
in the motes above our windowsill

{ *two* }
is that the path / the direction / we had planned
to follow? with no compass / no chart?

is that the path / the direction / we had planned
to follow? with no compass / no chart?

{ *one* }
through the intervening years I thought
I saw you wave / this time / this time

Joan Fleming
 Three Poems from *Arithmetic*

The new pictures

The therapist says, Tell me why you're here. Flat rocks of story feel too heavy or dull in the telling, they should be in a river somewhere, they should be changing. She makes a start, *All winter with my arms crossed and then it was warm again and he didn't want me*. Cross out the loud raincoat, forget if the coming-together was loud, make the whole day melt. Cross out later when he'd come home, and she'd be original, as in, *How was your day?* His eyes going everywhere. How was it not, everywhere but down. Cross out *fine* like a hum from some machine keeping you up nights, and you can't unplug it. You can't even find it. When everything dilates on the other. *It's a pretty good face, I'll give it 8 out of 10*. It sounds like what you need is to develop your inner world, says the therapist. *Oh*. She leaves, the city is shopping its afternoon, it is going by, back to the office. You're back, they say. Upstairs came by, they have an issue with the syntax and they want the new pictures. *I've got the new pictures*, she says. *I've got them right here*.

The second time

The second time she visits the warehouse where he has some kind of a bedroom, wall as curtain, splinter bunk and boxes, so they clamour on the roof. He rolls on top of her, *no*, she shakes her head, she struggles the neckline, pulls at the black tubes of his arms, it is interesting pretending, *no help no*. Backs to the window and he transmutes into a parrot she's seen before, *some beak*, but whomps off, so she stays there drinking wine til the colours stop their losing. Then she's awake, and it's dark already. *I should go*, she says. *I should find my shoes*. They'd come undone, rolled by the boxes. Just let me play you this one thing. He is tall in an idle way. Nothing is framed and everywhere there are pictures. It's not a song she's heard before, they lie while it plays and she thinks *we should be talking*, it turns on those same four chords, bring, bring, bring, bring, bring, and now she'll never not know it.

Times twelve

Maybe this not-touching and not-looking and not-talking is a kind of all right, because what is the other but one to be reached for across a gulf of want. Eros the veil, eros untouchable, same thing as being ignored. All this as she moves through the midday of their place together, fidgeting her cheek til the skin breaks or searching four drawers and a bits-basket for a shirt to blend in with what she'd already thought to wear, i.e., disappear, though she knows she doesn't own it. This is the kind of thinking to make the heart cave in and be replaced by arithmetic. Kitchen mornings plus the hot haunch of angry-untouchable equals lust as an ambulance. A can't-sleep light flipped on equals the face screwed up unpretty, minus looking. Multiplication is everything times everything, same thoughts going round and round. She plays this game though it is not fun. Twelve times twelve in the last flat box, she never learned by rote (by heart) what it equalled, twelve ribs in the rib cage, twelve face cards in the deck. *You know what I call a deck?* A fleck, a fuck. *Do you still love me*, or is that the wrong question. Know what I call facts? Acts, fakes, barks, backs. This *not-herself*-ness rakes itself across the inner elbows, inner thighs, inner arms. You know what I call yin. What I call inner. *Kin, kith, knife, pith, nothing.*

Pete Hay

The Wave: Drift and Echo

The morning sea was burnished flat
To mirror the sun.
It crinkles now with sackcloth.

It is an angry rising
And the wave is its relentless fist.
This implacable struggle, ageless.

'Sea-fences' to the saga-tellers,
They clatter shoreward now
As hurdles crash to a leg-weary horse.

Salt horses. They yearn to the land,
Reach – and expire in the reaching,
Scattering to spin, and echoes.

The eye of the wave falls on the sweet rolling field,
The meadow, the dune-guarded swamp,
Its child.

The wave rides the tide's moon-surge,
Slides through dune and marsh,
Juicing, thickening the rich green pools.

The raw smell of the sea is on the wave.
It holds a fertile redolence
And the hard stench of death.

Pure as form the wave rides the land,
Breathes upon generations warm with blood.
It extracts them, gently – one here, one there.

Today it trawls this clerk, this judge, this navy,
This stockbroker bright with gel in his hair.
It removes this town of mining folk,

A city lost to law, a rhino lost to forest,
This species, that,
This small blue mote within the sea of space.

The wave rolls on, rolls on.
The wave is the shape of time.

Sarah Rice
Rupture

I am starting to sense another world behind this one; beneath the smell of salmon croquettes, sunlight, and voices filling the train carriage; behind the familiar scene of people moving in the grey, railway forecourt. If one looks quickly, or sideways out of the eye's corner, sudden the awareness, presence of those other thousands, hidden in the before, or beyond, moving darkly in the in-between, shadows seldom seen; the peoples of Tokyo or Toronto, a glimpse barely caught, but disturbing for all that, the smooth surface of the world briefly folding in on itself; a moment of Möbius mobility. All moving. My god, so many. In this pressing

together of the present, somewhere right now, hundreds of kites flock the sky, hundreds of cranes, metallised and feathered; sun and thunder share the expanded scope, star and torrent and silver. Dawn and dark overlaid. Somewhere in the whisper of this stringy casuarina out the window is heard the bellow of red oak, row upon row in California, the dark acres of pine, the sullen silence of moor or lake or icefield. And under the worn, yellowed carpet of grasses in Grafton is a dusty ochre that elsewhere shows itself as black clod, or Nordic slate. And the sand blows in from all directions, from a sea that tears at the land's seams. Far too big for any one moment to hold or withhold, to stand or withstand. So many, so much, so long.

Carol Jenkins
Intensive Care

A day contrite, for making such a grim, knifey mess
the doctor says, he's knicked his heart, the pericardium's
beleaguered. He's been de-warfarinised, stitched up,
bolstered with this tube, that ventilator.
Free helicopter trip, his view only some black swirl
inside his eyes. Or so I guess. No point they say, too risky to try
to stitch the heart, it should mend itself, scar over.
So it does, a day contrite, and then back to it
the doctors being foreigners, the nurses not so good,
and him, going downhill, visitors not the right ones—
one has aged, the other's not put on any weight,

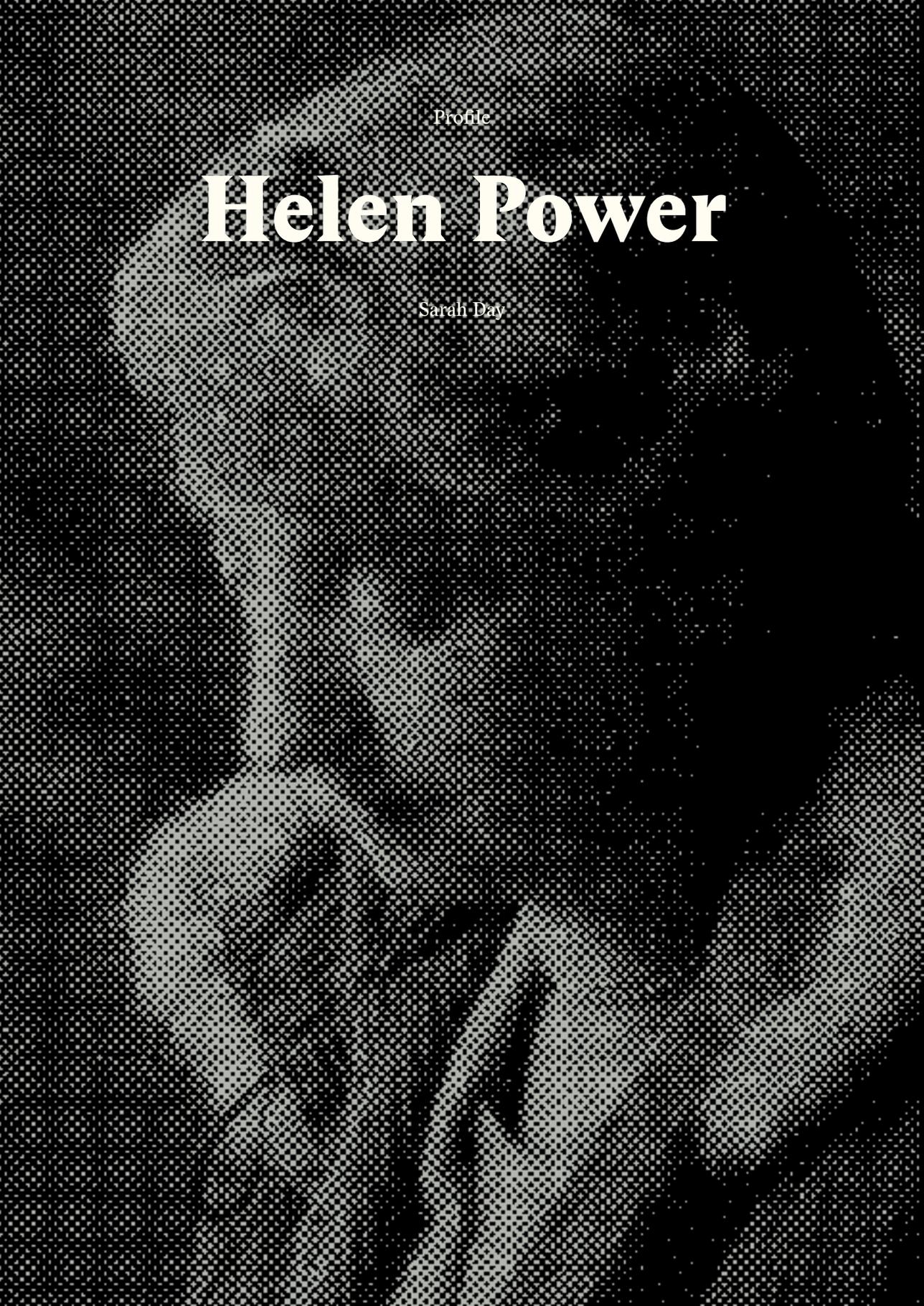
the food is shithouse (I second that). We can go
he doesn't want to hold us up. I say we will — when
it suits us, and stay a bit. He brightens up at
baby photos, frets about the weeks ahead
that he had been so desperate to avoid. Leaving
I hold his hand for a moment, its shape
still the same as that of the man who quizzed me
on social studies, lobsters from Geraldton, coal
from Collie. Looking back he's asleep
before we leave intensive care.

Kevin Ireland
A talking tour of the Home Counties

Sloshing through slippery vowels,
tripping over bunched or gapped consonants,
picking a way through goosy sibilants,
words from the Home Counties astound us
with resonances hinting at private assumptions
and bragging of public categories.

The sentences have long shrugged off
the old contentment of a burr and now the clip
and honk of the parade ground, the nasal lift, the bray,
testify to speech deliberately affected.
Where there once was a lilt the syllables now propose
vocations, property and notions of position –

and they make hard work of it. You have to grimace
to get it right or tip your head back to snort it out.
It's how we came here to the southern seas
to frame our conversations from a vocal stuff-up,
a rambling accent lurching here and there.
Something defiant, but pretty close to parody.



Profile

Helen Power

Sarah Day

Killed in Action

So it is ended! The long, long watching;
 The dread of the secret doors unlatching;
 The creeping fear lest the world discover
 You friend unfaithful and perjured lover!
 Ended the struggle to screen and hide
 Your poor stark self with my sleepless pride;
 And no more need for the heart-wrung prayer
 That I no child of yours might bear!

You failed me living; but now, in dying,
 There's no more treachery, no more lying;
 No more women the worse for you,
 For the hearts of the dead perforce are true!

So, freed from shame by your latest breath,
 I can love you proudly, at last, in Death.

Source: *Bulletin*, 13 December 1917, p. 3.

[*Sent from Tasmania*]

The tough, articulate sentiment in this poem is indicative of the singularity of its author Helen Power. Whether the poem is autobiographical or not, the tone of the woman it gives voice to is assured and commanding in the mixed emotions it expresses. I wonder, given that the Great War was still continuing, was this poem audacious in lauding the death of a man killed in action?

Helen Power's work is not widely known. In 1934, she privately published, at Hobart's Critic Print, a small volume titled *Poems*, and in 1964, Clive Sansom published through Robert Hale in London the posthumous collection, *A Lute with Three Strings*, from which the poem 'Killed in Action' was conspicuously absent.

Power was born in 1870 in Campbell Town in the rural Midlands of Tasmania. Self-educated, she had the freedom of her father's library from an early age and had read the whole of Dickens as a child. She developed an interest in verse and was introduced early to modern French and German poetry. Many of her earliest works are translations from the French. According to Sansom, from the late war years to 1943, four evenings a week, she ran 'Literary Talks' on modern American, European and British writers. She must have been an incongruous figure in Hobart during those years—a cultivated, intelligent, quick witted single woman with her compass set to the creative and intellectual world of the northern hemisphere metropolises.

In Hobart in the early twentieth century, she published poems and won competitions regularly in journals and newspapers such as the *Bulletin* and the *Australasian*. It is poignant, leafing through her notebooks, to read the dates and the names of the journals she submitted her poems to, some, presumably rejected, with a firm line through them and others with the word 'accepted' in her distinctive and decisive handwriting. As editors shifted in their literary taste and edicts

though, rejections became more frequent. On a pink torn scrap of the *Bulletin* (of unknown date) among her notes is a paragraph in which the judge of a recent competition quotes from her own submission:

[Helen Power] writes: 'I am sending a sonnet for the March competition but without much anticipation of its being favourably considered, since I know of your rigid rule as to "local colouring".'

It must have galling to be increasingly rejected, but the move to a modernist and national literary identity was inexorable. Evidence of her acerbic ire is present in the following lines from her poem 'The Reed':

My little tremulous pipe
 Is stifled in
 The loud discordant clang
 And brazen din
 Of modern orchestra.

For many years subsequently, she appears to have written very little.

Perhaps she would have slipped quietly into oblivion had Clive Sansom not made her acquaintance in a reading group in the 1950s and begun to collect and edit her manuscripts. As a result of their friendship, Helen Power began to write again late in life. Sansom believed that much of her best work was written in her final ten years. It is true that in the late work she was able to shed much of the self-consciously 'poetic' strain of the romantic lyricism that characterised many but not all of the poems in the first half of her life. In the late poems her natural verve and wit is given full reign. In the following poem, written a few weeks before her death, she casts off the lofty language of the past and consciously disrupts the formal metre that characterises most of her life's work. Her last poem, written at the age of 87 is, wonderfully, her most modern. Look at the vitality of its punctuation!

Your Heart has an Irregular Beat

That's what they tell me in hospital. Well? What of it?
 It never had anything else that I remember,
 Galloping or fluttering at the sight of one face
 Or the sound of another voice (for a time!)
 And then – complete indifference.
 It never beat steadfast and true, except to the call
 Of friendship, or the love of two dogs.
 Then came Age, and Passion lies dead in its ashes.

But there's plenty in life, besides love, to make the heart leap!
 What about Beethoven's fifth symphony? Or the divine
 Harmonies of Bach's shorter works,
 "Where sheep may safely graze" or the toccatas?

And what of the Italian Renaissance and the Ancient Greeks –
 Plato in Jowett's translation, and the Odyssey?
 And the Romans – Horace and Virgil, and Cicero's letters?
 And the French painters and writers of 80s and 90s?
 And the poems of Walter de la Mare?
 And gardens and the glittering burnish on the late autumn trees?
 And coming home, in the wintry dusk, to ones firelit room,
 The peace of it greater than the peace of God
 (For God is always a little disturbing)
 And the long deep stare of love and understanding in your dog's eyes –
 Who could expect the heart not to leap with such things flung at it?

 – But what's this? A change of tempo from the conductor's baton?
 ... Ah, Pain!...Darkness... Oh, ecstasy!

Helen Power's output was small, her poetry uneven. To today's eye and ear some of her work might read like the arch expression of effete emotions. She continued to use 'thee' and 'thou' a hundred and fifty years after they ceased to be spoken in Standard English. Influenced as she was by nineteenth century French poets (perhaps this accounted for her resolute use of the second person singular/familiar), she wrote in a milieu that was at odds with the culture she inhabited. Judith Wright in her review of *A Lute with Three Strings* (in the *Australian Book Review* of March 1965) alluded to this: 'Whatever Australia has encouraged in her writers it has seldom been the habit of meditation or the minor key'. With the exception of a sequence of poems, each of which is called 'At home in War Time', the outside world exists mainly as a mirror of her inner life'.

Helen Power was born seventeen years after transportation finished, which was roughly when 'Tasmania' officially replaced the sullied name of 'Van Diemen's Land'. The generation before her had witnessed or taken part in the resolute war against the land's original people. By the time she was born, the indigenous population had dwindled to a shocking fraction of its pre-European days, a mere six decades earlier. In my brief encounter with Helen Power's work, I have read no reference to this human catastrophe. Perhaps this is more a reflection of the ability of her privileged class as a whole to avoid confronting the ruination they were a part of rather than a manifestation of her individual detachment. Or perhaps I haven't yet read enough of her work.

Helen Power's poems are full of lovely lines, especially those on love and age as can be seen from the following extracts:

My soul is turned to beauty through my grief!...

Loved friend and lost. Thy spirit informs the hour,
 Thou art manifest in sunset, hill and tree...

And filled with intimate consciousness of thee
 I fare with courage homeward through the dark.
 (Bereavement, notebooks, Hobart Library History Room)

or:

Middle Life

When the long long climb is done,
 each hard-won foot of the way,
And the summit is reached at length,
 Past noon in the burning day,
When the dread mis-step in the dark
 And Youth's mad dancing are over,
And the last denial is made
 To the last importunate lover -

Turning the loose leaf poems on tissue thin paper and the pages of Helen Power's notebooks, the first of which is written on the lined government issue exercise books that schoolchildren used in the 1800s, in the dimly lit History Room of the Hobart Reference Library, I'm grateful to Michael Sharkey for bringing my closer attention to this poet whose life spanned the colonial era into modern times. Helen Power eschewed contemporary literary mores and was enigmatic in her anachronistic style. In her best poems there is an unorthodoxy and force of emotion that are affecting and illuminating.

§

Documentary sources

Helen Power. Manuscripts and notebooks (1890s-1957), History Room Hobart Linc.

"Low heart has an irregular beat"

Free
voice
not
impeded

That's what they tell me in hospital. Well! What of it?
It never had anything else that I remember:

Callapping or fluttering at the sight of one gaze,
Or the sound of another voice (for a time!)

And then — complete indifference!

It never beat, steadfast & true, except to the
call of friendship

Or the love of two dogs.

Then came Age, and Passion lies dead in its ashes,
— But there's plenty, in life besides Love, to
make the heart leap!

What about Beethoven's fifth Symphony? Or the divine
harmonies of Bach's shorter works?

"Where sheep may safely graze": the toccatas?
And what about the Italian Renaissance, and
the old Greeks?

Plato in Jonckheer's translation, and the Odyssey?

And the Romans — Horace & Virgil and Cicero's letters?

And the Dutch painters & writers of the 80's & 90's?

And the poems of Walter de la Mare?

And Gardens, and the glittering brownish on the lake
Arden trees?

And coming home in the wintery dusk, to one's
own firelit room

The Peace of it greater than the peace of God,
(For God is always a little ~~clearing~~ ^{disturbing})
And the long deep stare of love and understanding
in our dogs eyes?

Who could expect the heart not to sleep with such
things thrown at it?

... But what's this?.. A change of tempo from
the Conductor's baton?

... Ah! Pam!

Darkness.... Oh! Ecstasy!

Twilight.

The twilight falls... The end of a restless day.
Be still, my soul; await the evening star,
Then through the gates of sleep, escape and
wander far
In those fair fields where blooms the asphodel
And the quiet waters are.

H.F.

and 31
any
o.
An Alphabet of Modern Authors.

- A. stands for Aalen, (Armenian, at that!)
Who once wrote a novel concerning a hat.
- B is Arnold Bennett, fine builder of books
Whose brilliance of brain is belied by his looks.
- C. stands for Chesterton, figure of fun,
Whose points are, the Paradox, Pith, and the Pun.
- D. is John Drinkwater, (Verses and plays)
Who needs en de vie to give vie to his lays.
- E rams, a Welshman, whose Taffies are awful,
With 'Chapel' and problems cloaking deeds quite unlawful.
- F rance, dear old Anatole, witty and wise
With a string on his lips, but a smile in his eyes.
- G. stands for Georgian poets, whose verse
Well might be better - but - well - might be worse!
- H ardy, of authors the dozen, no less!
In drama? The Dynasts! In fiction? Why, Tess?
Kinds up my list, as all my mine overtake!

or Massfield, whose prose is poetic at times,
But whose poetry is prosy & queer in its rhymes.

3 Elizabeth

Hobart

January

Robyn Rowland
Sarajevo

for Hadžem Hajdarević, poet, May 2010

There was nothing we could do to avoid / what came, or wanted to come

—Hadžem Hajdarević, *The Voices are Coming*

You say there are many truths in Sarajevo
and that is one of them. I am a novice
in war damage, in common carnage,
and so far only understand one.
Its name is *Sarajevo Rose* – splattered craters of petals
sliced by mortars into pavements
where women shopped, worked, and children
played, where men hurried to business –before the hit.
Filled with red mortar now they bloom beside
lists of shredded victims that were families once.

In my far-way country –
oceans so wide between us
it might be a different planet
in a galaxy yet unknown –
we watched square screens in safety
wondering who were the white hats,
who the devil's guard.
'Give us the good guys' we cried,
'everything else is too confusing', and
we turned off the screens. Turned away.

We have lived colonial success in a safe island
distance, all the original people buried
or fenced off one way or another.
Never in my town the need for defence,
for dank tunnels out, for schools in basements;
for so many playing fields, parks and gardens
whitened with burial obelisks, grey crosses.
Never children rabbit-running from snipers
gilding them red. A weeping green glass monument
to fifteen hundred of them, dead.

Innocent and ignorant, we pale poets never had to
 disguise, or remembering, darken our words that deep,
 find meaning in ash and blood.
 Your mind is sharp and heart tender, body mortal.
 Your poems are full of death, full of old words,
 old tales, the underworld of day's light:
 'like gardens in Rilke's *Autumn*
 the war's wilting everyone's face.
 Everything sinks to its first tenderness
 then snaps back at us wrinkled and hard', you write.

Yet on our bus towards Čeliću you tell crazy jokes,
 make me laugh to splitting as we struggle with
 language, translators rapidly batting words
 like tennis balls. You feed us strawberries
 bigger than oranges and teach me history as if
 I were a child, from the beginning, rock by rock,
 river by river. You don't tell it bullet by bullet.
 You let me find that myself in unexploded mines
 planted in farmers' fields by the retreating enemy
 that halt our bus fourteen years after the war.

You come to say goodbye at my hotel,
 your wife's warm embrace a farewell gift.
 We drink tea and juice and then she tells me
 you made three trips through that tunnel for food,
 in blackness, water-logged, knees bent small
 while she stayed with your three children on the
 third floor of a building you could call Sniper's Delight.
 After each absence, at the end of each day, hungry,
 you just gave thanks that you all sat still together.
 As I do, as we sit now, poet, trying to imagine and speak.

Julie Chevalier
morandi's room

when the sky turns the colour of milk
he shifts an easel to capture the light
via *fondazza* only one room
olive oil ovaltine so many bottles
he niggles a basket it nudges a bowl
from the kitchen he fetches a funnel to study

in bologna smart artists don't study
the shades the hues the tones of milk
he coats the insides of jugs & bowls
catches transcendental light
he swirls white paint into the bottles
his sisters ignore the smells from his room

he tells the maid do not enter my room
do not close catalogues open for study
do not dust the dust from my bottles
it's dust that renders them matt as milk
he's obsessed with games of shadow & light
arrogant vessels & humble bowls

the maid serves *brodo* in a chaste bowl
europa's in chaos outside his room
mussolini simmers in half light
buys two morandis to hang in his study
when the war ends venice is top milk
the venice biennale world in a bottle

a lemon squeezer—a break from bottles—
ribs & cones among the bowls
he skewers their shadows milks
fresh life from his crockery room-
mates *natura morta* the only study
roma milano dada by daylight

a global depression his pockets are light
the clock keeps ticking so empty the bottles
the clock keeps on ticking cold as his study
he approaches his dealer with a blue begging bowl
returns with seurat's for his sisters' rooms
the kindness of kin, of dealers, of milk

politics is a distant room etching's his study
his milky pastels cream on a bottle
bowls overflow with ivory light

Liz Dolan

My In-laws Perfect the Sweet Science

Joe and Lois should have sensed
they were poorly matched

should have postponed the wedding forever.
After the church bell words flew like fists.

Except for a few bare-knuckled street brawls
they never took off

the gloves. He had a glass jaw,
she led with her chin.

He was a southpaw, she never could fathom
where the haymakers came from.

Always an upper cut ready to strike
neither willing to bob and weave.

Fifteen years and three sons in,
both punch drunk they split

the purse by unanimous decision.
Your mother always said he was her sweetest son.

He liked to whine and be waited on,
said you. Their boys?

They never had a chance-down for the count.

Liz Dolan
He Never Shut Up

But we all loved Tommy's uncombed locks
his gut busting laughter. Everything
grist for his mill. In the beach house
in the Hamptons he taped
the older guys' riff on the summer stock
of butts and breasts. He regaled us
with tales of riding the rails in Ozone Park
with Jimmy the Lip and Frankie Fingers.

The air went out of our summer
after Tommy left for Nam. We broiled
on Hot Dog Beach and languished
on a tube in Peconic Bay. After his tour
we expected the true skinny on the war:
just another tropical cruise.
But he never spoke
of the orange-scorched jungle,
body parts dangling from branches.

Rachael Mead
Behind locked doors
Cheltenham Cemetery

Calcified with stone and dust, this is a hard suburb
peopled with bare sketches of the dead.
The graves hold up their words
in loving memory beloved
lives abstracted into an absence
so profound they do not even cast shadows.

So much is hidden, held in check
under these stone façades.
Unspoken grief whispers across our skin
as we pass thin pools of shade,
as incongruous here as joy.

We search among the stones
for the stories, those lapses of reserve
granting us more than shallow names and dates,
these spare inscriptions
the lonely scratching of the living
on the locked doors of the dead,
while below the hard packed earth
the dead slowly get on with their dark work
of sifting themselves back
into the green world.

Ian Wicks
Hot air ballooning over the Yarra

They appear on still mornings,
like implausible dreams in the dregs of sleep
A fleet of dirigibles – airily adrift,
in the widening silver sky,
above the docile brown river
and its easy green suburbs

Propane fuels their visitations,
powering Archimedes' principle
Its fiery plume leaves the treetops speechless
and its urgent roar sets the dogs barking,
as the Montgolfiers' big, proud envelopes –
fat chances, filled to bursting,
slowly rise again

What will the imperial Sun, returning,
make of these dawn raiders, in gondolas,
with no thought for Icarus or von Hindenburg?
As though the swollen river was a snake,
asleep in a patchwork world
and morning's minstrels awoke mute
As though the dutiful Moon, departing, saw no-one
and we homunculi,
emerging slowly, in backyard pyjamas,
were finished with dreaming

Fiona Burrows
Wentworth Falls

When we did the Charles Darwin Trail
it had rained for nearly a week before.
Beneath the green, the give of ground
surprised me
like pushing my tongue against the inside
of someone's cheek

and everything smelt how I imagined
the word 'peat' to smell
whilst reading Seamus Heaney
at seventeen.

Some unseen insect fell in swoops
around us
as we pushed through warp and weft of ferns
and scissored light.

I could see
the tiny whorls and hoops of fronds
clenched tight like newborn fists

and wondered why
words that rhyme with curl and swirl and unfurl
are all round
and why we say them out aloud
with a mouth shaped like the knot of a tree.

Against the backdrop of receding blue,
eucalypts with bark rusted on
shaped the sodden shade
in sudden
contours.

I learned to find the trampled footsteps through
water-whittled lichen lines;
learned to make them mine,
and to remember that everywhere
everywhere
has been trodden.

When we returned,
I found out that Darwin
once wrote
of following a hum,
a tiny rill, of water to a precipice
at Wentworth Falls.

I pictured his note, written in the evening chill;
scrawled, unsteady as the steps he trod,

and imagined the thrill of standing
on the edge and questioning
God

surrounded by the calls
of parrots

squabbling in the scribbly gums.

Alexis Lateef
Man on wire

He is suspended between two buildings,
standing on something
 that shouldn't hold but does.
He pauses, soles placed evenly,
 and then he moves,
 painfully quick, once, twice.

Each passing over is a life extinguished.
 The lightest of breezes
could be his undoing,
 but with every crossing
he is born again.

From below he is only a speck,
 a thin shadow,
but to the congregated people
he is a dancing immortal.

They throng, as if waiting for news from him,
 some word from the sky.

He has nothing to offer them but this:
 his taut body
pitched against the void,
where only those who touch it
know the sweet burn
 of toying with one's life.

Barbara Fisher
Toast

First there is the smell.
 You are coming into the house
 after a bad day.
 Probably it's cold and wet
 and whatever you have been doing
 has been unsuccessful.
 But now you are greeted
 with a warm fragrance.
Someone is making toast.
 Your heart lifts. Someone loves you
 and soon you will be spreading
 good butter – it must be butter,
 have no truck with margarine –
 and as it melts deliciously
 you will take your first bite.
Oh frabjous day! You are at one
 with Mr Toad's delight
 in buttered toast, treasured memory
 from childhood reading.

Since it's such a part
 of English-speaking culture,
 Americans are good at toast;
 unsurprisingly, Asians are not.
 Europeans rarely attempt it
 and certainly not for breakfast.
 There is of course French toast
 but that is really just an eggy conceit.
It is not proper toast.
 Good toast naturally demands good bread,
 firm of texture and robust in flavour.
 Eschew anything resembling cotton wool.
 Sourdough always answers well.

Some will assert the very best toast
 is not made in an electric toaster
 or even under a grill. No, it is made
 with a toasting fork held
 to the glowing embers of an open fire.
 Thus spake Mrs Elizabeth David
 and who would disagree?

Ian C. Smith
The Hole

The rest of the windscreen crazed,
a hole above the steering-wheel
the diameter of a bullet
focuses our attention
after my father slowly drives home
from his night-patrolman's job,
his worried head outside the window.
This is after the police search
for the bullet we discuss in staccato bursts
like machine-guns in movie action
before we calm down, although my father
who walks alone, punching time-clocks,
listening to the pizzicato of wings
in the cobwebbed rat-scattered dark
then trying to sleep through hot days,
his dreams of a farm with green fields,
quits while he is arguably still whole.
I was eleven, and our relationship,
mine with this spooked angry man
who never heard a shot fired from shadows,
was bleeding to death.
Belatedly, I have come to realise
now his secret memories are long dead
and those former days disappear
like streetlights ghosting into perspective,
that I wasn't really disappointed,
that some of us are born to shattered lives,
doing our best, dodging bullets.

Simeon Kronenberg
 Naming

for Luke Fischer
Such richness can make you drunk 'Flying Above California'
 —Thom Gunn

In Luke's poems: Samos and Damascus and the *Abbaye de Senanque*, the towers of *Tübingen* and the weeping *Schuylkill River*. In Cavafy: *Antioch* and *Thebes*, the towns of *Osroene* and *Serapis*. And in mine: *Gyanyar*, *Pantai Saba*, *Ketewel* and *Denpasar* – places of the heart.

Reading place names (thinking) warms, and brings tears like music – and *wanderlust* – visceral, a beat in the body, the hot urge to go, to seek unlikeness, conflict perhaps or a place to die (as Marianne always said), or to wobble, excited, at the shock and puzzle and glamour

of new people and trees and structures. Names conjure lives lived in intrepid geographies, in stone huts or palaces, near grass and towers, or spires and crofts and water catchments, minarets, dams and flattened plains or mountains (*Agung* comes to mind) or deserts of ice and on great river snakes:

the *Thames*, *Neckar* and *Scamander*, the light of stars, the lean of trees and clutter of waves. Names describe an earthly ache.

Tegan Schetrumpf
A big blue spectre, top-heavy

We each have a pantheon of gods in our heads,
and you were Comedy. Every nineties child
grew up with your effervescent stream
of consciousness, the king of ad-libbing
'doing the voices' while Carrey did the faces.
I guess, now, your mantle falls to him.

Dear emperor, there's no need for them to clothe
your foibles in shrink-wrap sentiment
or embed your smiling mask in media tributes –
you were never afraid to let performance
feel sincere; you wanted us to love you

and we loved you. And we knew
that zany sparkle in your eyes meant
you teetered. Mania fuels magic.
But you are more than the parable

of the tragic clown. I promise
to remember you: a man
with very hairy arms.

Olga Olenich
Distance

Distance wears the colour grey like a veil.
Before the end it drops between us
an insubstantial wall spun from a question
and woven loosely with the warp and weft
of the deft evasive answer.
We duck and weave
we balance on a thread
we defy gravity
to find ourselves between two extremities
between the beginning and the end
when the curtain falls
and the one embroidered explanation
unravels slowly
leaving only
little threads of disparate colours
fading to the general grey of unresolved days
and into silence.
Over the steel grey river
they are building new apartments for lonely people.
Concrete floors and window walls
looking out and keeping in
a lifetime of silent reflections.
Who knows
I might be tempted
to live in close proximity
to the liquid metal river
where I might float
my own reflection along its silver surface to the open sea.
In the disturbing wake of the determined ferry
I may yet cover distances undreamed of in your vocabulary
of the careful stitch
and the hemmed curtain.

Isil Cosar
Harlem

As you go farther and farther
I feel closer
To that memory which
Seems
Like a moment imagined

You were an hour away
Then three then five
Soon you will leave my half of the world
Where we will no longer share
Heat
Day night
Sun moon
Snow
Rainbow

Can you imagine?
As I see the first jasmine
You will see the first
Leaf falling
Will I shiver with you?
As you watch it land
Will you feel the fragrance?
As I inhale, I wonder....

I wonder also about thin threads
Made thick with separation
Equator equinox dusk
Splitting dawn
Crescent moon
– Space and time

I wonder about borders and checkpoints
You need to cross
With your feet with your wings with your heart with yourself
I ponder upon
Paper, identity and transition
Those allowed to cross the line
And those who must go back

Then... I wonder about where I stand
With you
Your eyes
Your eyes
On me
Your head on my breast
You
Ever since you put Harlem in me
I don't know who I am

Mark Young
The Serentine Bat

Getting hard-
core homeless into
housing can be quite
mysterious, unpredictable,
intoxicating. The giddy
thrills to be found
provide artists

with an
organically developed
& inherently self-
empowering primer.
But it adopts no
healing theologies;

& those of us
who have been forged
in the crucibles of
difference find the
graphic primitives
confined outside

the borders have the
straight-forward effect
of stopping us from ever
baking anything in our
lives. Even though it's
changed how people

organise their family
schedules, I'm still not
giddy nor even partway
thrilled by it. That's
why my Xmas self-
present is a new Ducati.

Lucy Dougan
The Brazier

There was something in it then, after all,
living like this,
driving and knitting,
and waking to biscuits and heated milk like a child;
reduced to standing in supermarket aisles
and reading the ingredients compulsively,
admiring all the packages
too much as she had.
Her father said it was a syndrome,
this love of packaging,
and she admitted tiredly
that all those years ago
he must have been, no was,
completely right.
She didn't have it as bad
as her cousins or her sister,
or it was not such a grand narrative,
but still she had it,
some form of homelessness
that she would end up
articulating or not.
Or she would just knit and drive and dip biscuits in milk
and read the packages from which the crumbs had come.
Night was best – the outdoors night,
sitting by the brazier
that had been an afterthought anniversary present.
The bougainvillea arched above, ghostly, most alive.
Were its flowers also leaves of a different colour?
They stood out in the blackness
as if husks of burnt paper had risen – unwritten scraps,
yet still substantial,
floating, not giving anything away.

Hugh McMillan
In Jock's Beach Bar, Cyprus

That engine, so low and distant,
takes me back to Newhaven,
the foghorns across the Forth
and Fife out there somewhere
in a starless night.
Scottish seas make you sad:
the one on the right
with its squalls and black ice;
the one on the left that rubs
on empty islands and sounds
when it's dark like a song;
even the one down the bottom corner,
a runt of a sea
with its mud creeks and rotten jetties
and sly looks at England.
It's not like that here,
the waves spark and fizz like electricity,
a perfect bowl of blue that seals the eyes.
Aphrodite came out of these waters,
bringing love,
what came out of ours?
Grey ships, going everywhere.

Aleksandar Stoicovici
The colossal wall of muteness

The silence of fog
soaking slowly into the forest
like blood on a piece of gauze

The silence of deer
grazing on frozen tulips
in the middle of the battlefield

The silence of the flies
moving death from one place to another
on little fragile wings

All these layers of silence
this colossal wall of muteness
seem nothing compared

to the moments when you refuse to speak
when every word becomes a flag
waved in a lost battle.

When the fog changes
into hundreds of nooses
hanging from the branches

When the deer get tired
of avoiding the land mines and enter
some long forgotten parable

When the flies try so hard
to get in your mouth
while you're sleeping

Reviews



Bronwyn Lea

The Deep North

Michelle Borzi

Bronwyn Lea's *The Deep North* brings together in one volume a selection of fifty-three poems. All except three are from her first two books *Flight Animals* (2001) and *The Other Way Out* (2008). Those two books have received high praise from reviewers and Lea's poetry certainly has an intelligent, personable bearing. Her interest appears to be predominantly in lyrical poetry and in personal, poetical identity within it. This is not to say that the poet and the person are one and the same, but rather that the poetry opens out questions about the make up of lyrical discourse—the requirements of lyrical tone on the poet.

Take her 'Ars Poetica', for example. Here it is in full:

I used to want
to say one thing

& have it turn

out to be another.
Now I only want

to say one thing.
As if the pleasure

now is in the voicing
not the trickery

but the soul making
itself heard

above the traffic.

These lines have a nice simplicity and the straightforward meaning that the poem offers might convince us. Paul Kane quotes this poem in his 'Note' to the book and comments that, in its diction, Lea is eschewing the duplicity of poetry. Of course play is the key here. The poet is playing with seriousness, nonchalantly. Specifically, she is playing with an idea of a gap that is opened up when the personal seeks utterance in a lyrical mode. And how else might the 'soul' be heard except through the trickery of language?

That impression of straightforwardness is possibly due to a lack of linguistic pressure in the poem. Others among the more minor poems, though technically accomplished, come to mind: 'These Gifts', 'Seferis' and 'Memory'. 'Seferis', at first glance, has a lively vigour:

Every day carried away more & more
by this drunkenness. The sea. The mountains
dance without moving—I'm crazy
about the trees in this light. The sea
is breathless—without a ripple—pine

needles motionless as sea-urchins
 in clear depths. Writing this I'm drunk
 on it all. A black ship trawls
 the horizon. There is a sense that if
 the slightest crack opened up in this faultless
 scene, all things would spill out beyond
 the four points of the horizon & leave me
 naked, alone & begging for alms. I hate knowing
 my life will not be long enough.

Lea's poetry often incorporates an 'I' figure, drawing on what seems to be autobiographical elements. At times, however, the search into the private recesses of the self is not always shaped at drawing out its audience. In this poem, for instance, we are simply told about mental or emotional anxiety, as in the abruptness of the final statement, rather than being awakened to it through its thought and language. As readers, what we are given is gestured images and intimate personal emotion rolled into one. The poet's personality occupies a fixed point in the poem from which everything else emanates: the tone is confiding and likeable with its assertions of pleasure and disquiet and their concomitant moods, but there is no questing. Is the decorative imagery and the gesture to the existential demanding in an interesting enough way? This dynamic occurs frequently in the book. Sometimes the poetic writing is a good deal better than in 'Seferis'. A new poem, 'Port Moresby' is undeniably appealing in its picturing of a childhood self in that city, but attention is angled sharply towards its imagery. The poem seems to be more about the deftness of its own lyricism than about past experience.

The matter of a lyrical style is worth contextualising. I want to briefly mention Robert Lowell, who is heralded with forging a new direction for poetry on the threshold of the 60s with his book, *Life Studies* (1959). In an interview with A. Alvarez in 1965, Lowell responds to a comment that his writing 'added something quite new to modern poetry':

In the beginning you got people who said this was prose and so forth and didn't want to see the skill, I think. Now you're beginning to get a time when there's too much of this confessional verse—in my own country it's one of the trends—and you feel that a lot of the poems don't have enough lyrical concentration.

I think a confessional poem is a possibility but you shouldn't overwork it. Often you have nothing to confess that makes a poem. The problem is to use a little of all that and be inventive. I think of several possibilities, of strings one might be able to pull: one is the confession given rather directly with hidden artifice; the other is a more rhetorical poem that doesn't use natural language at all; and then there are ways of distorting the experience, bringing in invention.

Reading this passage prompted me to return to *Life Studies* for a reminder of personal language that is charged with energy. Many of the individual poems in that book are, in fact, fairly gentle—see 'My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow'. Lowell writes from a backdrop of real memories and his poems are strongly autobiographical, but they are also ornately structured art.

Lea's 'Born Again' has a hint of myth. It has the feel of autobiography behind it and the poet mostly succeeds in achieving a level of invention. The poem aims for a complexity of emotions, including a dissolving of anger, but it begins with a steely, guarded tone. These are its opening lines:

After the divorce he sold his house
 by the beach and drove his Volkswagen

into the desert to die. He was gone
 a year. I was living one vertical mile
 above the desert floor—where he slept
 in his car—in a house that overlooked
 a great sweep of rocks and woodlands.
 Instead of dying, god spoke to him.
 God forgave all of his trespasses. But I
 didn't forgive his trespasses against me.
 My heart was a long ledger.

To my mind, this poetry seems closer to Anne Sexton's than to Lowell's. Lea's lines are tough, detached and cool in the way that Sexton's poetry often is. However, the middle section of 'Born Again' suddenly develops a direct, step-by-step narrative of what-happened-next, with only a hint of invention and poetic compression. Some readers may see this movement as consolidating the story, but in any case the poem gets interesting again in the final lines:

The ponderosa above him
 was weighted with snow. The knees
 of his jeans were wet. Snow drifts
 on his shoulders and backs of his shoes.
 Snow collected on his upturned palms.
 I felt its coldness. Such intimacy
 we never shared. Sometimes grace
 comes like that, it falls like snow.

I may be pushing a mythical image too far, but there is something delicate and vulnerable in the symmetry of the man's posture as he prays in the snow. One cannot help thinking too of the symmetry of each snowflake, with that moment of 'grace' allowing the soul to lighten.

When Lea works well, it is usually with mythical conceits. Try 'Hand of the Bodhisattva' with its quietly confident voice. Or 'Christmas Day', which beautifully mythifies an ordinary, intimate occasion in ways that are feisty and sensual. In 'The Cairn', the poet adopts the voice of a 'simple stone' to delve deeply into a self-reflection:

You look to me for answers
 but I know nothing: I am simple stone
 conscripted with a leaf into a human
 sign. I promise you I solve nothing.
 I am mere punctuation to alert you
 to juncture and entrance. Check yourself:
 are you where you should be by now?
 where did you mean to be and how far
 have you strayed?

In this poem, there is no easy indication of what a response might be, nor is there any hint of affectation or distraction through imagery that embellishes. In the final four lines, the language slides seamlessly from the stone's 'voice' to the poet's, leading to a matter-of-fact acceptance:

Now here you are, mid-point in your journey,
questioning a stone of your origins and destination.
Bronwyn, it is not in my make up to pity you.
Make a decision and be on your way.

Lea can write poems of high quality. A distinguished example is her new poem, 'The Flood', which I will come to shortly. But firstly I want to raise a problem not yet mentioned, which is a propensity for easy discourse. It relates to the matter of lyricism: quite often, a poem will be filled with 'talking', spiced-up with images that are as harmless as attractive embroidery. The question is: will readers come back to these poems when they are of average and uneven quality? For example, 'Girls' Night on Long Island' ('of' seems to be a typo in *The Deep North*) presents poetry as easy through an imitative casualness. With insistent simplicity, the poem recounts snippets of 'confessional' conversations among a group. Such a style is limited and the poem itself does not present with much conviction that it knows what it wants to say. 'Contemplating Chaos at Burleigh Heads' is about a mother's existential angst and search for meaning: 'The grief / that comes when I confront my enormous uncertainty / about who this child is'. The gist of the poem, however, seems to hang off its imagery, as in this example (the best lines in the poem), which closely aligns the child's body with landscape:

If I could bend
a thread around the craggy line
of her body, trace her bays
and indentations, the slender peninsulas
of her fingers and toes, trace every drift
and ripple down to the twists and turns
of her molecules, the coastline
of her body would be infinite.

As a mother who knows exactly what Lea is talking about, I can delight in the imaginative tracing and its hyperbole, but I am not very convinced by 'coastline' and 'infinite'. Imagery through much of the poem is unpolished and the poem itself wanders rather aimlessly. 'Women of a Certain Age' and the sequence, 'Driving Into Distance' are full of intelligent thoughts, yet the discursiveness is essentially weak. The problem with these poems, and others, is that they use lyrical tones to establish a style that is non-threatening, for an outcome of creating an approachable personality.

If Lea seems to coast along at times, at her best she does take risks, though by the very nature of risk-taking, this can result in rough edges. 'The Angel and the Hermit', a poem that works overtly with myth, is a case in point. It begins with a high-reaching statement: 'It is the fashion of the age / to believe that behind nature's cruelest acts / lie the secret springs of divine tenderness and love'. The poem then uses allegory to tell poignant stories about parental suffering at loss of a child. At the heart of the story is an idea of the arbitrariness of life, an age-old story in itself. Yet I feel that the poem's reach is too ambitious in its attempt to keep everything in play at once—its stories, images and the poem's own questioning. The narrative tends to stumble over itself. Might the poem resound more fully perhaps with less activity? It has some intriguing ideas.

'The Flood', however, shows Lea's craft at its finest. In this poem, a photograph takes on emblematic quality: it is used as a reference in time to delve into memory and to probe the past in a way that foregrounds history on both a personal and public level. The poem's first movement sets out a progression of images, bound by thought:

What do they know of war
 it's the summer of 1938
 and they're smiling on a beach
 in Tenby, Wales. History
 hasn't happened yet, though Freud's
 rocked up in London, Superman debuted
 in Action Comics #1, and Roosevelt
 has commenced his fireside chats.
 But it's a dazzling black and white
 chromogenic day in Tenby, and Frank
 is solid in white linens,
 sleeves rolled up, Havana at hand,
 sand scalloping his white patent shoes.
 Elsie leans in for a kiss,
 tanned in a halter top and shorts,
 she touches his forearm
 with an intimate lightness that reveals
 no knowledge of the future—at least
 that's how I remember

the photograph
 as it sat near a century away
 on my window sill in Brisbane,
 Australia.

This poem works with ideas of the interdependence of life and art, successfully achieved through the labour of searching for, and contemplating, the things that hide from thought. Lea situates personal recollection amidst seemingly miscellaneous cultural and political references, but they are clearly hard-fought-for. The lines catch at tenderness towards kin from the past, and there is wistfulness for a bygone age, which brings in an idea of the fragility of memory and the importance of keeping it alive. An element of foreboding sits behind the public references, 'History / hasn't happened yet' and 'Roosevelt / has commenced his fireside chats', throwing a shadow over the lightness that abounds in the private world.

In a further, concluding movement, the poet continues to reflect on the photograph, raising the past in the present:

Now I kneel
 at a bathtub and everywhere
 around me faces stare up
 from the mud. Frank and Elsie
 float into the present. I wash them
 with my thumbs as tenderly
 I washed sleep from the eyes
 of their granddaughter and a huge red
 beam, curtain of fire, Aurora
 Australis, blooms across Wales,
 lighting up their lives from the other side
 of death. And the brain can discern
 the different scales of loss—
 it's paper in my hands not flesh—
 but the heart, the biological
 heart—how the heart pounds

at what it takes, and almost hopes,
is history's end.

Here, we have an understanding of shared suffering, brought about by trauma and loss. The lines, 'it's paper in my hands not flesh— / but the heart, the biological / heart—how the heart pounds', play into the close connection between self and language and between life and art. 'The Flood' is sophisticated in its use of an 'I', shedding any guise of the nervous need to cloak the self with imagery. Yet more than this, the poem is an offer of community where the heart and soul of its language is given over to readers as dialogue. Bronwyn Lea's *The Deep North* offers a number of poems that we can engage with, that will draw us out—on the page and from the platform. The book is worth seeking out for those.

- A. Alvarez. 'Robert Lowell in Conversation'. Robert Lowell, *Interviews and Memoirs*. Ed. Jeffrey Meyers. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988, pp. 74-78.
- Bronwyn Lea. *The Deep North*. ISBN 9780807616260. New York: George Braziller, Inc. RRP \$24.99.

Todd Turner

Woodsmoke

Carol Jenkins

As poems only exist as the experience of being read, the reader's job is to make the poem out of the gaps, to effect a surge of perception and understanding, and it might be argued that it is in the space between the words on the page, and the page and the reader, and the spoken word and the listener, is the space that allows this to happen, where the reader remakes this white space into her or his poem event. To my way of thinking one measure of the poem's excellence is how reliably this poetic effect can be found. I am a fickle reader, and I have read some poems once and enjoyed them but on a return reading find they've fallen quite flat: Single Use Only Poems, as it were. A good poem is tamper proof; it delivers on any number of rereadings, and amplifies the friendship between poem and reader. So setting out to review a book, is for me a naturally hazardous process: I have to want to revisit the poems, and not turn what had been a pleasant one-off into a penance.

Todd Turner is a goldsmith, and the word 'lapidary' seems to hum about *Woodsmoke*, his first collection, an elegant production at a modest 56 pages. The opening poem, 'Shelling Peas', sets out the rhythmic practice of shelling. It's ostensibly a simple telling of a daily task, but the coda to each stanza, 'Snap off the ends, tear open the strip, / split the hull' builds and becomes incantatory by reiteration, reinforcing the poem's declarations for routines and repetitions, and the narrator's application to craft, his liking for needlepoint and lace-making. All of these careful acts of construction provide an understated trope for the making of poems, a podcast, as it were, to the pleasures of orderly practice.

From this contemplative domestic space, Turner's poems move out into paddocks, past Paterson's curse along flat roads, in cars and trains. From the second poem, 'Heading West to Koorathawa', until the road brings us to an end in 'Field

Work', we watch a cinematic landscape slide by. The landscape ranges from back of Bourke through the porous edges of suburbia, where farmland is subsumed into house lots, leaving poignant remnant blocks, into the inner city. One of the central concerns of *Woodsmoke* is the migration of country families to the city, what they bring and what they lose. The poems here often find the pastoral looking out from bridges and train windows. Congested roads turn into cattle races in 'The Road':

The Road

A few miles in and the road forks into a funnel
of diverging ways. I steer clear of the cars
that veer and swerve, and stick to the middle lane.
Soon the traffic chokes to a crawl and it feels

as if we're being herded along like cows
on a cattle run, all bulk and weight converging
in the crush. Further on, beyond the gridlock,
I pick up the pace and regain whole minutes

of lost time, drive on at speed across a region
of winding suburbs with the hard ground
rushing towards me, the dark tar glinting
with sparks the way rivers do in sun.

This doesn't last long, and it's back to the bustle
and chug of bumper to bumper, of vast
and middling distances, innumerable
and immense. We halt —and then putter along.

The clear lens of the windscreen holds true.
The sheer dawn-dusk of it all pushing us to press on,
to come full circle, like the conjoining head and tail
of a serpent, who makes of itself a perpetual ring.

Turner catches the ironic rush and stall of traffic, wryly noting 'now I... regain whole minutes of lost time', and when he conflates the circularity of dusk/dawn with conjoined head and tail of the serpent, we have not just the ambiguity of going nowhere fast in a cattle/traffic race but a clever allusion, a whiff of petrol, from the benzene in the motif of the Ouroboros famed for providing Kekulé's dreamt insight into the structure of benzene.

A quick head count of noun groups to give a frequency distribution provides an insight into how Turner balances his palette. The noun subjects of *Woodsmoke* are broadly, in descending order of frequency, plants, animals, fields/terrain, rivers, roads, country towns, fire and smoke. He uses these to build a sense of down to earthiness that ranges from the subterranean up to the wink of starlight. In between the urban pastoral works are poems of quotidian practices and objects.

Turner has a way of diversifying and then conflating his metaphors, so they amplify and illuminate each other. In 'The Wireless', he leads off with the evocative 'sepia tones', deftly pairing the aural experience with visual nostalgia borrowed from photography and follows on with the hallowing effect of a 'muffled sermon of kettle and cup':

The Wireless

murmured in sepia tones; first creak
of the morning, routine cockcrow,
muffled sermon of kettle and cup.

Little lamp light, dear hub of the house
dawn kindler of draughts and cracked
leaves, sweet shepherd of hob-fired

broth, spirit level of whim and woe.
Your console hummed from the rungs
of the kitchen where no stool or step

could reach your touch-tuned hearth.
Upon the table, a stove warmed stout
jug bubbled and brewed, knee-worn

chair legs slid in under shadowed nooks.
We sat and listened, hunched in the quiet.
Potato eaters in the communal dark.

Opening the second stanza with 'Little lamp light, dear hub' brings to my mind an echo of 'Dear Soul Mate, little guest' from David Malouf's wonderful 'Seven Last Words of the Emperor Hadrian'. More importantly for Turner's poem, this line sets up a tighter arrangement of the alliterative runs that were introduced in the first stanza; we have 'hub of the house', then 'dawn kindler of draughts', a phrase with one internal alliterative pair and a half of another pair in the next phrase, creating a movement that works to lead the reader onwards. So too do the nicely sklent rhymes and half rhymes, hub/hob, hummed/rung, reach/heart, proceed with their job of discretely carrying us on without the obvious smack of settling into a predictable pattern. 'The Wireless' builds its picture of a family with an adroit 'family-lessness': the family here is unnamed and unseen until the last two lines and then only by actions, they listen 'hunched in the quiet', an act of fine ambiguity that plays on the radio creating its own silence, in parallel to the way a poem creates its own white spaces.

Turner's hybrid world of country/city has certain nearly painterly effects. While we are focused on a scene, it is frequently the light or the air that takes centre place, and provides an embodiment of the duality of place, evoked by phrases like 'ambling air that roams' from 'Mid Winter' and then in 'River Birds', 'Strobing with its under-light/ to any passing thing.'

In 'Pine Grove', opposite the elegiac poem on a brother's death, we spy on a cemetery where mourners crouch and where the 'unliving ... have no words, no thoughts to speak of', an interesting commentary on thoughts and words, and the numbness of grief. There is an uncanny uncertainty about Turner's graveyard, and a certain knowingness about the odd juxtaposition contained in 'Beyond the rows/of the flame-shaped cypress trees/ a man kneels above his own.' Is it his grave, a grave of his own or his cypress tree? The logic here is both nicely weird and entirely plausible.

'Interiors', a composed still life, opens as neatly as a venetian blind, with the drone of traffic and the nuanced pre-figuring of the river by the bridge and the final stanza 'He draws the blinds/sees an ibis on the river/ pause... then take up flight', where the neat enjambment of 'pause' works to give a sense that we are being given polite reading instructions, and then asked to think about it all.

As a collection, *Woodsmoke* mines this kind of duality with deft technique. Turner often writes along an edge or brink to give the reader sense of depth. These are poems that don't set out to obfuscate; here, lucidity, the pastoral and warmth of feeling prevail, and fine attention to craft pays off handsomely. I've focused here on the machinations of just four poems in this collection, but I think many of them will repay this kind of close reading.

→ Todd Turner. *Woodsmoke*. ISBN 9781876044862. Melbourne: Black Pepper, 2014. RRP\$22.95

Geoff Goodfellow and Carol Jenkins

Christopher Ringrose

Spending some time with these two volumes reminded me that it's a mysterious relationship that one establishes with a poet, a book of poems, or a single poem. Sometimes one adopts a listening stance, attentive to a compelling voice; at other times one's eyes are opened, like those of Howard Carter, to 'wonderful things'.

Geoff Goodfellow's *Opening the Windows to Catch the Sea Breeze*, drawing on his output from 1983 to 2011, seizes one by the elbow, tells a life story and catalogues a lifetime's writing achievement. Each section is prefaced by a prose introduction detailing Goodfellow's life, his family history, and his publishing successes ('Such was the success [of *No Collars, No Cuffs*] that it went through nine print runs . . . A first print run of 3,500 copies [of *Punch On Punch Off*] was seen by many at the time as ridiculous. The book is now out of print.')

The autobiographical format is well-suited to the task of connecting incidents and situations from common life, to standing up for those people belittled, ignored or oppressed, and refusing to kowtow to anything dressed up as authority. The tone may be belligerent, but the details are telling. 'i jerked the handle / of a sausage filler / for 5 quid a week', he says in the early poem 'The Apprenticeship'. The apprenticeship didn't end well, though he left on his own terms – after a fight over a stray comment from the butcher about the drunkenness of Geoff's Dad, a personage who crosses and re-crosses the pages of *Opening the Windows* like Hamlet's ghost. Dad is indelibly inscribed throughout the poems, whether it's when the teenage Geoff wrestles him, drunk, into bed before Mum slips him a couple of Mogadon, or when, himself damaged by World War II, he cunningly ensures that Geoff isn't sent off to National Service, or when he offers advice about fists: 'you've got these / learn to use 'em — / they might come in handy'. In fact, fists do figure throughout *Opening the Windows*, in obituaries for boxers, in noisy fights in the street in 'Learning to Live', or in a homage to a bouncer ('the customer with the / compressed cheek bone / calls him Sir now / the police Mister'). Geoff can't resist paying respects after Dad's death by having his father's voice assert his self-respect in pugilistic terms. He remembers his mates as 'hard bastards':

If anyone had spoken about me
out of turn you can imagine
what would have happened
those bastards would've

been fighting one another to see
 who was going to knock
 the loud-mouth out
 not to mention my own boys

All of which makes it sound as though *Opening the Windows* is posited on an unreconstructed old-style masculinity. This is not in fact the case. Geoff Goodfellow is a fine mimic, and there are complex, convincing voices (male and female) in the collection. If he dwells on things corporeal, and the physicality of work, disability and sickness, it is because the immense wear-and-tear and physical strain of work on building sites and elsewhere needs to be acknowledged and set down: both his own 'blow-out in [his] / L4 & L5 discs', and the effects on his fellow men and women that are wrought by heavy lifting (literal and metaphorical). What is more, even when you start to think a poem has gone on too long, a wry irony will surface, giving a lift to the closing lines, or casting a new light on the Goodfellow persona. This is most apparent in the closing section of the book, which deals with his treatment for cancer. Unflinchingly physical and unsentimental, these are some of the most powerful contemporary poems about illness. They are also political, and the account in 'The Seventh Doctor' (the title of which gives a strong clue about the content) gives a grimly humorous and dogged account of traversing the public health care system in search of dignity, accurate diagnosis . . . and treatment. Thank goodness for the seventh doctor. If you find yourself holding the book, you might look first at the penultimate poem, 'Reversing', and its description of a chance encounter with the twenty-year-old owner of a badly parked vehicle. It's surprising—and heartening.

§

Carol Jenkins has followed up the success of *Fishing in the Devonian* (2008) and the chapbook *Night Croquet* (2009) with a rich, varied collection, *Xⁿ*. Like Geoff Goodfellow, she is excellent company, if at first she appears more reticent than him. Her poems unfurl in a sequence of witty surprises, teasing riddles, odd angles, and subtle sound patterns. The botanical poem 'Perianthetical Apple, Cherry, Plum' is phonetically luscious in the Hopkins manner, as she addresses the trees in blossom:

Be flower wrap, pollen pot, carpel king,
 tepal tide, bee bait and wasp impersonator

house of plum state, modified leaf palace that duples
 into picnics, prints, pillow words and porcelain . . .

Carpels, tepals and perianths are grafted appealingly on to more familiar poetic diction. *Fishing in the Devonian* attracted attention, in part, for its blend of the poetic and the scientific, and there is an element of that in *Xⁿ*. 'Evolution by Engulfment' makes phagocytosis intriguing (yes, I did look it up, to find that it was 'the ingestion of bacteria or other material by phagocytes and amoeboid protozoans'). 'Zero-vs-Nothing' and 'Exit Speed' neatly apply the language of mathematics and physics to relationships. The miniatures in 'Set Pieces' (the titles of Jenkins's poems are always worth a second look) work the notation of mathematical sets into conundrums. An ordered pair (a, b) is a set of mathematical objects, but

A disorderly pair approach a revolving
 Door, A says you go first, B says, no, you

C queued behind, huffs O it doesn't matter.
How many times will the door rotate before C leaves?

Such virtuosity means that Jenkins is able, Rumpelstiltskin-like, to spin straw into gold. A visit to the Butter Museum in Cork, Ireland, generates echoes of Donne, Marvell and Escoffier, the argot of butter ('milkers, maids and buckets / pails, skim-mers, dippers, creamers, / keeners, dashers, table churns . . .'), curious fossil butter and ingenious rhymes. The twenty or so poems that make up the virtuoso sequence on eggs leave one wondering what *can't* be brought within the orbit of the egg-as-subject-matter, whether it's irremediable catastrophes ('The egg is the great fall guy, exemplar of what *can't* be undone . . .'), unspecified mishaps ('believe me nothing is over easy'), or the shift into body chemistry of 'Miscarriage II':

my body was
home to you, and in that quiet sense
of each, you trusted me completely

back then your dark stains of wasted protein
held my throat so tight I could not think
to say goodbye.

In fact, such modulation of tone and subject matter is one of the features of *Xⁿ*. It is easy to highlight the cleverness and linguistic vitality of the collection, but it is also worth stressing the way that Jenkins's poems can embody profound and moving expression—of love, grief, desire, exuberance, or anxiety, for example—without relinquishing her characteristic wit. There is the meditation on marriage in 'Surrender comes with twenty different speeds' (as usual, the key word in the title is examined at many levels); the haunting airline journey in 'Owl Service'; and 'Parking backwards at Beauty Point', a poignant elegy for the writer Kerry Leves. Such poems (and one could cite many other examples) make you realise that Carol Jenkins is, finally, hardly more reticent than Geoff Goodfellow. There is no doubt that Goodfellow wears his heart on his sleeve (or would do, if his singlet had sleeves), but *Xⁿ*, too, draws you into its writer's orbit—into a relationship.

- Geoff Goodfellow. *Opening the Windows to Catch the Sea Breeze: Selected Poems 1983-2011*. ISBN 9781743052952. Adelaide: Wakefield, 2014. RRP\$24.95
- Carol Jenkins. *Xⁿ*. ISBN 9781922186201. Sydney: Puncher and Wattmann, 2013. RRP\$25

Contributors

Jordie Albiston has published eight poetry collections. Two of her books have been adapted for music-theatre, both enjoying seasons at the Sydney Opera House. Her work has won many awards, including the 2010 NSW Premier's Prize. She lives in Melbourne.

Alice Bellette is a poet, musician and scholar based in Melbourne, Australia. She co-edits poetry submissions at *Ricochet* magazine and curates her own chapbook *A Sharp Knife*, a publication dedicated to the female poetic voice. Her poetry has been published in *Miniatures* and *Youth in Revolt*.

Peter Bland is a New Zealand poet, playwright and actor. He has published a large number of poetry volumes in New Zealand and the UK. He has written frequently for *London Magazine*, which published three of his collections. Recent volumes published by Steele Roberts (Wellington) include *Collected Poems 1956-2011* (2012), *Breath Dances* (2013) and *Hunting Elephants* (2014).

Michelle Borzi completed a PhD on the poetry of W.H. Auden in 2003 at the University of Melbourne. She writes critical essays and is a regular reviewer of poetry.

Paul Brooke lives in Ames, Iowa, and is the author of three full-length collections of poetry: *Light and Matter* (2008) *Meditations on Egrets* (2010) and his newest, *Sirens and Seriemas* (Somerset, Brambleby 2014). A former biologist, he combines science, poetry, and photography.

joanne burns' most recent book is *brush* published by Giramondo (2014), and she is currently assembling a Selected volume of her work, spanning over 4 decades. She lives in Sydney.

Fiona Burrows recently completed her PhD thesis, titled 'Words of Shape and Shade: Synaesthesia in the Poetry and Poetics of the Early Twentieth Century'. She has taught creative and critical writing at undergraduate level and currently works as an Academic Adviser at the University of Western Australia.

John Carey is an ex-teacher of French and Latin and a former actor. The latest of his four collections is *One Lip Smacking* (Picaro Press 2013).

Julie Chevalier writes poetry and short fiction in Sydney. Her third book, *Darger: his girls* (Puncher & Wattmann 2012) won the Alec Bolton Prize and was short-listed for the WA Premier's Poetry Prize, 2013.

Philip Cordingley (born in Melbourne, 1948) lives and works at Castlemaine in Victoria. He was awarded a Diploma of Film and TV at Swinburne Institute in 1969, and worked as a graphic designer, mostly in TV from 1970 and, when time permitted, produced and exhibited 'fine art' pieces until 2004 when he concentrated fully on this field. He works mostly on paper with themes based on 'place' and 'self'. He is also inspired by the idea of physical and spiritual exploration and the consequences of ageing and isolation in a time when technology is changing at an exponential rate. His work makes reference to the ambiguity of language and social history and, more specifically, the graphic nature of symbolism and the making of marks. As a result, he often incorporates typographic and cartographic elements in the literary text from which he draws his inspiration. Recently, he has returned to incorporating strong geometric forms and bold colours with textural and linear contrast, stylistic elements not seen in his work since the mid-80s. His work is held in Art Bank, Monash Gallery and private collections. His work is also available at benchmarkcollective.com.au, portjacksonpress.com.au and arttoart.com.au

Isil Cosar is a Sydney-based poet and a teacher. Some of her work has been published by *Mascara Literary Review*, *Newzine* and the anthologies *Auburn Letters* and *Poetry Without Borders* (2008).

Lynn Davidson writes fiction, poetry and essays. Her work has appeared in journals including *Sport* and *PN Review* and been broadcast on Radio New Zealand. She has published several collections of poetry, a novel, *Ghost Net*, and a novella, *The Desert Road*. In September 2013 she had a writing fellowship at Hawthornden Castle in Scotland. She works as an educator and tutors in short fiction and poetry.

Sarah Day was born in England and grew up in Tasmania. *Tempo* (Puncher & Wattmann 2013) is her most recent collection. Other collections include *Grass Notes* (Brandl & Schlesinger 2009) and *The Ship* (Brandl & Schlesinger 2004). Winner of the Wesley Michel Wright Prize 2004, Queensland Premier's Judith Wright Calanthe Award for Poetry 2005 and joint winner of the ACT Art & Literary Awards' Judith Wright Prize, Day's *New and Selected Poems* from Arc (UK) received a Special Commendation by the Poetry Book Society in 2002.

Dan Disney teaches in the Literature program at Sogang University (Seoul). He is the editor of *Exploring Second Language Creative Writing – Beyond Babel* (John Benjamins 2014) and is this year's recipient of the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize. He is finishing a book of villanelles.

Liz Dolan is a six-time Pushcart nominee and winner of Best of the Web. Her first poetry collection, *They Abide*, was published by March Street. Her manuscript, 'A Secret of Long Life', nominated for the Robert McGovern Prize, will be published by Cave Moon Press. She has received fellowships from the Delaware Division of the Arts, The Atlantic Center for the Arts and Martha's Vineyard.

Lucy Dougan's books include *White Clay* (Giramondo) and *Meanderthals* (Web del Sol), and her prizes the Mary Gilmore Award and the Alec Bolton Award. A new book is forthcoming with Giramondo in 2015. She works for the Westerly Centre at UWA.

Johanna Emenev is a New Zealand teacher and poet. She is studying towards her PhD at Massey University, and tutoring on the Level One Creative Writing Paper at the Albany Campus. In addition, she works with Rosalind Ali, delivering the Young Writers Programme for the Michael King Writers' Centre in Devonport and Parnell.

Barbara Fisher has worked as an illustrator, copywriter, art teacher, and antiquarian bookseller. Poetry collections include, *Archival Footwork* (Indigo 2001), *Still Life, Other Life* (Ginninderra Press 2007), and *Rain and Hirohito* (Picaro Press 2012). Her work appears in the *Quadrant Book of Poetry* (2012), *Women's Work* (Pax Press 2013) and other anthologies.

Joan Fleming is a New Zealand poet living in Melbourne. Her first book is *The Same as Yes* (Victoria University Press 2012). She is currently pursuing a PhD in ethnopoetics, working on a collection of failed love poems, and collaborating with other artists to expand the possibilities of poetry in the world at large.

Claire Gaskin has been publishing and teaching poetry since the 1980s. Her collection, a *bud* (John Leonard Press 2006), was short-listed in the SA Literature Awards. She was the Victorian editor of *Blue Dog* from 2007 till 2010. Her collection, *Paperweight*, was published by John Hunter Publishers in 2013. Vivian Gerrand completed her PhD at the Australian Centre, Melbourne University. With interests in literature and migration, her interdisciplinary dissertation explored representations of Somali belonging in Australia and Italy. In addition to publishing academic articles, she is writing creative non-fiction, tutoring at St Hilda's College and is an editorial assistant.

Ian Gibbins has been a neuroscientist and Professor of Anatomy at Flinders University. He is now a poet and electronic musician. His poetry has been widely published. His first full collection is *Urban Biology* (Wakefield Press 2012), and *The Microscope Project: How Things Work* was published in 2014 as part of a major art-science collaboration. See iangibbins.com.au

Pete Hay is the author of five volumes of poetry, most recently *Last Days of the Mill*, with the visual artist, Tony Thorne (Forty Degrees South 2012) and *Girl Reading Lorca* (Picaro Press 2014). *Last Days of the Mill* was short-listed for the Tasmanian Book Awards in 2013, and won the People's Choice Award.

Sergio Holas has published his poetry in *El espíritu del valle* (Chile), *Babab* (Spain), *Letralia* (Venezuela), *Arena* (Melbourne), and *Social Alternatives* (Queensland). He has published *Distancia cero / Cero Distance* (2004), *Ciudad dividida / Divided City*, (2006) and (in 2013) *Paisajes en movimiento / Moving Landscapes* (all from Vina Del Mar, Chile, Altazor Editores. He has just completed a poetry book in English, 'Adelaide, Ramblin' on My Mind. Meditations Upon Anomalies as Emergent Occasions.'

Kevin Ireland has published two memoirs, a collection of short stories, six novels, a libretto, volumes on fishing and growing old, and 21 books of poems, the latest of which is *Feeding the birds* (Steele Roberts, Wellington 2014).

Carol Jenkins lives in Sydney. Her second collection of poetry *Xⁿ* (Puncher & Wattmann 2013) is shortlisted for the WA Premiers Award. Her next book *Select Episodes from The Mr Farmhand Series* is due out from Puncher & Wattmann.

Heather Taylor Johnson, a reviewer, essayist, and occasional university lecturer in Creative Writing, is poetry editor of *Transnational Literature*. She has published three books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Thirsting for Lemonade* (Interactive Press 2013), and a novel, *Pursuing Love and Death* (HarperCollins 2013).

Kit Kelen is an Australian poet, painter and scholar and Professor of English at the University of Macau where he has taught Literature and Creative Writing for the last fourteen years. His next book of poems, *Scavengers' Season* is forthcoming from Puncher and Wattmann.

Andy Kissane's recent publications include his fourth collection of poetry, *Radiance* (Puncher & Wattmann 2014) and a book of short stories, *The Swarm* (Puncher & Wattmann 2012). He was the winner of the 2013 Fish International Poetry Prize and is the Coriole National Wine Poet, with six poems featuring on the back label of their cabernet shiraz. andykissane.com

Karen Knight was born in Tasmania. She has been widely published and anthologised since the early 1960s. She has written four collections of poetry. Her most recent *Postcards from the Asylum* (Pardalote Press 2008) won the 2005 Dorothy Hewett Flagship Fellowship Award, the 2007 ACT Alec Bolton Poetry Prize and the University of Tasmania Prize (Tasmania Book Prizes 2011) for best book by a Tasmanian publisher.

Simeon Kronenberg is currently at the University of Sydney, researching contemporary gay love poetry. He has published poems in *Southerly*, *Meanjin* and *Cordite*, and the anthologies *Australian Love Poems 2013* and

APoems 2013 (AP Members Anthology). He won first prize in the inaugural SecondBite Poetry Prize.

Peter Lach-Newinsky, NSW author of *Requiem* (Picaro 2012), *Post-Man Letters* (Picaro 2010), and *Cut a Long Story Short* (Puncher and Wattman 2014), has won the Vera Newsome and MPU Poetry Prizes.

Mike Ladd lives and writes in Adelaide. His most recent book is *Karrawirra Parri: Walking the Torrens from Source to Sea* (Wakefield Press 2012).

Andrew Lansdown, a widely published, award-winning Western Australian writer, has published 3 novels, 2 short story collections, and 13 poetry collections (two of them for children). Recent poetry collections include *The Colour of Life* (in *Two Poets*, Fremantle Press 2011), *Gestures of Love* (Wombat Books 2013), and *Inadvertent Things: poems in traditional Japanese forms* (Walleah Press 2013). His website is: andrewlansdown.com.

Alexis Lateef is a West Australian poet and editor. She has a BA (English) from UWA and is studying librarianship. She is working on her first book of poetry.

Hugh McMillan is a poet from South West Scotland. He has been published and anthologised widely. His latest book is *The Other Creatures in the Wood* (Edinburgh, Mariscat 2014), and he has recently finished a book on contemporary views of Dumfries and Galloway, commissioned by the Wigtown Book Festival.

Rachael Mead is a South Australian poet and writer who has been published in literary journals internationally. Her first collection was *Sliding Down the Belly of the World: New Poets 17* (Wakefield Press 2012); her second, *The Sixth Creek* (Picaro 2013). She was shortlisted in the 2013 Newcastle Poetry Prize.

Marjon Mossammaparast is a secondary school English/Literature teacher residing in Melbourne. He has published poetry in *Island*, *Blue Dog*, *Going Down Swinging* (under the pseudonym Logan Jones), and has work forthcoming in *Southerly* and *Gargouille Literary Journal*.

Gina Mercer is a poet who has taught creative writing and literature in universities and communities for over 25 years. She was editor of the Australian literary magazine, *Island*, from 2006-2010. She has published four collections of poetry, most recently *Handfeeding the Crocodile* (Pardalote Press 2007). Her next book of poetry, 'Bird Beyond', will be released by Walleah Press in 2015.

James Norcliffe is a New Zealand poet, editor and writer of (mainly fantasy) novels including the award-winning *The Loblolly Boy*, for young people. He has published eight collections of poetry, most recently *Villon in Millerton* in 2007, *Packing My Bag for Mars* and *Shadow Play* (both 2012). With Siobhan Harvey and Harry Ricketts, he coedited *Essential New Zealand Poems: Facing the Empty Page*, a major new anthology of NZ poetry (2014).

Penny O'Hara is a Canberra-based writer of poetry and short stories. Her work has appeared in *Verandah*, *Islet* and *Best Australian Stories 2011*. She was the winner, in 2013, of the Michael Thwaites Poetry Award.

Olga Olenich is a widely published writer whose poetry and prose has appeared in literary journals in Australia and overseas in English and Russian. It has also been featured online, in major newspapers, and on national radio.

Geoff Page is based in Canberra and has published twenty-one collections of poetry as well as two novels and five verse novels. His recent books include *1953* (UQP 2013), *Improving the News* (Pitt Street Poetry 2013) and *New Selected Poems* (Puncher & Wattmann 2013). *His Aficionado: A Jazz Memoir* is forthcoming from Picaro Press.

Christopher Palmer recently returned to Canberra after living in Alice Springs for five years. He is working on a manuscript for a first collection.

Stuart A. Paterson was born in 1966 and raised in Ayrshire, Scotland. Widely published and anthologised, he received an Eric Gregory Award from the UK Society of Authors in 1992 and a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship from the Scottish Book Trust in 2014. *Saving Graces* was published by Diehard Poetry

in 1997. He lives by the Solway coast in Dumfries and Galloway, where he was formerly writer-in-residence.

Simon Patton lives with his partner, two cats and Sealyham the Terrier near Chinaman Creek in Central Victoria. His translation of Yu Jian's 480-line long poem 'Small Town' [Xiao zhen] appeared in *Chinese Literature Today* in 2013. Four shorter poems by Yu co-translated with Tao Naikan will appear in *Modern Poetry in Translation*. He also worked with Tao on *Starve the Poets!* – a selection of poems by the contemporary poet Yi Sha (Bloodaxe 2008).

Rachael Petridis is a widely published Western Australian poet. Her first collection, *Sundecked* (Australian Poetry Centre 2010), was commended in the Anne Elder Award.

Janette Pieloor lives in Canberra and has published poetry since 1991 in journals and anthologies, including *The Best Australian Poems 2011*. Her collection of poetry entitled *Ripples Under The Skin* is forthcoming from Walleah Press.

Ron Pretty's eighth book of poetry, *What the Afternoon Knows* (Pitt Street Poetry), was published in 2013. A revised and updated version of his *Creating Poetry* will be published in 2015. He spent six months in Rome in 2012, courtesy of the Australia Council.

Sarah Rice won the 2014 Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize, was shortlisted in the 2013 Montreal and Tom Howard poetry prizes and co-won the 2011 Gwen Harwood Prize. Her limited-edition book, *Those Who Travel* (with prints by Patsy Payne, Ampersand Duck 2010), is in the NGA collection, and her publications include *Award Winning Australian Writing* and *Best Australian Poetry 2012*.

Christopher Ringrose is a writer of poetry and fiction who lives in Melbourne, where he is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Faculty of Arts at Monash University. He co-edits the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* and the Sydney-Based magazine *Papier-Mâché*.

Robyn Rowland has two forthcoming books: *Line of drift* (Doire Press, Ireland) and *Intimate war. Gallipoli/Canakkale 1915. Seasons of*

Doubt & Burning: New and Selected Poems (2010) represented 40 years of work. Her poetry appears in national and international journals and anthologies, including the Bloodaxe anthology *Being Human* 2011.

Brendan Ryan lives in Geelong, Victoria, where he teaches English at a secondary college. His poetry, reviews and essays are widely published. His second poetry collection, *A Paddock in his Head* (Five Islands 2007), was shortlisted for the 2008 ACT Poetry Prize; his latest collection is *Travelling Through the Family* (Melbourne, Hunter 2012).

Brenda Saunders is a Sydney artist and poet of Aboriginal and British descent. She has published three poetry books. Her collection, *Looking for Bullin Bullin* (Hybrid Press 2012), won the Scanlon Prize for Indigenous Poetry 2014. She is a member of DiVerse Poets who read their ekphrastic poetry at Sydney Art galleries.

Tegan Jane Schetrumpf writes poetry, essays and creative non-fiction. Published in *Contrappasso*, *New Trad*, *Southerly*, *Meanjin* and *Antipodes*, she was shortlisted for the 2013 Jean Cecily Drake-Brockman poetry prize. She also conducts postgraduate research at Sydney University into millennial Australian poetry.

Oscar Schwartz is a writer from Melbourne. He writes about the intersections between digital technology and literature. He tweets regularly from @scarschwartz.

B.W. Shearer is the author of plays, short stories and poems both for adults and children. His poems have been published in *Eureka Street* and *Verso*, his stories have been published in *Australian Short Stories* and *NSW School Magazines*, and his plays and radio plays have been published, produced and performed in Australia and overseas.

Ali Jane Smith is a poet and critic who lives in Wollongong NSW. Her work has appeared in *Southerly*, *Cordite*, *Famous Reporter* and other journals. She is the author of the chapbook *Gala* (Five Islands Press 2006)

Ian C Smith lives in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria. His work has appeared in *Axon: Creative Explorations*, *The Best Australian Poetry*, *London Grip*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *The Weekend Australian* and *Westerly*. His latest book is *Here Where I Work* (Ginninderra 2012).

Aleksandar Stoicovici was born in 1988 in Timisoara, Romania, of Serbian, German and Ukrainian descent. His first collection of poems, *vineri* (friday) was published in 2011, followed by *aleksandar doarme* (aleksandar is sleeping) in 2012. Select poems have been translated into English, German, French, Spanish and Serbian. The poem in this issue was written in English.

Rod Usher is an Australian poet and novelist living in Extremadura, Spain. His third poetry collection, *Convent Mermaid*, is published by Interactive Press. See ipoz.biz/Titles/ConM.htm

Mitchell Welch is a writer and poet originally from Brisbane. He is currently living in Melbourne and working as a cemetery administrator while undertaking various fiction and non-fiction projects. He is also the poetry editor of *Ricochet Magazine*.

Ian Wicks is a physician and medical researcher in Melbourne, who is a newcomer to poetry. His poem 'Andante' was published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* in 2012 and another ('The visible human') is in press there. 'In a heartbeat' was shortlisted for the 2013 Australian Science Poetry prize.

Chloe Wilson's first collection, *The Mermaid Problem* (Australian Poetry Centre 2010), was commended in the Anne Elder Award and Highly Commended in the Mary Gilmore Award. She recently won the 2014 Arts Queensland Val Vallis Award.

Mark Young has published more than twenty books, primarily poetry, and including speculative fiction and art history. His poetry and essays have been translated into several languages. His most recent books are *The Codicils* (Otoliths 2013), *Asemic Colon* (The Red Ceilings Press 2013), and the *eclectic world* (gradient books, Finland 2014). He lives in North Queensland.

How to submit

Poetry submissions open twice a year; the first submission round for 2015 will take place between 1 January and 31 March.

Please submit via our portal at australianpoetry.submittable.com/submit

Essayists and reviewers should send short pitches describing potential articles to editorapj@australianpoetry.org. Please specify whether your article would best suit the print edition of the *APJ*, or is designed to explore the capabilities of our electronic edition and website.

A list of books received available for review will be published online and updated regularly.

Though two essays appear in this edition with annotations, please also keep in mind that the *Australian Poetry Journal* is not refereed, and that we cater to an intelligent generalist readership. Citations should be kept to a minimum where possible.

Intending contributors of reviews, memoirs, interviews and other prose should note that the journal's preferred style for punctuation, quotations and presentation of titles is based on the *Australian Style Manual*.

Finally, *Australian Poetry Journal* receives a much higher volume of poems than it can conceivably print, and we appreciate everyone who takes the time to share their work. We aim to foster a long-term relationship between poets and the journal, so please keep submitting even if your work is not selected in a specific round.

ap
Australian Poetry The power
of words

*Our poetry culture needs to be heard
Australian voices enriching the world*

Dear Friends of Poetry,

Australian Poetry recently issued a statement of regret in response to the ABC's decision to cease production of *Poetica*. We asked that lovers of poetry write to the papers, the ABC board, the Minister for Communications and their local federal member to register their disappointment at this deeply unfortunate consequence of reduced federal government funding of the ABC.

We were not alone in our disappointment; various Australian voices took up our call to arms and were united in expressing their dismay.

"With the execution of *Poetica*, Australian culture is diminished."
—*Sunday Age*, 30 November 2014

Barry Hill's article was a passionate lament to the loss of a radio program dedicated to poetry and broadcast to an estimated 60,000 listeners per week.

Like Barry, you may have objected to "the execution of poetry" or despaired at your capacity to make a difference, "as I gird myself to make a case for poetry, I can see the piss going into the wind."

Australian Poetry will not stand idly by. We are determined to keep alive our poetry culture by raising funds to continue the tradition of *Poetica* through a new podcast series. A dollar per week for a year from 60,000 listeners would be a great start!

Help us to maintain the spirit of *Poetica*, please donate online at:
australianpoetry.org/support/donate-to-ap

Or send a donation by cheque to:
Australian Poetry
The Wheeler Centre
176 Little Lonsdale St
Melbourne VIC 3000

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible. Every contribution, no matter how small, assists us in our mission to encourage the appreciation of poetry and to celebrate the diverse poetry cultures of Australia.

Thank you.



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