

IRISES

THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA
VICE-CHANCELLOR'S INTERNATIONAL POETRY PRIZE 2017

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*Edited by Monica Carroll
and Paul Munden*



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Navigating this file

This is an interactive PDF: clicking on poems in the contents will take you to the poem's page; clicking on the poet's name at the end of the poem will take you to their biographical note (if they have one); their names in the biographical note will take you back to their poems; and clicking on the page numbers throughout the book will bring you back to the contents page.

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Vice-Chancellor's foreword

In this, the fourth year of the University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize, I am delighted to see that so many poets from around the world continue to enter the prize, representing so many diverse countries and so many different perspectives.

Poetry has always been a significant part of my life, and to read such a fine and varied longlist of works reminds me how poetry continues to speak eloquently for our times and ourselves. Poetry not only addresses the experiences of individuals and their personal relationships, but it also reaches deeply into the lives of readers. Many poems echo down the years, becoming a key way of understanding culture and history. For instance, if one wants a deep appreciation of Australia, India or the USA, key texts consist of the poetry of those countries.

Through this prize, and through other initiatives of the International Poetry Studies Institute in the Faculty of Arts and Design, the University of Canberra signals its strong commitment to poetry and to culture more broadly. This poetry prize is a key way for the University to continue to further its network of national and international connections, and to be part of the larger international literary conversations that are taking place all of the time across the globe.

Longlist judges Elizabeth Campbell, Vahni Capildeo and Sudesh Mishra undertook the very considerable task of selecting the poems in this longlist anthology of sixty poems from more than 1,000 entries. Head judge Billy Collins picked the winner, runner-up and five shortlisted poems. The shifting and beguiling tonality of so many of these poems, and the ways in which many different subjects are justly and poignantly addressed speaks of the great capacity of the writers who entered the prize. The judges and administrators have done sterling work in managing so skilfully the various processes involved in their adjudications, and I would like to thank the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund for their support.

The University of Canberra is very pleased to contribute to the literary community through this important prize. Poets remind us that there are so many ways of making meaning; and so much that creative and complex uses of language may do for all of us.

*Professor Deep Saini
Vice-Chancellor and President
University of Canberra*

Judge's report

It's conventional for judges of poetry competitions to go on about the difficulty of choosing winners because of the high quality of all the submissions, which is a nice thing to say, but it overlooks the way really good poems leap off the page and announce themselves as really good poems. The difficulty comes in later when the field narrows then intensifies at the final decision when the judge must pick the best poem out of a cluster of truly excellent poems.

In the end, I chose 'Irises' for a number of reasons, but especially for how the poem moves in subject and tone, taking the reader for an interesting ride. It opens by rather casually announcing a death ('umpteen cards'), but it gets away with that because the deceased was the mother of the speaker's friend's boyfriend—three times removed. The poet then turns from the death to a condolence card bearing Van Gogh's painting of a cluster of irises. These irises, seen as wonders of color, are soon replaced by the irises of the painter's eyes in one of his many self-portraits. With these two paintings, the poem finds a subject so rich as to include the painterly aspects of the image, the circumstances of its composition in the St. Paul asylum, Van Gogh's madness, and his revealing correspondence with his brother. Along the way the poem notices that the painter uses his characteristic brushstrokes whether he's painting a self-portrait or a landscape with a field of wheat. The poet's smart, likeable tone guides us deftly through all this matter. In its final manoeuver, the poem leaps away from Van Gogh, who is replaced by the same kind of personal anecdote that began the poem, a chance meeting of 'a man who had played Jesus on stage,' and whose eyes had the fearsome power of Van Gogh's own eyes. It's a wonder how this poet turns the dial of the poem so effortlessly as it lifts then returns the reader to the ground. And how appropriate to poetry that the poem turns on a double meaning—iris the flower, and iris the colored part of the eye, proving once again that poets are people who find it difficult to say one thing at a time.

Billy Collins

Winner

Iris

When my friend's boyfriend's mother died of a tumor, there were umpteen cards in the sympathy section to choose between, and one said, it's hard to find words...

a line I could've written for \$4.99, but the front had that painting by Van Gogh, that cobalt blue—the most expensive of the tubes his brother sent to support

his work—iris blossoms fluttering like a moth in different states of flight, and I bet you'd recognize the image. In some hotel rooms, they'll hang two of the same print,

one over each of the beds. Or maybe you know, if you saw it in person and checked the small plaque, how he'd paint in the garden of Saint Remy's asylum. The jaded

watchman at the threshold to the next room of landscapes stared as I leaned toward the picture but kept a mannered distance. How this man became iconic

of unyielding devotion to light—his ravenous eyes wolfing down the flowers before him—is no mystery, just look at those irises, the ones in his eyes in this portrait

of himself as a monk with shaven head, his lids Japanesed, a bow to Hiroshige, whose 'Sudden Downpour' he'd copied as a student, enthralled with the quiet work

of the knife that kept carving as peasants bolted over the footbridge and the boatman leaned harder on his pole to get to shore. Using the same strokes he'd use for a field

of wheat along his bristling jaw, around the cranial curve—the part of the head that's safe to treat as a thing—he arrives at his own eyes, ablaze with distrust. And when you sit

for hours to study how the lamplight breaks across your brow, the bridge of your nose, you might be surprised how long it takes not just to trace all the parts but to be seen

by yourself. The eye that looks back, whichever one you try to pin down, will slightly shift to consider itself, so you end up having two disconnected eyes, each squinting

through the mask of who you think you are. A backdrop of emerald radiating from his head obliterates, but only in part, the letters à *mon ami Paul*—this gift he made

of himself then chose to give to himself. I once met a man who had played Jesus on stage,
and he said how strange it felt after the curtain, to be watched in the lobby by the
audience,

how no one would talk to him or return his gaze, how empty the moonlit roads,
how desolate the bike ride home.

Eric Berlin

Runner-up

Having Intended to Visit an Orange Grove, the Poem Finds Itself in a Supermarket

The smell of orange blossom in California
where exactly seven years ago I stood
before a small tree, watched a hummingbird
dip its beak in a flower. In another life now,
buried in the clatter of a café on lunch break,
I will my pen to do something with that moment,
will it to walk across the page leaving beautiful
footprints. The nib approaches the untouched sand
of the next blank line, the hummingbird holds
like a brief blue laser piercing the flower, when
a child wails. The startled bird vanishes
as only a wild thing can, leaving a hole which
the pen criss-crosses with ink, describing
the screaming child, the dropped chips, the
radio washing the scene with the dishwater
of eighties music and insurance ads,
orange blossom drowned in the smell
of hot sausage rolls. To tell you the truth,
my imagination capitulates shockingly
easily. Without a whimper it puts the pen away
and applies itself to the subject of dinner.
Before I know it we are crossing the road without
fully remarking the dappled effects of the
breezy plane tree shadows on the herringbone
brick footpath, and we enter the Woolworths
supermarket. Here my imagination feasts
without shame, or any sense of irony,
on the full sleeve tattoo of a young woman
who is cradling a bag of Californian
navel oranges. She moves forward in the queue,
recalibrates the load in her arm.
A small bird flexes in the crease of her elbow.

Debi Hamilton

shortlist

The Skull on the Table

*

Bouquet of nothing
in this vase ringed
once with watery thoughts.

*

Someone emptied this glass
but first someone filled it.

*

Seashell rustling of things washed away.

*

Sand at the bottom of an hourglass
never to be turned again.

*

All this openness!
One only had to compose
away from one's bones.

*

The chambers echo faded hymns.

*

Inside : the blank ceiling of a chapel.
Immense murals unmade flake by flake.

*

A geode that glistens with phantom
memories. A spiked glitter beyond imaginable.

*

Who embroidered your osseous fabric?

*

Desire carved this canyon.

*

Engraved prison walls.

*

Looted jewelry case still smelling
of silver, amethyst, and sapphire.

*

Sun weaves into your openings
warming the walls where hopes used to climb
like coral roses at every instance of light.

*

A camera without film.

*

Honeycomb. A humming keeps filling
these cells with drops of amber absence.

*

A lesser moon or greater.

*

Ancient monastery where once a monk dreamed
of planting all the flowers of the world.

*

O dried flower pod, what seeds are these?

*

If you're a bell then you have no tongue.

*

If you're nothing
then you weigh heavily upon this table.

*

If you're a souvenir
then you do not remind us of life.

*

If you're a poem, your lines fail
to evoke lips moist at the center,
hazel irises ringed with fire.

*

Your mind deserted you like swallows
through a collapsed barn roof.

*

Does your spirit ever visit you
like a dust storm a ghost town?

*

Extinct star on the table.

*

The evening stains you a light crimson
and then dusk drains you of warmth.

*

I will sit with you and the night will come
and fill you again like thoughts of nights,
and stars, and shooting stars, and planets as distant
to us as death.

Claire Akebrand

Mulian

After Ocean Vuong

Like any good daughter, I guide my mother out
of the grave. Palm to open rib, fingers to hull
of ear, her breasts ripening into cabbage-patch
the rain rushes to fill. She's stiff. The temple
of her body is now a temple for moss.
Wind has scythed the joss. I lie beside her
to see how far our likeness goes. Not far,
still vegetarian. Soon she will resemble
any other paddy. I could till her feet.
I could carry her on my knees. *Still angry,*
ma? My arm responds
in self-defence: palm to open chest,
press. No use. Murder has strained her
into thinking a scarecrow can help
how it's dressed. I plow into her femur.
I think of the strawmen I have sown
against her sundried figure. Unavoidable—
how moss overstays; how wind chimes for passage.

Min Lim

Five Creatures Under Every Mother's Skin

Damselfly

Age thirteen, the skin splits down her back.
Emerging, clad in shimmer and sequin
and glassy wing to much ado. Pretty head
thrown back, clasped by mate after mate.
The green river air is shot silk
scribbled with their heart-shaped pen.

Salmon

Seaward, she is drawn tail-first. The river,
a silversmith arming her, scale by scale.
The ocean has no boundary, save memory.
Though her flesh will coral with experience,
she will dodge bamboo rod and vernal bear,
return to gravel nurseries of the smolt.

Pelican

Grotesque red bill pressed to her quilled
leather corset releases the last fry
from gular folds. (This, the tongue's
business, but hers too tiny to roll around).
If they want to believe she pierces her bosom
to blood-nourish her young, let them.

Vixen

Bring on the night! Let her stalk and cry,
dog-fox by her side, blackberry picking
by moonlight in fur coat and black boots.
By dawn she returns to earth, her kits
an auburn ball. The sick one she'll carry
to the wood's edge and dump it. Just in case.

Pilot Whale

Her skin-rubber, hashed and scored
with life's scars, hides an armchair heart.
Her glands can still suckle a youngster
bored with waiting for his mother,
God love her, this, so much more fun.
Her children's children will be doctors.

Audrey Molloy

The Rehearsal

Virginia Woolf, late at Rodmell

Deep in the pelting rain, trampling rain-flattened grass (her pelted coat, now short-furred), she can hear the Ouse well before seeing it: tidal, swift. Lately, there has been much river-calling—banks burst, broken water roaring white; the marsh a gulling sea. A grief of long heavy fall, its burden spread about the fields. Each haystack in the flood, marooned so, strikes her as a Monet, each a time-piece, measured out in colour. She moves to where land lies level with the flow. At best of times, high-watered, edges bared by current, the river draws her where a stretch has offered smooth palm-filling stones, dread-heavy; heavier than resistance. She steps out from the bank, out of solidity. But there is no question here of drowning: she gills water to a dampish air, unremarkable as fog encountered on a walk from Tavistock to the Embankment. The Zeppelin of a rowing boat's wooden hull passes overhead; a child's fingers trailing through the under-surface, drawing Ouse-swimmers close:

Barbel, Roach and Dace,

Chub, Tench and Minnow. Visions peel from them in shoals; showing everything that she has feared to see. Every balance, all completeness, ravished and dismantled: squares

in ruins; waters rising through the city; libraries reduced to rooms of pulp and twine. She falls. Leonard catches her staggering return—she, flushed,

bent forward, dripping like a spaniel. Slipped, she tells him. Fallen, in a ditch close by the osier beds. Through the *waste* of Rodmell, he leads her back towards the house.

Six days on, she rises from her sick bed (illnesses, how express it? partly mystical), swinging wide the casement to find Leonard at the rhododendrons and a curious seaside feeling in the air.

John A. Scott

I Remember Telemachus

I am susceptible to
forgetfulness. I know
where my car keys are
now, submissively tied
to the whistle I have
never blown in self-defense,
but I can't recall the conversation
you say we had about whether
or not our friends had mentioned
that they would like to meet us
in Portugal next fall. Some things
I let lapse, like most of my
college experience, but I'm
a pushover for lavender and
open magnolia blossoms. I'm
better at sight than recording
words, but if I could harness
the sound of your voice
when you're happy, like it was
last night when we arrived late
at the party at the lake because
the afternoon light detained us,
I would change my ways.

Sally Van Doren

longlist

Some Days Seem More Ephemeral than Others

Some days seem more ephemeral than others, translucent,
filled with speech no-one listens to, or absences, or grey shawls,

and you flicker through them, brittle as an old movie reel,
from seen to unseen, from seen to unseen, mostly unseen,

inhabiting the negative space of yourself, which you will fall into
altogether one day, like people around you have been doing for years

only you seem to be noticing it more now, all those lemmings
dropping over a cliff and the cliff getting closer, you feel it,

but at this minute you don't know whether to push back against
the ephemeral—shout something, make a statement, drop a jug

of water, strip naked, cajole the gaze of eyes, however momentary,
because you are still here, even if no-one is paying attention,

so immersed are they in their own incarnations of visibility—or whether
you should just lean into it as you would a lover, take the gift

of being unnoticed and slip away into rarefied atmosphere,
wispy white contrail trailing behind you marking the passage no one saw.

David Adès

Urals

Dead Mountain, 1959: Tents cut open from inside. Nine hikers, six hundred meters, one tongue missing, all naked. Cause of death: unknown compelling force. Those are facts. Ask him, Veteran of Three Wars, but yesterday he fell down the stairs like the diver sucked into a blue mouth in 2001.

How do we contend with chance? I have bullets. Mighty Kalashnikov, bullets frozen in shame and failure. Empires yield to mystery. The Colonel felled by a cramp. Where to bomb back if the bomb, says the radio-voice, came from inside of me? Lungs filled with slivers of rib, the dead lie dead, neither bruise nor lesion in the skin. If they choked on a bullet, if I did, there must be some way to slide it down my lungs, where a snowstorm dances in victory, where the wind sings a gypsy song. This version of the story: hikers irradiated, blood napalm, bones flint and steel. Buried in the snow. A shovel rusts in this lonely pass for the lost survivor, prays to be held. Kholat Syakhl, shadow country. A Hind with nine aboard crashed here in '91. All lived. Jesus Country. This conflict of omens cuts my skin from inside. If you sit up and peer through the slit, there is only whiteness. So lie still. Dawn is slow today.

Carlos Afaible

Here birds are

*Knocking on this door again, I feel as if I'm drumming on my own chest.
I overtook him without knowing.*

I

She was sitting gently
sinking without sinking
in the pleated light

on half their bed. I saw
my mother in the clutch
of scented orchids
wearing her wedding
ring like a trance. Her joy

broken for keeps, a sob
breaking like a small bone in her throat.
I was a child
peering at the bedroom door.

I don't lose sleep over the mercy of God.

She is in love, he is preserved
in love.

II

He was found maculate
on his side, limbs like crushed cowslip flowers
tangled in the bicycle frame.

Swept aside
by something that had passed,
gone in the wake
of something that was passed at the summit
of the world, a trail in pine shadows.

III

The first night I raided his palace
for icons, for drawings and photographs
like soldiers

out on the temple roads with shovels
on their backs, holding gods like children
in their arms. There were birthday presents.

Fled slowly. Took nothing. My eyes were closed
and my mouth and nose
were closed. I carried pure silence
room to room like a little bell shook in the dark.

Then you came out to meet me;
brought back to life and wearing your black racing goggles.
I breathed with eighty-four thousand pores of the skin and said nothing.

IV

Morning: I dizzy the birds and smash them into feathercake and catch
my breath with anger.
The quietness robs me blind and the cosmos
on hearing the dumb question 'Why me?'
barely suffers to reply 'Why not?'
and there is still all this beating of wings.

Art Allen

The Jonah Emulator

Except this time the whale
winds up inside of you. Because light
is scarce, because you are
so handsome, because each paycheck
is your bribe, for three days
you are sentenced to carry
the whale in your belly,
it never breaking down, it never
entering the bloodstream. Your body, like any
body, is a prison, but not a prison
of the spirit, just of water
and other creatures. When God
asks you to speak, you will vomit forth
this whale, this whale will be
your answer, and you will finally become
a prophet, so empty
and so completely understood.

Josh Bell

At Equinox, Crossing the Hudson River

The year not quite on its hinge, I want
To speak about the happiness of my body
And the delight its joints exert when climbing
Three-hundred-and-forty-two stairs to reach
The pedestrian boardwalk on the eastward side
Of the Hudson River Walkway where sunshine
Exuberant pours from azure and seamless heaven.

The sun rides in sweeps of scarlet finery,
Indifferent to my swift joy as rightly
That's how it works. So, step by stride I follow
A line of mothers pushing prams and vehicles
Carting tiny charming faces and squeals
Of laughter from eastward westward until
Even my sorrow tires of hearing itself.

Though I've been scorned for it, let me never
Be afraid to use the word *beautiful* or *hope*
Or any other flowers in the garden of voice.
Just now a hummingbird --- I swear it's true ---
Has drummed its brilliant trumpet engine
Literally across my path and swerved
Back again as if to show me the way home.

How many days did the boy I was never
Speak the holy words of gratitude or grace
Yet all the while believed I surely had?
Shame upon that captive boy's successor
For thwarted years that might have flourished.
But that, too, is how it works. You have
To go out into the world to find the world

Waiting inside yourself: to rescue (from false
Because empty certainties) the bravery
Waiting to speak, waiting to be heard.
Not *too* many words, mind you, just enough
To honor the sun rising or later the frogs
Incanting bodily happiness from mud
Naming resolute waters, ever flowing below.

Saul Hillel Benjamin

Head Count

Of all the field trips my school made us take, the circus seemed the least misleading. Not like the Museum of Natural History, where the tour guide pitched his monotone above the swishing of our puffy jackets as we shifted from foot

to foot beneath a dead version of everything and strange kids eyed us like the blue jays glued to branches behind glass. The circus didn't pretend to teach us anything. Not like the Cloisters, where a unicorn fled the spears of stiff-limbed men from tapestry

to tapestry, only to end up hemmed in by a fence so short he could've stepped right out, the circus was an outing with no takeaway. If this was a forfeit on the part of our teachers or forgiveness, we couldn't tell. But we were old enough to recognize the tiger's reluctance

to leave its cage, grown-up enough to unfold into a stranger's palm a few bills for a chintzy wand of fiber optic strands that glowed like failing embers, but that was not what captivated Leo. That summer, my dad had claimed a patient of his

would be joining my class, a boy from Uruguay who'd been in a crash—a truck plowed into him and his parents as they idled in front of their home. His mom was the patient, but he came to translate. On the first day of school he'd been easy

to spot, but he spoke with no accent and so fast he could commandeer any conversation. And with such strange details, when he'd lie it rang true. Enough, at least, to keep us listening. Like once he shot a horse in a ditch, on fire, to save it from burning.

Motorbikes looped in the cage sphere of death. I offered my popcorn but Leo was too caught up to notice. His father had died on impact. But that my dad warned me not to repeat. Back at school, when the bus unloaded,

I ran upstairs for a book I forgot. The overheads off, Miss Mahn, our teacher, who talked like a starlet from early TV, always *gee* and *gosh*, was leaning close to the Vietnam vet who taught us math and once dragged me into the hall for yawning,

he was holding her shoulder, their heads almost touching. She kept trying to speak through her tears but couldn't. *How hard is a head count?* some kid hissed behind me, adding in passing, *Leo's still in New York*. Later, I heard how the cops found
him

bowling alone west of Madison Square, how he'd answered their questions—that he'd
gone
to the men's room and by the time he got out the bus had left, so he thought he'd walk.
Twenty miles, he said, was nothing to him—he'd done it before, in Uruguay once,
when his uncles were being disappeared, and how the cops were so charmed
by the tales he told that they dialed the number he gave to them then hung around to
listen,
even paid for pizza and all the games he could play until his dad could come get him.

Eric Berlin

Native Orchids

We'd come as far as the wooden bridge, not too far from town—rows of windows in the distance like strip cartoons, and the moon in one frame, a dab of correction fluid.

We'd come to find native orchids, though I'd begun to believe they existed in places none of us would see, not unless we entered magic circles and danced

ceremoniously with wine cups in our hands, hallucinating ourselves as gods. Someone said they'd seen native orchids in a book, that they looked like psychedelic spiders.

We walked past the creek, trudged over rocks and grass, soft grey moths fluttering at our heels; then to an overhang; below in the creek, tadpoles like free-floating

commas, and an egret still as a porcelain ewer full of cool wine, a chestnut teal shaking water from its head as though trying to free itself from some witless tenet.

When cockatoos massed onto branches strutting, screeching, fanning out their crests with the bluster of card-sharps playing bluff hands, we were glad to walk on, despite

a standing army of leeches, a cloud of gnats moving like a constantly revolving door. Cicadas had begun a high-torsional jamming session in the apple gums: still

no orchids, though we did see a flower with filaments fine as caterpillar lint, a minuscule insect gear-shifting its legs as it roamed the seed-freighted pistil and poked

its feelers outside the pinhole edge. A man in the group, his stomach like a huge puffball bulging over his belt, kept kicking the caps off toadstools and tearing down

spiders' webs. When at lunch he sat near a bull ants' nest, none of us said a thing, we just watched him jump, trying to escape his own nerve-ends that were

taking him on a brutal expedition of incendiary pain.
The group leader, a woman with oceanic blue hair,
her cheeks speckled like a martin's egg, lowered her
head to the ground and with her boot flipped over
a rock. Again no orchids, just a centipede, a scurrying
cutting of brown fern. When we returned to the road,
we saw the late sun syndicating its light in level after
level of office block windows—and for a moment
we were startled out of ourselves, the way we might
have been had we seen the orchids' red, shell-pink
or turquoise petals. . . the eastern sky was now plum-purple,
fruit bats filling it like cinders from a woodland blaze.

Judith Beveridge

Blue Morpho

Adrift in an azure trance, affixed by invisible
star-points of pins to the sumptuous nothing of black
velvet, it's as immense as the word 'once'
uttered once, buffeted by silence, to float or sink.
Gazing into the pool-like body, how slowly it becomes
the confined loved one—exotic, exhausted, ex-
everything. Small as Earth on television, then realer:
the otherworldly waters of Iceland flown over
once, the shifting blues frightening in their nearness,
the glorious black shore. You, afraid until the sensation
of a longed-for presence hit, better than morphine.
You clapped with the rest—reborn, exhilarated.

Paula Bobince

Shark's Tooth

Color of smoke at its most intense, when fire's
first born and working hardest, in its nest of dry grass
and sticks, to live. An eon ago, a shark
was born to a mother. Struggled tail-
first into ocean, eyes still enclosed
in fleshy darkness, an innocence that lasted seconds,
embedded in Time like beads on a necklace.
Little thing, half in this world, half in utero-Heaven,
was your death like that? Head in the clouds,
seeing again your mother, whose side you clung to,
the rest thrashing before quieting into sand?
Blood-flowers wreathed you,
briefly, before you grew monstrous.
Speechless. Unseen by any human. Eating
with teeth shed into the thousands, your only money,
spent on dailies and delicacies, then
falling out and out, as in a stress dream. Then,
to paraphrase your life, *and so on*, until the lowest
undulation of waves jostled away skin, cartilage, until
there was nothing but a smile broken up
by hurricanes, an Ice Age, the melt of a planet,
until one tooth felt its way to shore
millions of years into the future. Feeling, finally,
a breeze, the human touch of a child.
Diminished to the size of a child's incisor, how big
it once was, how fearsome. Now
a gift run to a mother skimming *Vogue*, falling
asleep to this season's prints, a return to
ruffles, pearls the color of...

Paula Bohince

Comfort Stop

Friedensreich Hundertwasser
is a name that comes not trippingly
off a Maori or pakeha tongue
yet he was the pride of Kawakawa
and a Living Treasure of New Zealand,
an internationally known ecologist
and architect and above all,
in the popular mind, the Klimt of the khazi,
creator of the world's most charming
and beautiful toilet-block,
a *chef d'oeuvre* of Loo Art Deco,
columns and arches that marry
a Mad King Ludwig kitsch
to the frosty decadence
of Viennese orientalism,
plus a nod to the Alice in Wonderland
embrace of a crazy-paved world.
There's also a sense of the Antipodean
flair for ad hoc improvisation,
unlikely local materials that come to hand,
the co-option of workers given a chance
to exercise their crafts and *tours de main*.

It's a tourist hub, approached by a tiptoed
sword-dance through flailing selfie-sticks.
The *trompe l'oeil* windows, necessarily opaque,
are bottles in pastel shades like lime, puce
and lavender. The asymmetrical tiles evoke the slow,
deliberation of the builder of a drystone wall
but the symphony of shapes and colours
has all the sophistication of a painter's practised eye
that takes the artless layman's breath away.

In the off-season, it must be a focus
for the locals, a comfort and convenience
stop for polite gossip, hard to conceive of
the other kind in such an ambience.

Imagine a Clochemerle *pissoir* sunny-side up:
no sinister rendez-vous, no political
cabals or vicious rumours. The spiritual
force of Hundertwasser lingers still.

John Carey

Dream Homes

In my dreams I have often tapped into the false memory of homes I have never lived in slapped together from a kit of architectural and narrative clichés: a harbourside flatette with no definable features but outside stairs and a dresser filled with unsecured secrets; a spacious open-plan apartment with an indoor garden tended by unseen hands; a two-storey terrace with upstairs rooms which were never used, lounges and libraries with not a bedroom in sight. And none of these homes was a primary residence, all bolt-holes to escape to, safe houses to hide the residue of unnamed crimes, places to bring an unsuitable lover to or work on the draft of an explosive memoir.

A diet of crime and espionage fiction might explain the building-blocks but not the impulse. An analyst might look for an unhappy child with a self that fitted badly which he needed a weekend retreat away from. The social realist might posit something sterner and more mundane: A North Shore Sydney boy obsessed with Real Estate options? Who would have thought?

Perhaps it's just a random playing-out of our common condition: '*homo somnificiens*' who needs doors opening onto other lives and possibilities, or a transfer-station for psychic waste and old embarrassments. Dream homes might be a free translation of the well-known dream of flying, clear of that other dream of a long corridor that debouches into another day or not, like a bird dreaming of not flying.

John Carey

Peacocks

How many moons and lamplights have washed
the garden's strict geometry with their lunescence?
The pale bluing of grasses, branches, stone, and air.
Silvery wisps of hair tickling cheek by the breeze,
melding fragrances of blue mist and white peonies,
while eyes moisten and blink searching for the moon.

That first gaze was a deep falling into recognition
of lives imbricated in distant past lives
then finding each other again in Belgium
strangely familiar and intimate
although we had just met.

You wore a red sweater, swung prayer beads, while smoking Belgas in
the library, turned pages of the tome of medicine, and stared at me.
I was lean, wore burgundy boots and a cocky green beret.
Nights were intoxicated by your deep brown eyes and olive skin,
Days frustrated by the elusiveness of you.

How much erotic longing lay between the moment of the first gaze
and decades punctuated by interludes of greeting each other
to play in the Canary Islands and Snow's Pond.
Then I could touch the nape of your neck again, smell the fragrance
of your cologne, dream of the children we never had, and contemplate
the thousands of lives we touched as doctors in this lifetime.

The vocabulary of the silences, speaking French and English,
while living in the same country a thousand miles distant,
you and I always meet near the perimeter of the heart.
Knowing the impossibility of living with and loving you
except in my imagination, I accept that
you decline love as absent from your repertoire of desires.

After a painting 'Nocturne au Parc Royale de Bruxelles'
William Degouve de Nuncques

Nina Carroll

Roll-Your-Own Page

Bereft of kindling newsprint,
being a particularly cold bush night,
reluctantly, I reached for the dry leaves
of the Australian Poetry Journal.

Ripping out Publication Details,
Contributors, I began
lighting Maling, Pretty and Clutterbuck,
pausing at Hennessey,
tearing Dionysius, Kissane, my own, *Tyger*.

When cigarette papers ran out,
a real conundrum:
with whom would I share breath?

I chose Geoff Page's, *L'esprit d'escalier*,
a fine poem, no doubt a fine smoke.
If cancer were to fog an x-ray,
no worthier bloke.

Scissoring a rectangle, from ...*a nasty sort of laugh...*
down to ...*my second wife once called me smug...*
I tobacco'd up, rolling
and thread-tying a beedi.

Inhaling, I watched the orange edge
erasing phrases,
arguments do not convince, vanishing,
some words... are slow to fade, becoming ash.
The burning poem pinched my fingers;
I stubbed it out.

Nicotine-dazed, eyes closed,
I raised supplication to the poet.

I might smoke Jennifer Compton next.

Joe Dolce

Ceaseless Tintinnabulation

Right now at the limits
of physics all the persistent circuitry
of crickets and swallows together with
the perpetual electric night-ring of the cicada
are held in the corridor outside the labs
of the World's Quietest Place
(minus twenty point six decibels -
white-out, a record) waiting for news
of when their story might be heard.

Elsewhere on the planet a bell
is still ringing behind glass, one hundred
and seventy six years a prisoner oscillating
in its sound-proof cell like a car-alarm
buried deep in the blizzard. How long can
it endure? Put your ear to the jar:
not even the loudness of a person
whispering alone in a room or the whirl
of the fan on your microprocessor.

One day the glass will crack
like ice and we'll hear the speech
of all the creatures in the underground aquarium,
the girls turned into birds the many
unrecorded accounts of the night
in crystal-clear live-stream broadcast.
Till then we must listen for whatever
sounds we can catch the silence which is still
ringing, the snow which is still ringing.

Jane Draycott

Twelve Tastings

1. *LEMON*

Zest of the table, you invite the bitter to dine with sugar, the sweet to flirt with sour. X on a treasure map, you mark the twining of my roots.

2. *MANDARIN ORANGE*

Sepals of peel, petals of pulp on china—my hands explode into flower. I grasp at nothing when I jump the orchard wall. . . .

3. *PURPLE PLUM*

Your seam's an Avalon of blue. Broken, your liquor baritones my voice from pit to sky.

4. *STAR FRUIT*

Sliced into pentagrams of antique gold, you taste bland—reason for the bees to make fresh honey.

5. *RED PEAR*

Gravid, bell-like elegance, you are Mother. Moth-holed musette, I'm a sower's apron that spills hopes on stone. Would you host my seed?

6. *FRESH FIG*

Your sweet Iberian sands smooth my daily bread. As my corners shrink, you send me out to deepen springs.

7. *GREEN APPLE*

Tart to the tongue, sponge to the palette, you bridge No Time & Clock Time. Two lands ahoy! Where shall I go? I pendulum over mute waters.

8. *APRICOT*

Your velvet sunrises put me on tiptoe. I'm a Buddhist monk fingering her beads.

9. *KIWI*

Black seeds circle your white moon like Trappists at compline.
An edible galaxy, you sound the heavens in my throat.

10. *CHARDONNAY GRAPE*

You entice intoxication with two cups—Empty & Full.
They meld when ringing out their carillon love.

11. *WHITE PEACH*

When I bite your ghostly vintage, I too want to hide, but who then
will taste me? We won't give up, will we, my sister wine?

12. *BLACK CHERRY*

Full-lipped, crimson kisses, lover's knots at all the stem-tips—
you turn tears into lights. Alluring as night candles.

Anna Evas

Rooms by the Sea

On the painting by Edward Hopper

'Maybe I am not very human. What I wanted to do was to paint sunlight on the side of a house.'

Edward Hopper

1.

That further room, a tenth of the whole,
a mere column, with its tranche of light
slanting in across the life of things:
red chair and green carpet; a painting –
sun-glazed, its story untold; the bookcase
whose unseen books touch each other
or lie alone, ready to enter your thoughts,
for your thoughts to enter them.

That further room. It must have granted
ease and pleasure, the solace of dailiness.
In the painter's psyche, in the economy
of his life at the easel, master and captive,
the fact of this room, what it configured,
amounting to a tithe. Is that a fair guess?

2.

The closer room is the main game
with its folding insert of radiance
hinging wall and floor—an origami of sunlight
you could lean against, warm bare feet on.
The doorway holds, as in a tumbler, ocean
dauntingly at its work, summer sky.
The door, compact as a sentinel, waits.

So this is it: the archetypal real.
A room, stripped, complete. A perilous
openness. Even the shadows are inscaped
with light—lapis ghosting steel-blue.

Under a short horizon, the sea's archaic
pulse and thrash, salt air billowing.
Breathe in, out; breathe in.

Diane Fahey

Versus

For these few moments gathered here on either side
of the pedestrian crossing, waiting for the freight train to pass
only minutes though it seems longer, the ding-ding-ding, the boom gates falling
and falling, the kicky-de-chick of many wheels, the bounce of the sleepers
as the wheels pass across them, the sunlight flicked between the containers
skittering across the opposite faces (reminding us of colonial photos
people trapped in snapshot moments, eyes squinting into an artificial flash
or of swimmers, faces briefly visibly when they rise above the grey-blue water
gasp, descend below the surface) but then

the gap of an empty trolley
the sense of space
the wider clarity
the faces seen
for slightly longer

a girl on our side jumping up and down
shouting train! the single syllable entering our heads

turning into
steam, electric
freight, passenger
Ghan, Indian/Pacific

the system of tracks criss-crossing the country, signs
and signals, indicators of the system
all that is conveyed, all that is transported
the moving language of the rails and how
these things can grow
from a single word but then

the girl picks up a bit of gravel, throws it into
the gap between containers and a boy opposite
sees her and does the same

the stones' trajectories
making pathways through the air
pushing aside atoms
rearranging space
the gap, opening
and opening
like a conversation
with no fixed
destination

while we wait, our minds closed around our own
stones, ready to exchange them in trade, to pass them
as counters in a game or to throw them at the soft
parts of the body, the bruisable flesh, the flaccid organs or maybe at the hard
parts of the body, the brittle scaffold, the inner structure, or maybe even
to lay them down, we don't know what is going to happen, only
that the train will pass, that our soft-hard bodies will cross over
that another train filled with passengers
is already pulling
out of the station's shadow.

Alison Flett

If Not Residential School Then Where to Go

A dead animal on the logging road small and brown with fur it does not move it is stuck to the road

Its nose froze when the sun is up the ice melts enough it could pull away

A man touches it

It moves it is not dead its nose froze he loosens the way words stuck on the road is why you need punctuation to separate the clumps of words that walk on the road and stuck there

You were warned to leave the animals alone all of them they are wild

Wild thoughts do not leave they keep coming with fear that says they will hurt

they will take when you are not looking if you do not look you will be taken

You stay in the woods you could hide if they came

We do not have roads though our paths stay the same we follow without a road and there is an animal stuck on the road is it dead poke with a stick there on the road it is stuck

Do not touch it is wild it lives in a world that intersects ours but we cannot bother its world

We cannot let thoughts run wherever they want they have to be killed skinned

scraped with punctuation stretched to dry in paragraphs and worn against the cold

The ice stuck to the road that caught the animal that would get up but it froze the

fur matted to the road it wanted to get up but could not until the man touched it

and it was not dead

He loosened it for a moment it did not know it was not stuck it took a while for it to know it could run away

Stay where you are the man said give it a moment to know where it is to find the

side of the woods where it ran from the road where it was stuck

The rain on the roof is falling an encampment of words yet without marks to tell them where to stay what to say

The words in groups need marks after them they will teach you there you will like

the pencil in your hand the sound of it writing on your paper like rain

You thought it was cold and it would be snow that does not sound like rain

because snow is quiet it knows how to hide if it falls in the night but when the sun is up you see the white and it is snow

It melts and runs like rain it changes to something else it is not its own anymore

do you want that to happen you argue

They will change you from snow to rain or rain to snow whatever it is that is falling

They will hear your footsteps on the roof they will know you are the snow that walks silently and unseen until the light

Had the animal stopped to sleep on the road at night not caring it was on the road
where a horse or wagon or truck could come
Only now it was a brown animal covered with fur that stuck in the ice that froze
in the night that was cold
The rain had stopped and was starting again it could hide and not be hidden by
the part of it stuck to the road

Diane Glancy

Stalking Egret

Still,
as a statue carved
from the best Carrera marble,
White, on black bone stilts
in the water running off
toward the blue Pacific,
with his neck stretched out
above the shallows where
He stands
in the Santa Ana River,
or every now and then
takes a slow step toward
where another fish may lie,
Indifferent
to the sun shining down,
or to the heady stare
of those eyes above him
looking down
Watching
for that first sign of life,
a fin's flicker,
A minnow
that he can stab and stop
against the sandy flat,
above the flying shadows
of ripples moving on
Toward meaning,
Toward that hint
of transcendence left
when wavelets die
unnoticed on the shore
He stalks.

Mark Grinyer

Illustrated Plates for an Unauthorized Biography of Gertrude Bell

(i) *Red Barns, 1963 (Courtesy of Redcar Public Library)*

Your childhood home, my childhood puzzle;
the afternoon school boys—hoop-capped, blazered,
scarved—slipping in the wicket gate, as I trekked
homeward in my Start-Rite shoes. A smell
of creosote and honeysuckle in the summer air
as markers older than the alphabet
incised my female clay with their prestige.
I knew their leather satchels contained
empires. Was that the year *Lawrence of Arabia*
swept my mother off her red plush seat
in the Regent Cinema? Cantering back
along the esplanade, between the steel works
and the cooling towers, she snagged
on marram grass and chilly sand,
the tether's end of kids, the strap for cash.
Lost in plain sight on Red Barns' weathered wall
a plaque as blue as Peter O'Toole's eyes:
'Gertrude Bell, Friend of the Arabs.'

(ii) *Highway of Death, 1926 (Courtesy of Baghdad Museum)*

You tell the maid to wake you in the morning,
but restless on your pillow in the night,
lighting the lamp, you see loose freckled skin
on the hand that drew the map that made Iraq.
Feeling its tremor you shake a few more pills
from the hidden bottle, choose a deeper sleep.
Bad dreams of war make the British
civil cemetery a god-forsaken place to lie,
Khatun, but the cold ground in Redcar
churchyard presses my mother harder.

Maeve Henry

Hephaestus

My first memory is falling,
the look of disgust on my father's face.

Even the air I hurtled through was desperate
to be relieved of me. My body, broken

as I broke through the surface of the ocean
that accepted me. I had to stay within

its cold depths to learn anything.
They know me as the lame, pitiful one.

But here I am standing among the other
gods with a hammer in my soft hand, never

quite knowing what to do with this
strange material, this avalanche of fire falling

endlessly within me. Now and then,
an Olympian subcontractor comes unannounced

to break my legs again, or to add a deforming
trace of arsenic to the metal.

They need to keep me at the forge,
shaping their breastplates and their helmets

from something formless. They need me
continually in some stage of recovery.

My callipers are made of gold and fractured,
repurposed lines. I'm not the god of poetry,

but of sculpture and volcanoes. I've tried
to disappear into the sudden closing sunset,

the glistening carapace of the beetle, the dark
red warmth of the earth. But I know

where I belong, and that walking—
getting anywhere—is a kind of falling.

Andy Jackson

First Prayer

All summer we've set to tending
the casualties of my garden,
mostly hummingbirds, who crazed
with so much choice, smack
constantly at the playroom windows.

This morning your pudgy palm
pumps open and shut
around another broken,
shimmer less thing—
A plea or an offering?

—to hold in your hands something
that just before twisted air
like a new quarter spinning—

That shocking iridescence draining
out before our eyes into the vague sheen
of a fly's wing.

I know what it's like to spend
a childhood brokering deals
with Saint Francis of Assisi.
To find what was swimming gold
shriveled up on the kitchen floor—
a dusty, orange rind.

Is it wrong to love how the sun
burnishes your bare shoulders
as you go gleaming from plant
to bowed plant?

To hang back and eavesdrop
as your shadow spreads across
the little makeshift plot:

snail *bird* *bird* *mouse*
 bird

Nicole Johnson

Snail, after Ponge

To hump the freight
of the palace staircase
from door to door

a disciple of yes-but-later
its pocket watch always open
to the hypnotist's spiral

reading such slow
cartographies with
Muppet antennae

the worthless diamond-
ooze as evidence
of night passages

inside the shell is Chauvet
and the reek of the soldier's
helmet

cushioned on its belly
of smashed-thumb it dreams
of wings and fire.

Jake Kennedy

Night Reverie

i. m. A.J.

After the pub
he somehow managed
to get himself home
and on his balcony took out
the soft hot thing he had
stored by his heart
and he opened the wrapper with his clumsy
numb hands and he bit down, munched the glorious munch of
all drunk-eaters
off in that dark otherworld of altered
reality
where the night feels
as if you are not in it –
the night is you, and the bleary star
glimpsed through
one eye,
and the private laughter as that one eye opens and shuts
opens and shuts.
And that warmth moved down his throat
and past to the deep belly where alcohol
already glowed.
He was full,
full and outside, sitting on the rail of the balcony
like an old traveller
like an old cowboy
and at some point he tipped forward
with a lump of pastry still in his mouth he fell to the darkness,
bleary,
far away from loneliness
that night.

Wes Lee

Rubik's Cube

I read the same paragraph three times
before the clicks divert me
to his jerking wrists, the whites
struggling to align, as errant green
and orange boxes step out of row.
This, he's told me, relieves
stress.

I close my eyes, then assign a color
to his life's compartments: green stores
his cousin's DUIs, the ex who's found him
on Facebook; orange holds unanswered emails;
white allays threadbare boxers, low blood sugar,
the faucet's broken aerator;
and yellow houses
me.

I know why he does this, why we all do:
I've boxed her phone call, when she told me
my lover, her baby boy, crashed into the pole,
died on arrival to the e.r.
Sharing that space is the firemen dragging
me out of bed, my drawer of journals
and fish tank left
to burn.

But he, the magician with the saw,
sequesters me too much,
too often, as if the boxes fate
his life.
I don't like the cube's influence,
have told him how its discovery
was an accident, inspired by pebbles egressing.

Still now, with Sports Center as our backdrop,
his hands keep moving,
and I crave the quiet
from before we could afford air
conditioning, when the decrepit ceiling
fan spun, a faint soundtrack
while we piled our bodies
in a nightly ritual.

Amy Lerman

Touchstone

I think of a body drying like a sheet.
I think of my mother kneeling.
In these thoughts a cobra hangs on
her neck like a favourite noose, skin
unzipped by a mongoose. Her dress pools
to her patella & the venom
suckles what's left
of her breasts. *It hurts*
right, ma? Her neck's bent. She's scooping
the liquid out of her hands, phalanges pared
sharp enough to cut teeth.
They learn to speak: *silly girl,*
I'm dead. She's so
thirsty. If I could, I would've tucked
her into a camel's skin for the nights.
I would've knitted a scarf
of my own entrails, ending
where my throat began. I speak, & everything
comes out in lies, a puzzle-box
minding its own trick. *I miss you*
ma. Is it normal to consider
guilt? In these thoughts her body
reaches for a hug, as if
I didn't manage to kill her
coming out of her womb. My favourite
trick: I ask if she's warm
enough to forgive me, pretending
I am too young for answers.
She should've seen how my teeth
grinned in the cavities of her skull,
how I tipped her hull back into her dress,
pressed the mandibles
into my cheek, a cobra leaning into the nose
of a mongoose, begging
to be spared. Any sip of water
was like drinking to her death.

Min Lim

The Greek in the Café

Life's a gift the dying appreciate,
The Greek says. Birth is Fate.
I'll tell you what Fate is, his friend says,
Fate's the past that takes you hostage.
The Greek looks wounded when he smiles at that.
Everything comes to those who wait,
His friend says. Wait till they what?
The Greek says, watching insects dance
About a chip basket light,
Wait till they die? You sound like Penelope.
We're jongleurs with the voice of angels
At the behest of philistines, the Greek says.
They praise our song and pay us pence.
I wish, he says, but can't finish the sentence.

There's no learning here! his friend says,
That's the problem. They had their chance.
The sea is strange lately, the Greek says,
Have you noticed? Dark streaks across deep water
Take you down. The future?
His friend says. Don't talk to me about the future!
You think: stand straight, and your back grows rounder.
That's the future.
They ask, the Greek says,
They ask politely, they seem to hear,
They nod, but no-one remembers
Anything you tell them. No-one ever remembers.

Robert Lumsden

Native Orchid

They say it comes upon you in old age.
They say vocabulary is heritable.
If it's in my gait the only place

I would feel it is my back. The doctor said it would
never heal. I walk.
This morning, small dogs and old men are set awkwardly

on the path. The first guy I pass carries a blue
bag, dangling testicular tubes of warm turd like spare
change. Newspaper tucked under an arm—the other fluing

out a palm in appeal. The second man shoulders something vast.
His clodded feet drool from the Hoddle Avenue shop with a tiny
red dog by his side. I notice the grasp

he has of the pie and see the callous of caulking,
plaster walls and the fibrosis in his eyes
overrides my urge to talk to him.

He walks. I carry on past the purple dragonfly
grass gently affirming in the first stir of air.
The eye of a poet knows nothing except sky.

By the time the back pain starts the road is crossed. Cues for
me were rocks and water, in that order, not new
but caught in motion. I tried to use your

voice as mine to rouse an image from mown clumps
snug around sprouts of roses - it had to do with less
colour and more comfort. Not sure now if the hum

of green beneath appreciates the pun. They say
there is an age when men forget a dog. Fox-terrier
I think it is. Tail like a snake tongue forks the day.

By the mail box, his owner stops. Usurper.
Employed against the elements all his life.
There is size and scent enough to conjure

A walk without gain. Morning light finds the red on
A native orchid, struck from the turf on a slate lawn
When it happens, in spite of my intention

to walk beyond the warmth my hands
feel in their pockets; beneath a metronome;
beside the fence to the Catholic Church where

I read an omen on a stone. ‘This rock was blessed...’
I could not make out the rest. Stepped across
the gutter to water uttering a lesson

in Latin. Rapina. Rapina. Rapina.

Glenn McPherson

Adoption Day 1978

I remember my cream polo-neck was itchy as hell
and wishing for a groovy velour one just like yours.

But in the end, nothing about that day
was what I wanted. In the courtroom,

when the magistrate asked me, Mum was perched
on the edge of her seat. I didn't need to see her face

to know what I was meant to say. Dad, you didn't
say much. Start as you mean to continue, I guess.

Your parenting was defined by what you didn't do.
No praise. No affection. No Speech Nights or Sports Days.

Sometimes music lies in the space between the notes
but even so, all my childhood triumphs seem like

wild dancing for rain that would never fall. Now,
here you are in ICU, hooked up to a nest of tubes

feeding you blood, oxygen, everything you need except
nicotine and alcohol. And still, you just keep on

talking over Mum out of deafness or disrespect. Or both.
I'm almost snapping my Sudoku pencil with one hand.

It's the same one I used while you were in surgery,
all the numbers blurring as I remembered that day,

all those years ago, when you heard Mum ask
for a father for her child. When you answered.

Rachael Mead

WeClutter

we are the eye contact that becomes uncomfortable.
we look away like we have low self-esteem because
we have low-esteem. we make you feel nervous,
even though we do not mean to. we are the fast name
introductions that bomb rush out of our mouths
while shaking hands. we are the other person's name
which we will forget as soon as we do not say it right.
we are the over-enunciated words, the squint they give
us back. this is the other side of english, chopped and
confused. we are the words that stick to the side of our
mouths, the burst of spit that lands on your face when
we are struggling to get one word out. we pray about it.
we pray about it. we pray about it. we are the hand
movements that are out of sync with what we are
saying. we are *you know what i am saying, you know what
i mean!* we do not know what to use first: tongue, teeth
or breath. we run out of breath trying to test it out. we
are the kings of repeating ourselves. we are the nods
you give us as if you understand us the second time
around. we know it is hard on you, but harder on us to
deal with it. of course we pray about it. we pray about it.
we pray about it more than ever when the stakes are high
and we need the foundation of words to serve us like the
sun serves daylight. so we are left to find our own little
way through the dismay, so we tell statements, not stories,
the fastest you have ever heard. we are the conversation
that runs short and the smile we have because we are glad
it is over. we are the biggest comedians, jokes we can only
make out; we have so much life within us yet none in front
of people. we pray about it day and night. we are the phone
conversations that are hard on your ears. we are feedback
we don't want to hear, the cringe of an echo, the dread of a
cold call, pull our hair out if we have to break down complex
information, shoot us before you make us publicly speak,
we can't get past the phone interview for a job. we have a
degree, but cannot verbally deliver. we are crossed fingers

in hopes that our words fell out right, but unfortunately our facial expression remained neutral. we dash from confrontation, we call it *no drama*. we absolutely get ourselves, but sometimes we don't. we do not even know it's a speech issue, we think it's just a small issue, something we haven't fixed yet. we are all over the place, cannot contain the words so they won't spill out at the same time. we even trip up asking God for help, but we still pray about it. we pray about it. we pray about it this confusion we cannot fix, this circus that lives in our mouths.

Oak Morse

Poem, Singular

n.

Prevailing poems contain all thought entities.
Nature for example, flora, adjustments in
The forecast. Air arriving freshly. There are lines

Of dancers in arresting dresses, sounds going round,
Round, choirs backed by tactics—lyres, cymbals,
Knives there are—battles, colossal plus the

Personal, heat, sex, regrets, poems that manage
Mountains or that drive a laden train into
Wary hollows, cities of some million moving forth

Back, strangers, sleep, the dead dead in
Daedalian graveyards, ghouls assembling, goals
Rear vising— All ways revealing knowing.

n-1.

Singular poem, ease full in
its carrying. No careering
tone religion no hero not a
shadow. Not a gaudy mode
of transport, trawling scenes,
pawing across possibles.
Bare; barely realising.
Hardly at all.
Rarely.

Anne-Marie Newton

The Famine

in three cantos

Canto I

Trees, bared of leaves chewed raw;
bark pulped, grass cut up, and boiled

Rotting trunks, hollowed for grubs;
the chips, ground for broth

Anthills, flattened for insects;
their sweet earth, given the children to lick

We vie with vultures over corpses;
with hawks for rats and snakes

Then it's the vultures dying, of no use
to the living, their blood already purulent

The hungry peasants
break into armouries, trample

over food store fences
to face armed Party cadres,

derail trains; rumour :
grain's being shipped under

escort, by order
of the great emperor, to Peking

It's the famine of the Great Leap,
in the third year of my life.

Canto II

Three times you sold me
to feed my sister and two brothers,
my mother and grandma

Three times, whining puppy like,
mindless of kidnappers, braving
moon shadows, I sniffled my way back

turning the value
of your useless girl child
into a three-headed nightmare

Desperate, you fled to Hong Kong
as the loss of sustenance threatened seven lives,
there to find the ransom your creditors demanded

Two years we waited, hungry years, grandma and I,
the last to flee the famine when the snakeheads you hired
had us one by one slither past Party spies and border guards.

Canto III

Now at three score I still ask why me, as alone
in dreams in the dark that still scares me
I'm running back, tears pouring rivulets

The morning comes and I see us wives,
husbands, children, together eating, laughing.
Wouldn't all this have been without me?

Then thinking of all those
who aren't here, and I am,
I swallow the day's tears

and bow, awed by your plight
your sense of responsibility,
to say: there's nothing to forgive, father.

Louis Nthenda

Xeno's Paradox

Almost supernatural bluster.
The bay forgets its islands.
They are gone
behind a white wall
of rain which spatters
the windscreen trying to get in.
Although raindrops never
really hit the ground:
they vaporise centimetres short.
Something hits my windscreen, then,
just as a horse at full gallop
is momentarily levitating,
but still manages to run.
Suicidal fly trapped inside
with me, bumbles to get out.
Something philosophical needed
about two opposing forces,
or the way of the trapped and the free.
The storm passes out to sea.
Polished and detailed car.
Rainbow signature flourishing.
This is a concrete irony.
A solid smile of nothing
covering the sky.
The islands were not really gone.
The rain was really hard.

Damen O'Brien

Funny Hat

I met a man the other day
walking through the quiet streets
with a parrot on his head.

What's that on your head? I said
and he replied: A parrot.
What sort? I was genuinely curious.

An African Grey Parrot, and what's more
her name is Dorothy.
Remarkable, I said, for it goes without

saying that African Grey Parrots
are a rarity in my neighbourhood.
The parrot had leather vest and a little leash

to stop it flying off. As we paused
he placed the bird on the ground.
It waddled over to me

and implementing both beak and prehensile
claw it climbed up my trouser leg
like a monkey up a banana tree.

And how old is Dorothy? I asked
and he said: One hundred and seven years old.
Even more remarkable

for by now the nimble parrot had reached
my shoulder where it gripped my ear
like a biscuit in its beak and bit.

I cried out, but the intervention I sought
was not forthcoming. Instead
the man looked at me as if I were the one

interfering with his parrot.
The truth of my experience
as different from his

as a shadow from its host.
He plucked the bird rudely from my shoulder,
replaced it on his head, (he was wearing

a funny hat), wandering off
through the bright, dreamy, unknowable
light of an afternoon in our time.

Mark O'Flynn

Off the grid

We were fearless on our bikes and wild
riding through razor grass
cutting through the hidden snakes
and yelling at the sky.
We could not contain
our love for the shiny handlebars
the silver bell with its tiny lever and its tinny sound
our ringing endorsement of summer
and freedom from classrooms
where the ghosts of old teachers and their dusty despairs
peppered the blackboards with veiled warnings.
Deaf to the shouting keep-out signs
we lifted our bikes
over the shaky wire fence onto flat ground
and we took off like Tour de France
along a cracking path that someone had made
for getting somewhere.
Point A to point B
was too much like mathematics
too much like rules
too much like the grids of adult lives
so we zig zagged across the yellow paddocks
where the dried discs of cow dung
flew from under our spinning wheels
with Olympic certainty.
Gold medals hanging from our necks
sunlight singing in our eyes
we took on days like winners.
Our afternoon shadows grew
into long-limbed giants
and the mantis frames of our steely bikes
stretched all the way to the creek
where the sun was playing his last game of the day
and the secret orchestra of night was tuning up.

And we wondered what the fuss was all about
when we came home
and saw the front gate was open
yawning with anxiety
because our parents had made the dangerous leap
from one plus one.

Olga Pavlinova Olenich

A Volcano

A volcano is a place where birds do not appear.
Even the birds you came to see.
Those birds stay away. They dart through the sky
Like quivering muscles. Alas. They were the birds
You came to see.

A volcano is a place too quiet for words.
Those words have to be swallowed. Those words
Have to be wrapped in heavy cloth and stored
In wooden boxes, buried under rocks. Those words
Can never be spoken.

A volcano is a place that you might choose to go to.
You might choose an ashen footprint. You might choose
That blackened lava. You may decide to carry some small
Pebbles in the pockets of your vest. But living with a volcano
Will never feel like a choice.

A volcano is a place where nobody else will go. You will always
Be alone with the volcano. You will dream that you see the faces of long-forgotten people
In every rockface and riverbed and tree trunk and pebble.
Didn't I go to school with her?
Wasn't he the one who drove the ambulance?
Is that the neighbour I told?

A volcano is a world of leaking and bruising. Nobody you love
Wants you to go there. A volcano can make you feel angry
At all of those people. Those people who love you, who are not searching
For those dark birds to hold in their arms. Those people whose arms
Are full of other things.

Gemma Parker

After Emily Dickinson

The house of possibility opens
for me, for all the ghosts dancing after my feet:

Turn it this way
and it looks like an old farmhouse standing in the pear trees,
wong-footed on a concrete bed,
turned around backwards by a zealous developer,
Front porch converted to a bathroom—
where I sang and cooked and cleaned and wrote
and they were all one work of living:

Turn it the other way
and it's an apartment all piled on top of itself,
bedroom and kitchen and enough room
to dance on a half-door with pint glasses on the corners,
enough room to tuck up in a bushel-basket for the winter:

Turn it and see
The farm on the edge of repossession
empty cupboards
see the blanket under the stars
and under the bridge
the heap of rubble in the desert:

Turn it the other way and see this
The floor of an ocean
the roof of a mouth
and between them like a tsunami or an avalanche,
the walls of oncoming vastness.

Colette Parry

Is That the Dark?

Is that the dark whose head I see
crowning crow-black like a head of human hair?
Its fingers and tongues
touch suns between their radiant toes,
making them fall
into lakes and over mountains,
like large tripped titans, tricked into Tartarus.

Is that the dark
sweeping embers under campfires
and stomping out stoves with its hooves
and painting the thoraxes of hornets
and stopping to stroke the sandy pollen centers of sunflowers?

It's flipping up the leaves' white skirts.
It's carrying rain water at the ends of its arms
in two heavy silver buckets.
It's poked-through with moth-holes of stars
and sliced by the moon's crescent scythe.

Is that the dark you're letting in
through the widened windows?
Are we meant to dip our toes in its inkwell
and leave its footprints on countertops,
like opportunistic cats?

Tell the dark to take its time.
It can savor the dim centers of snail shells
and cast open the cast-iron pupils of cattle.

Invite the dark to spend the night.
It can fold itself into our bat-wing bed sheets
or trick us by standing in corners , pretending to be something else.

Leak our secrets into the dark.
Tempt the marionette strings on its thumbs.
With a whisper to its shadow puppets,
it can convince us of
what we've never done,

or forge our forgetting
that we've ever filled our eyes with a sunrise.

It's telling us how to live forever: Just
open wide enough.

Open wide as Cronus to swallow suns
and their carousel solar systems.
Disguise yourself as something small and meek, like
half a planet's nighttime (dutifully devoured by daybreak),
all the while being—
quietly, deep down in your throat—
the canvas for a cosmos.

Danielle Pouliot

She Demands that I Return her Wig

She says it's an emergency: is this another trick?

I let her in and now she's in my face: *Look what you've done,*

she spits: *You stole my hair, my heart, my silver spoon.*

Why did you plant those nests under my mattress,

bombs in my boiler, birds that chat and flatter in my chest?

I can smell the terror. I must control my borders,

guard the soul that's mine. We have to get the press in order:

they lie about the bodies brined and sunk and twist the laws

of smoke! Close-up she's wrinkled, tart. I should care more,

take her shopping: ethical tomatoes, farmers market,

sing-alongs or something. I mustn't be hard hearted.

I smile experimentally. She shakes her downy head:

Why do you filch my wigs, plant rat eggs in my bed?

I wonder if she hears my radio as it intones the daily news:

I try this: *My friend, this world is burning; why not call a truce?*

She smirks: *I know you want me dead, my old corpse on parade,*

this land is rife with filth like you. I may be bald, but I am unafraid;

I'm super-close with Health and Safety. I can call the cops,

I know an undercover wolf who's at the top

at Scotland Yard. Where's my heart? Give back my wig!

Her right hand pulls me close, her left one digs

into my scalp. *We'll vaporise those heathen foreigners,*

she screeches, tearing out my hair, *but life is even worse*

at home with thieves and communists like you for neighbours.

Jacqueline Saphra

The Silence of the Mountains

You held out your hand but refused to look up, instead
kept your panic-focused gaze pushed forward against the cliff face.
You spent five minutes studying old rock while I climbed
the impossible journey down to you.

I often think about what it is you could have seen.

What, in the crumbling orange façade, caught
your attention so suddenly, that your fear-warped
face turned slack-jawed with surprise a whole two minutes before
I heard the ear-shattering crack of stone beneath your feet.

I like to think your eyes never left the rock face.

That whatever caught your attention in the red dust and stone
held you there until you closed your eyes for impact.
I like to think you didn't look up to meet my eyes, only to find
me clinging eyes-closed to the mountain, all heroism drained out
two metres above you.

Dawn Seabrook

~ Pink

Pink. My childhood. 1950s demarcations. Twenty-first century perpetuation.
Pink. That damnable colour. Pink walls. Pink furniture. Pink to nurture.
Pink on the wardrobe hangers. Pink pyjamas. Pink for charmers.
Pink curtains. Pink lace. Pink socks. Pink satin ribbons for curls.
Pink for girls.
Pink for submission. Constant contrition. Knees together.
Quiet and meek. Stay in your seat. Pink for nice manners. Mustn't be yellers.
Be good and be nice. Do as you're told. Be polite. Everyone else is right.
Don't invite
A bad reputation. Ostracisation. Condemnation.
Be silent!
Your curse is accidental flirtation. Horrid ovulation.
Deliberate temptation. Just be a nice decoration. A poor imitation.
A perfumed diversion.
A female perversion. An unsullied virgin.
Avoid fornication. You're on probation. No affirmations.
You are a girl.
Pink.
Do it.

Donna Sharp

Playing Telephone

You must have played the game: each child whispering to another, the message changed by the end of the line, perhaps on purpose, one player intent on mishearing, but the children do not care the reason.

As adults, they will come to understand
that all messages change eventually:
from urgent, to less so, to forgotten.
And from *I love you* to *I loved you* to *goodbye*.

I thought of this when you told me your father was dead,
a gunshot wound, his doing. My first thought,
seeing the ache behind your restless eyes,
was that this news would not long be new. That soon,

you would be talking about 'the night he died' and then
'the year he died' and that what I was seeing then
would be pushed further and further away from you,
time folding over until we asked ourselves

did we ever not know?

Weren't there always warnings, signs,
dread now shadowing memories, beach vacations,
Easter potlucks: *Not yet. Not yet. But soon.*

And this may make you sad, I know, this forgetting
what should be unforgettable. Because he was not always
destined to die, not like this, but was once alive
and joyful and free of that which finally consumed him.

But, in truth, I am glad for time's betrayal,
its duplicity. For it dulls in us a pain
that once promised to never be dulled, that threatens,
with absolute certainty, to stab forever, merciless.

Eventually, you won't remember the first pain—
not really. You will have lost the surprise that set it ablaze.
Eventually, the scar will ache, but something practiced and forgiving,
like running your hand along a worn blade, its edge

no longer deadly, but there.

Tori Sharpe

The Psychiatrist Imagines Isaac as a Case Study

*Father! The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb
for a burnt offering? God himself will provide the lamb
for a burnt offering, my son.* We walked on together to the land of Moriah.

My father built an altar and laid the wood in order.
Then, it all happened so fast. He grabbed me.
I thought it was a game. He caught my hands with the rope.

Even as he wound it around me, I thought it was in jest.
He lifted me up on top of the firewood. Only then,
did I realize: *I am the burnt offering.*

The long trip was a ruse. He had planned it the whole time.
I tried to break loose. He lashed me down.
The knife's edge partially eclipsed the sun. *He's going to kill me.*

He came in close, his smell like a goat. I saw his eyes, my father's eyes.
He's gone mad. I felt his beard brush my face. I stopped moving.
I was lying still watching my father clench the knife.

I could see myself beneath my father. I could see him over me.
I could see his back as he was about to plunge
down with the full force of the knife.

Apart from feeling cold, it was almost peaceful.
Next, was the hard part. He dropped the knife.
It did not tear into me. I stopped floating above him.

I had no feeling in my arms and legs.
I was shivering and hot. Hot and cold
were the same in the desert. I was thirsty.

My father spied a ram, its horns tangled in a thicket.
He loosened the knots where I had been bound.
He used the rope to tie the ram, the knife for the slaughter.

Blood. Then, fire, burnt wool, burnt flesh, together.
And then my father spoke. He called the place,
The Lord Will Provide. Yes, that was it, *The Lord Will Provide.*

* * *

I heard my father fell down laughing when he found out the great joke
God had played on him. My mother said, *God has brought laughter for me;
everyone who hears will laugh with me.* I was their long-awaited son.

They say my father is a great man; I avoid him. He put his arm on my shoulder,
in a fatherly way, as he used to. Suddenly, I couldn't breathe.
I, who used to be so strong, fainted like a weakling in front of my father.

The problem is, it keeps happening. I cannot see the sun without the knife.
I try to steel myself to it, force myself to take a breath. Again. Again.
I wish he had killed me.

I lie awake in my tent, a watchman. If I drift asleep, I wake up screaming.
I'm afraid, now, and I hate myself for being afraid. I was never like this before.
At night, alone, I weep, like a woman. I am ashamed. What a laughing-stock

I am. *I trusted my father.* I even carried the wood on my back.
My name means, *He laughs.* I am the only one whose name was not changed.
Why? Does God mock me with His laughter? Shall the Lord provide

laughter to my life again?

Patricia Sheppard

Throughout the poem, there are quotations from, rephrasings of and references
to the narrative of Genesis, Chapters 17 & 22, New Revised Standard (NRS).

Flexing for the Glorious

Watch-alarm wakes me in perfect thirds,
disturbing a chord about to be resolved.
I reach across to turn the world off

for a little longer, my dream still vivid
but fragmented, its notes fading, window
fogging over. It has absconded again,

banished itself to some opaque exile,
only a few mementos remain—I store them
against the craft of the ravenous morning:

a house, unknown, yet I knew its design,
a place familiar, yet remote as any star;
you were there, whoever you really are,

and I was there too, but *there* was—where?
The rooms I crossed searching after you,
seeking a voice I couldn't see; the passages

I strode, slowmotion, urgent to arrive—
where? Just as the answer was forming,
its question utterless, just as the dream

intensified, came to its turning—I awoke,
to perfect thirds ... I do not blame the hour,
or the alarm, or the dream's secrecy,

for that, after all, is the preserve of dreams.
But I still can hear the augmented fifth,
on the precipice before those wakening thirds,

ready to lift itself to its keynote chord,
flexing for the glorious major triad—which,
like Sebastian, I would have done anything

to place exactly where it needed to be.

Alex Skovron

The Ferry Boats (P. M. Slight, '57)

That picture, hanging on the bathroom wall, which sat on the mantelpiece of my childhood home for many years—three ferry boats, apparently on collision course, drawn in black ink with the edge of a card, the sea coloured with a transparent green wash. The green has faded to brown over the years, but the ferry boats remain, in all their thumping, smoking, tooting glory. Suddenly, it's 1957 again and I'm crossing Auckland Harbour from the North Shore to the city with my parents. We walk up the gangplank with the other shoppers and the workers. The cabins are crowded, so we sit on the outside, watching the smoke fly over, gulls flapping past, waves breaking across the bow and streaming backwards. My brothers and I throw peanuts for the gulls. Our father takes us for a walk around the boat, ending on the platform above the engine room. Giant brass and steel pistons pump, the furnace door is open, the stokers—black with coal dust from head to foot and dripping sweat—shovel coal into the flames to keep the pressure up. (Once, with my grandfather, an old watersider, I was allowed to stand on a box behind the great wooden wheel and steer the boat, while he swapped yarns with his mates.) At the ferry wharf, impatient workers mount the rail and leap ashore, Gladstone bags in hand, before we have come properly alongside. The boat bumps massively against the bulwarks. A sailor throws thick ropes round bollards, front and back, then lowers the gangplank, with a rattle of chains. We shuffle off the boat among the crowd and walk out of the Ferry Building into 'town'...now traffic streams across the Harbour Bridge into the city, day and night—turbo-charged and climate controlled—but it's not the same, no matter how that green has faded, those memories turned brown, like an old sepia print, like that inexorably fading picture of those ferry boats, so close to colliding on my bathroom wall.

Stephen Smithyman

Lagynos

Two shallow halves joined together:
I can't detect the clay slips
which made a vessel to hold
a litre of wine. From its centre
rises a slender brown mottled neck
or spout eight inches long. Likewise
from its edge there's a handle
parallel to the neck before
it curves to the mouth of the flask.

From overhead it isn't perfect,
the neck not quite in the centre.
An expert could tell at a glance
that it's a reproduction although
a good job of faking has been done
of how two millennia
of the sea's persistent nagging
have worn away glaze and painting.
And it's porous: water, for a rose
I put there to surprise you,
soaked through the base in minutes.

I bought the flask in the museum
in the old part of Budva,
Butuanum under the Romans,
from the Illyrian, Buthoë.
What country is this now? Montenegro.
The old town is narrow alleyways,
boutiques, bars or souvenir shops,
Russian powerboats in the harbour.
I bought the flask because you like
economy of form and you, too,
have a lovely slender neck.

Our three-year old grandson decided
he'd test the laws of gravity
and dropped it. Without neck or handle
it resembled a flying saucer.
I glued the intact pieces with Loctite.
Not nearly as good as new,
but surely a genuine relic
into which you put immortelles,
dried flowers with simple forms.

James Sutherland-Smith

The End of the Affair

So the cat untwists in midair
beneath the apple tree, a blackbird
fluttering backwards from her paws
as she lands eyes vivid with desire,
crouches, wriggles, deliberates, blinks.
So, too, an apple springs unbitten
from your hand to its twig, unripens
from red to green, dwindles to pistil,
before it blossoms, folds into bud.

So, too, the car strikes, tyres then brakes screech,
your father's walking stick flying
to his grasp as he somersaults
to his feet, backs off to his house,
goes inside, floats his coat to a hook, sits
over the years his hair thickening,
darkening, his voice deepening
into laughter until he can catch
and throw you up to where you smile.

So, too, the scar on your thigh,
whose slight ridge I love to touch
with a fingertip, widens
becoming bluish, livid, pink,
minute particles rising to it
from wherever you care to limp
making a scab, an ooze of droplets,
a flow before another's knife
withdraws and heals the jagged tear.

So, too, our lips close on each other's.
So, too, our mouths move apart.
So, too, their separate smiles fade.
So, too, our eyes look askance.
So, too, we step back, turn away.
So, too, our heartbeats decelerate.
So, too, we don't blurt out the words.
So, too, we don't decide to risk it.
So, too, we are never introduced.

James Sutherland-Smith

B-Side

While others listened to hit tunes on 45s,
you always flipped the platter like a pancake
and learned the lyrics on the B-side—
song not as well-loved or well-reviewed,
perhaps even derided by the critics,
 maybe in fact awful,
 but you knew that someday
 there'd be a contest
 and you'd know the answers:

What was on the reverse of *Two-Bit Manchild*?
 Can you sing the chorus?

You'd win points by knowing about
what you didn't love, and might love it a little
because you won points. Like sleeping with the uglier
sister of a cheerleader: It still counts, if you're keeping
score. And the B-side sister always
knows the words to the B-side song.

Even now, with vinyl in vogue again, you're the only person
anybody knows who can sing both sides of the single
which hit the charts with *Muskrat Love*. You've waited
through your youth for a score-keeper to come along
and record your accomplishments, the songs covered
in smelly bars at volume sufficient to account for
the Noise-Induced Hearing Loss you suffer now.

You can't make it seem smart or funny anymore
when you invite your exhausted audience to join
in another round of *Honey Come Love Me*. The girls
you shagged for the record pretend you don't exist.

You've become the forgotten B-side of former lovers
whose hearts weren't as broken as you hoped and they feared,
old friends who look the other way when they see you coming.
A contest was held, after all, but you didn't enter.

Rebecca Timson

Pharmaecological

'Pain is useless to the pained' - Galen

1.

Don't say good men are dead.

You're neither good nor dead.

Much to my chagrin, a man.

Graveside, cluster his darlings (I am but one).

Local brunettes, mostly gone early to seed.

Our vital spirits crave a more ovoid shape,
a smaller water chamber.

Our immunities subdued
by the snake charms of stroking doctors.

You always did prefer the couch to bed.

Just another post-viral afternoon.

Spare me your gilded curiosity.

Serotonin's fucked. Please pass the placebo.

We revel in deceit and the sleep of absent friends.

2.

In that fancy house,

I worked all hours

Saw too many things (what's the use of having eyes
if that's the best they can do)

A girl raving downstairs hair tumbled.
She'd waited a day for coffee.

Maybe someone bewitched her linens
milked all the relics found there.

It's a business, like any other. Tricks work well

for girls with only one good idea, for girls who pen
survivor porn memoirs or clean eating apps.

They've earned their reclusion.

Besides, she felt safer under the table than on it.

He told her a bullet would go right through mild steel, how
a human torso is a feather pillow.

She could make it the most obscene
word in any language: his name.

3.

She ate the flowers and then
was afraid to sleep again.

An open book her knees
consoling rigidity, the printed page
all her remembered afflictions, their weight.

a hewn revolutionist should be lean
a vessel of hollowed virtues

and renounced vanities
stomachs taut as eyelids

a warning in her blood that scalpels
wait with lessening patience.

she moons at unfamiliar doors
faces strangers' interiors

cells of her flesh reject kinship
denying everything human

she may walk anywhere in safety
who hides long invaluable legs

beneath heavy skirts rituals fasten
on her heels as threats recede, but not for long

Lindsay Tuggle

Let the People Still Walk

'serious economic depression gave birth to the Pinnacle Road.'
Michael Sharland, Once Upon A Time.

what did ferns construct?
only selves, stepping on
shoulders of sepia;
while the gums age inward,
marry their rings
to a hundred springs
and thrust out high bouquets,
the ferns wrinkle their bodies
and fur them, loiter with signs
near the bustling creeks and 'wait,'
they say, 'will work for rain.'

all directions, their leaves,
wander as you will. schools
of green fish, waiting in line
for thin soup. in poor years,
a begging tableau; dripping
pennies spill through
pockets of moss, even as
the ferns trickle downstream,
kissing and alone; content
with the stretch low.

for us: a long, flat mantelpiece
lodged above the fires. we
will be ornaments, earning
our own boots, our scars.
others will flatten the camber
with wheels, but we feel
the high air judge. reach
for the sun, break through

the canopy of scree;
will you be scorched?
a yell of triumph is
a kind of burning.
'one day,' you say,
'we will all be as tall
as a mountain.'

Ben Walter

The Wonder of Fulfilment

our suit bag bodies drag on their coat hooks
in the dry cleaners' autumn wardrobes.

we scarf down our smoked fish residuum,

considering teeth to be the naked parts
of skeletons we should closet in our hearts.

most of us are scared if we're honest.

the body suits the teeth, but honest autumn
scarfs our hearts in the smoldering closet.

part-naked skeletons tear our skins apart.

we can only imagine what they're thinking
in sinking their naked parts in the fruit

of our flesh. our wire coat-hangers are bent

into punctuation: open-mouthed questions
near-naked under their body bags.

and our coat tails wag in all seasons.

cloak rooms remain chambers of exchange
and smoke yells fire from our crowded mouths.

fish bone slivers never stood a chance,

and in the end it appears we need to be naked
the iceberg tips of our skeletons to speak.

Mitchell Welch

Nine Tweets From the Seraphs

As Mohammed said to the suicide bomber in Paradise: Holy Shi'ite! Oh snap! ✨ the bomber responded: At least I'm not a *piece* of Shi'ite anymore¹ · 1:51 PM – 8 Sep 13 via web · Embed this Tweet

@sambrownwitt: You who tweet tweet against the dying of the pixelated light from the thick oily eye of the super-hurricane. ✨ a storm is comin' · 10:26 PM – 14 Sep 13 via the music of the spheres via tesla coils · Embed this Tweet

Quietly, from the source of Job's wind, a newborn's hand unfolds like the Aluetian shield-fern: which, naturally, is endangered · 10:53 PM – 14 Sep 13 via the carbon · Embed this Tweet

That's how we visit: ichor in the veins, missing arms of a goddess, the Higgs-field, in the thoughts of Lazarus—Dodos, Black Rhino, the lips of Al-Husein's severed head, Judas, the kiss · 11:57 PM – 14 Sep 13 via the blood · Embed this Tweet

For there's ever onely one reader as if every point ✨ particle was made of sunbeams · 11:04 PM – 14 Sep 13 via the carbon · Embed this Tweet

Each one had 6 wings: with 2 he covered his face, with 2 he covered his feet, with 2 he flew, ✨ Passenger Pigeons darkened the sky · 10:50 PM – 14 Sep 13 via the word · Embed this Tweet

✨ from the epicenter of the blast, one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal. ✨ he touched my mouth with it. Particle: Send me Lord · 10:48 PM – 14 Sep 13 via the fires · Embed this Tweet

¹Which raises questions. You think your body is returned to you when you die? You really think we're made whole? · 10:26 PM – 14 Sep 13 via the live coal pressed to the prophet's lips

Sam Witt

biographies

Judges

BILLY COLLINS has published ten collections of poetry, including *Questions About Angels*, *The Art of Drowning*, *Sailing Alone Around the Room*, *Nine Horses*, *The Trouble with Poetry and Other Poems*, *Ballistics*, *Horoscopes for the Dead* and *Picnic, Lightning*. His two most recent books, *Aimless Love: New and Selected Poems 2003–2013* and *The Rain in Portugal*, are New York Times bestsellers. Collins has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. He served as United States Poet Laureate (2001-03) and New York State Poet (2004-06). He was recently inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

ELIZABETH CAMPBELL was born in Melbourne in 1980. She has been the recipient of many prizes including the Vincent Buckley Prize, the Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship and an Australia Council residency in Rome. Her books, *Letters To The Tremulous Hand* and *Error*, are published by John Leonard Press.

VAHNI CAPILDEO was born in Trinidad and studied Old Norse at Oxford. Her publications include *Measures of Expatriation* (Carcenet), winner of the Forward Poetry Prizes Best Collection award, 2016; *Simple Complex Shapes* (Shearsman); and *Utter* (Peepal Tree), inspired by her former job as a lexicographer at the Oxford English Dictionary.

SUDESH MISHRA's fifth volume of poetry, *The Lives of Coat Hangers*, came out with Otago University Press in 2016. He is Professor of English at University of the South Pacific.

Poets

DAVID ADÈS is the author of the chapbook *Only the Questions Are Eternal* and the collections *Mapping the World* and *Afloat in Light*. His poetry is widely published particularly in Australia and the U.S. He won the inaugural University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize 2014.

CARLOS AFABLE is a deadbeat and poet from Baguio City, the Philippines. He was a finalist for the 2015 Maningning Miclat poetry awards. He divides his time between his hometown and Quezon City, the Philippines. He is looking for a job. afablecarlos@gmail.com

CLAIRE ÅKEBRAND's poetry has appeared in the *Manchester Review*, *BOAAT*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. Her debut poetry collection, *What Was Left of the Stars*, came out with Serpent Club Press in summer 2017. Her first novel, *The Field Is White*, is forthcoming with Kernpunkt Press in fall 2017.

ART ALLEN is a poet from Manchester, living with his wife in Amsterdam. His debut pamphlet, published by Green Bottle Press, was selected as a Semi-Finalist for the 2016 Claudia Emerson Poetry Pamphlet Award and Highly Commended in the Fool for Poetry Chapbook Competition 2016. His poetry appears in *The Bombay Review*, *The Amsterdam Quarterly*, *The Irish Literary Review*, and elsewhere.

JOSH BELL is the author of *No Planets Strike* and *Alamo Theory*. He is Senior Lecturer at Harvard University and the recipient of a 2017 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

SAUL HILLEL BENJAMIN, to his five-year-old son's and his own exhaustion, continues to delight airlines by living in Winnipeg Canada and variously in the USA. Before his course at University of Manitoba he was involved in conflict resolution work. *At Summer's End: Theme & Variations and A Sextet for Voices* is in the hands of publishers.

ERIC BERLIN's poems have won the National Poetry Prize and The Ledge Poetry Prize. He is researching the poetics of stand-up and the linguistics of laughter, and teaches online for The Poetry School. His first book of poems is currently nearing completion.

JUDITH BEVERIDGE is the author of six collections of poetry, most recently *Devadatta's Poems* (Giramondo Publishing) which was short-listed for the NSW

and Qld Premiers' poetry prizes and the Prime Minister's Poetry Award. Her new and selected poems will appear in 2018.

PAULA BOHINCE lives in Pennsylvania, where she grew up. Her most recent collection is *Swallows and Waves* (Sarabande, 2016). Her poems have appeared in *The Australian*, *Australian Book Review*, and *Island*, as well as magazines in the US and UK.

JOHN CAREY is a Sydney poet, ex-teacher of French and Latin and a sometime actor. The latest of his four poetry collections is *One Lip Smacking* (Picaro Press, 2013).

NINA CARROLL MD now is choosing the creative life of leisure and pleasure at her garden and home 'Swans' Pond', and sailing adventures in the Bahamas with her partner. She confects poetry from the myriads of fragments that collected while she was a gynecologist in Boston.

JOE DOLCE is a songwriter, poet, and performer. His poetry has appeared in *The Best Australian Poems* 2014 and 2015. He was shortlisted for the 2014 Newcastle Poetry Prize and was winner of the 25th Launceston Poetry Cup. He is on the staff of the Australian Institute of Music. His forthcoming book, *On Murray's Run, 150 poems-lyrics, selected by Les Murray*, will be published by Ginninderra Press in October 2017.

JANE DRAYCOTT's latest collection *The Occupant* (2016) is a UK Poetry Book Society Recommendation. Previous collections include *Over* (2009), nominated for the T. S. Eliot Prize, and a translation of the medieval dream-elegy *Pearl* (2011), winner of a Stephen Spender Prize for Translation. She teaches at Oxford and Lancaster Universities.

ANNA EVAS lives in Virginia.

DIANE FAHEY is the author of twelve poetry collections. She has won various poetry awards including the Newcastle Poetry Prize, the Wesley Michel Wright Award, and, for *Sea Wall and River Light*, the ACT government's Judith Wright Poetry Award. Her most recent book is *A House by the River*.

ALISON FLETT is originally from Scotland where her poetry collection *Whit Lassyz Ur Inty* was shortlisted for the Saltire Book of the Year Award. She has performed her work on national television and radio and at literary festivals in Britain and Europe. She is poetry editor for Transnational Literature.

DIANE GLANCY is professor emerita at Macalester College in Minnesota. Her recent books are *Fort Marion Prisoners and the Trauma of Native Education*, non-fiction, *Report to the Department of the Interior*, poetry, *The Servitude of Love*, short stories, *Mary Queen of Bees*, novella, and *No Word for the Sea*, novel.

MARK GRINYER's poetry has appeared in *The Kansas Quarterly*, *The Literary Review*, *The Spoon River Quarterly*, *The Pacific Review*, *Perigee*, *Cordite* and elsewhere. His chapbook, *Approaching Poetry*, will be published soon. He has a PhD in English, and in addition to writing and teaching, has worked in the Aerospace industry.

DEBI HAMILTON is a Melbourne writer, poet and psychologist. She was joint winner of the Newcastle Poetry Prize in 2014, and her second poetry collection, *The Sly Night Creatures of Desire*, was published by Hybrid Publishers in 2016.

MAEVE HENRY grew up in the north east of England and now lives in Oxford. She is an award winning children's writer, and her poetry has been published in various print and on-line magazines. She works in hospital administration and is married with three grown up children.

ANDY JACKSON is a poet, currently based in Castlemaine, who has featured at literary events and arts festivals in Australia, India, USA and Ireland. His most recent collection, *Music our bodies can't hold* (Hunter Publishers, 2017), consists of portrait poems of other people with Marfan Syndrome.

NICOLE JOHNSON's poems have appeared in *Chelsea*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Antietam Review*, *William and Mary Review*, among other publications. She received her MFA from the University of Michigan and has been a participant at The Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in both Vermont and Sicily. Currently she teaches writing at Art Center, Pasadena.

JAKE KENNEDY is the author of three trade collections of poetry. He has just recently published (with OPR Books) an entirely made-up biography of NYC poet-architect Madeline Gins entitled *Made Line Sing*.

WES LEE lives in New Zealand. Her latest collection *Body, Remember* will be launched in 2017 by Eyewear Publishing. Her poems have appeared in *Westerly*, *Cordite*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *New Writing Scotland*. She has won a number of awards for her writing, most recently, The Saboteur Awards Best Anthology 2017.

AMY LERMAN is Residential English Faculty at Mesa Community College in Arizona, winner of the 2015 Art Young Memorial Award, and second place

winner in 2014 *Prime Number Magazine* award. Her poems have been published in *Euphony*, *Garbanzo*, *ABZ*, *Generations*, *Gila River Review*, and *Stories That Need To Be Told*.

MIN LIM is an undergraduate at Yale-NUS College. She is the winner of the National Poetry Competition 2016 (Singapore). Her works have appeared in *Softblow*, *Breakwater Review*, and *Eunoia Review*, among others. She writes at: <http://minlim.com/>

ROBERT LUMSDEN lives in South Australia. He has published fiction, literary criticism, and poetry in periodicals, and is at work on a series of novels, three of them completed. A book on the aesthetics of reader response is in process.

GLENN MCPHERSON is a Sydney based poet and teacher with a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Sydney. Poetry has always held a spell over him and he is passionate about promoting it in a world that needs poetry more than ever.

RACHAEL MEAD is a South Australian poet, short story writer and arts reviewer. She is the author of *The Sixth Creek* (Picaro Press, 2013) and her next poetry collection is forthcoming with UWAP in 2018. You can find more of her work at rachaelmead.com.

AUDREY MOLLOY was born in Dublin and raised in County Wexford, Ireland. She lives in Sydney and works as a medical writer and editor. Her poetry has appeared in *Australian Poetry Anthology*, *Cordite* and *Overland*. She was short-listed for the 2016 Judith Wright Poetry Prize for New and Emerging Poets.

OAK MORSE is a poet, speaker and teacher. His work has appeared in *Underground*, *Pulp Literature*, and *Fourth and Sycamore*. An ambassador for 'cluttering', a speech disorder diagnosis which he has worked tirelessly to overcome, Oak lives in Lawrenceville, Georgia where he works on his poetry collection, *When the Tongue Goes Bad*.

ANNE-MARIE NEWTON lives in Perth, Western Australia. Her poetry and prose have appeared in numerous Australian journals, most recently *Southerly* and *Cordite*, and has been broadcast on Australian national radio. She holds a PhD in Philosophy/Cultural Studies and has worked in a range of occupations including academic, educator, and mother.

LOUIS NTHENDA, born in Malawi, schooled in Malawi, Zimbabwe and at St Antony's College, Oxford; has worked in various jobs in Zambia, Nigeria, Hong

Kong and Japan; long listed in the 2015 Oxford Brookes International Poetry Contest; his poetry has appeared in *Orbis* (UK). He has published mostly non-fiction.

DAMEN O'BRIEN is a Queensland poet and works in an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle company. He was joint winner of the 2017 Peter Porter Poetry Prize. He has also been successful in the Yeats Poetry Prize, the KSP Poetry Award and Ipswich Poetry Festival. Damen is published in *Cordite*, *Mascara*, *Verity La* and *Stylus Lit*.

MARK O'FLYNN'S novel *The Last Days of Ava Langdon* was a finalist in the 2017 Miles Franklin Award. He has published six collections of poetry, most recently *Shared Breath*, a chapbook from Hope Street Press. He lives in the Blue Mountains.

OLGA PAVLINOVA OLENICH is a Melbourne writer. Her memoirs have been included in *Best Australian Humorous Writing* (MUP, 2008) and *The Best Travel Writing Volume 11*. (Travelers' Tales Series, Solis House 2016). Her poetry appears in various anthologies including *Dazzled: The UC Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize 2014*.

GEMMA PARKER is an Australian poet recently published in the tenth edition of *Award Winning Australian Writing*. She has lived in London, Paris and Hanoi and now teaches English at the University of Adelaide. She has just completed a two-week residency working on a manuscript of poetry at Bundanon, NSW.

COLETTE PARRY is a student of communications and music at Simmons College in Boston; her poetry is rooted in the Pacific Northwest's mountains and temperate rainforests. She is also a graphic designer, singer, martial artist, social(ish) dancer, and Sidelines literary magazine coeditor. See more at parrycj.wixsite.com/portfolio.

DANIELLE POULIOT teaches Creative Writing in Albany, NY, where she lives with her husband and two children.

JACQUELINE SAPHRA is an award-winning poet whose latest collection, *All My Mad Mothers*, was published by Nine Arches Press in May 2017. *A Bargain with the Light: poems after Lee Miller* will be out from Hercules Editions in September 2017.

JOHN A. SCOTT is the author of sixteen books of poetry and prose. His major experimental novel, *N*, was shortlisted for the 2014 Victorian Premier's Prize and chosen as one of the *Guardian's* Books of the Year. He is currently working on a series of almost non-fictional poems, 'Shorter Lives'.

DAWN SEABROOK is a twenty-four-year-old writer published both in Australia and the UK. She was also shortlisted in the inaugural University of Canberra Health Poetry Prize. You can find her on social media @Dawn_Seabrook.

DONNA SHARP is proudly entering her Grumpy Old Woman life-phase and enjoys the added perspective this gives to her writings in poetry, Older Women's Fiction and Young Adult Fiction. She likes the direct approach and a little touch of irony or perverse humour woven between the lines always tickles her fancy.

TORI SHARPE received her master's degree in Creative Writing from The University of Texas and her PhD in Creative Writing from The University of North Texas. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetry Daily*, *The Hopkins Review*, *Blackbird*, *The Southwest Review*, and other journals. She teaches at Arkansas Tech University.

PATRICIA SHEPPARD has an MFA from the University of Iowa. She was Visiting Scholar at the Women's Studies Resource Center, Brandeis University, in 2017. Her poems have appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Iowa Review* and *The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation*, and her chapbook, *If You Would Love Me*, will be published by Finishing Line Press in 2018.

ALEX SKOVRON's sixth and most recent collection, *Towards the Equator: New & Selected Poems* (2014), was shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. A volume of short stories, *The Man who Took to his Bed*, is forthcoming from Puncher & Wattmann. He lives in Melbourne.

STEPHEN SMITHYMAN is a retired school teacher, living in Melbourne. His poems and short stories have won numbers of awards and appeared in a range of publications. He won the Victorian Cancer Council Outstanding Poem Award, 2011, Poetica Christi Prize, 2013, and the Glen Phillips Poetry Prize, 2016.

JAMES SUTHERLAND-SMITH lives and works in Slovakia. He has published six collections of his own poetry, the most recent being *Mouth*, in 2014. He has translated a number of Slovak poets and Serbian poets. Selections of Ján Gavura's and Mária Ferenčuhová's will be published shortly.

REBECCA TIMSON has worked as a middle school teacher, wildlife biologist, freelance journalist and ski school director. Several of her plays have been produced in youth and community theaters. In support of her current focus on poetry, she has been awarded writing residencies in the Czech Republic and Germany.

LINDSAY TUGGLE is a Sydney based poet and scholar. Her first collection of poems, *Calenture*, is forthcoming with Cordite Books (2018). She is the author

of *The Afterlives of Specimens: Mourning, Medicine and Whitman's Civil War* (University of Iowa Press, 2017). She has been a fellow at the Library of Congress, the Mütter Museum, and the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

SALLY VAN DOREN, a poet and artist, is the author of three poetry collections, *Promise* (LSU Press 2017), *Possessive* (2012) and *Sex at Noon Taxes* (2008). She lives in New York and St. Louis and posts daily excerpts from her ongoing poem, *The Sense Series*, via Instagram@sallyvandoren.

BEN WALTER's lyrical writing has been widely published in Australian journals, including *Meanjin*, *Southerly* and *Island*. He was the winner of the 2016 John Shaw Neilson Poetry Prize, and runner-up in *Overland's* VU Short Story Prize. His most recent book is *Conglomerate*, published as part of the Lost Rocks Project.

MITCHELL WELCH is a writer, editor and non-profit administrator from Brisbane. He currently lives in Melbourne, and has published work in a range of literary journals.

SAM WITT is the winner of the Katherine Nason Bakeless Prize and the author of *Everlasting Quail* (UPNE, 2001) and *Sunflower Brother* (Cleveland State University Press, 2006). He has taught at Harvard University, University of Missouri-Kansas City, and at Whitman College. He edited *Devouring the Green* (Jaded Ibis Books, 2014). His third book, *Little Domesday Clock*, is forthcoming from Carolina Wren Press.

IPSI :: CCCR

The International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI) is part of the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research, Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra. IPSI conducts research related to poetry, and publishes and promulgates the outcomes of this research internationally. The Institute also publishes poetry and interviews with poets, as well as related material, from around the world. Publication of such material takes place in IPSI's online journal *Axon: Creative Explorations* (<http://www.axonjournal.com.au/>) and through other publishing vehicles, such as *Axon Elements*. IPSI's goals include working—collaboratively, where possible—for the appreciation and understanding of poetry, poetic language and the cultural and social significance of poetry. The institute also organises symposia, seminars, readings and other poetry-related activities and events.

The Centre for Creative and Cultural Research (CCCR) is IPSI's umbrella organisation and brings together staff, adjuncts, research students and visiting fellows who work on key challenges within the cultural sector and creative field. A central feature of its research concerns the effects of digitisation and globalisation on cultural producers, whether individuals, communities or organisations.

