

silence



THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA  
VICE-CHANCELLOR'S INTERNATIONAL POETRY PRIZE 2019

# s i l e n c e

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Vice-Chancellor's  
International Poetry Prize

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*Edited by Shane Strange*



UNIVERSITY OF  
**CANBERRA**

INTERNATIONAL POETRY  
STUDIES INSTITUTE

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## Vice-Chancellor's foreword

The University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize is now six years old. It attracts a wide array of entries from excellent poets worldwide and has opened up conduits and connections between many poets around the world by showcasing and valuing the poetry they are writing. Every year's anthology reveals new poetic surprises and wonders, sometimes from well-known poets and sometimes from poets who have published relatively little. The prize is not only a significant international initiative; but it reaches into diverse and rich, and often multilingual, literary and cultural communities across the globe. This year the poets who submitted work to the Prize are located in regions as far-flung as Bulgaria and Barbados, Kazakhstan and South Korea.

The judges, too, are both international and multicultural. This brings to the process a heightened awareness of language and culture, and of how poetry operates in its many different contexts. For the 2019 Prize, more than 800 entries were received from 41 countries; judges Kei Miller (Jamaica), Tricia Dearborn (Australia) and Paul Munden (UK) read all of these entries and chose a longlist, bringing highly refined poetic sensibilities to a difficult task. At the end of this process they selected the best six poems: a winner, a runner-up, and four shortlisted poems. Judging is an unenviable task, particularly when entries are very diverse and of a high quality, and I thank all three judges for their perceptive critical responses to so many poems, and for their sheer hard work. The University of Canberra is fortunate to be able to work with such fine writers.

This anthology contains a wide range of poems. Some are fairly traditional in their technique; some are experimental. This is one of the features of a Prize that values poetry written in various ways and from a wide range of contemporary perspectives. At a time when the world is facing significant challenges centred on climate change and social and political instability, poets provide complex, sometimes chastening and often marvellous responses to what they know and experience.

The University of Canberra is strongly committed to poetry, and the way it enriches and enlivens national and international cultures, building bridges between people and celebrating the value of complexity. Research into poetry conducted by the University's International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI) continues to contribute the worldwide understandings of the significance and value of poetry everywhere – in the past, now, and into the future. I invite readers to enjoy this fine anthology.

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

# Judges' report

This year marked a change in the judging process, which had hitherto relied on three longlist judges, each reading a third of the submissions, and a head judge choosing the shortlist and winners from a much reduced bulk. This year, all three judges read everything, and then faced the difficult task of agreeing the final results.

It was a fascinating process; even the longlisting captured surprisingly little overlap of opinion, but that is perhaps an endorsement of the new process, in terms of ensuring that good poems were not overlooked.

'Big' poems made themselves heard, as ever, but we were equally receptive to small, quieter poems that staked their claim on a prize in very different ways. The final shortlist, which was highly debated, represents, we believe, a real diversity of poetic approaches. And there were other poems that might have been added, if the rules had not restricted us to six.

What persuaded us, in the end, of the winner and runner-up was their spirit of adventure; they are brave, tackling their subjects entirely on their own terms, and with panache. They encountered a degree of resistance in some of our readings, but that proved to be a strength: they weren't necessarily 'easy'; they won our admiration on repeated reading, which is perhaps what a poem most wants, and – in the case of a really good one – deserves.

*Kei Miller, Tricia Dearborn, Paul Munden*

Winner

# Insomniac at the ice shack

I left my little home, its lantern and stove, magazines  
and radio, and stepped out,  
dressed in drownable layers of wool and rubber, cotton underclothes  
like a newborn's home-going swaddle,  
dressed, in truth, like a homeless person, like my father  
in the depths of his shame, trembling  
like a caught creature when he returned from his benders,  
big-eyed, amazed.

How I crept across the long, pearlescent table  
to unsheathe my saw, and first draw in the snow a circle with the blade's tip  
like the toe pick of an ice skate, shivering further  
when its teeth hit the water, the solemn slosh unsprung  
turning instantly to crystals.

Moonlight dove into that emptiness, and I  
lowered my line after it, no green thing visible, no Spring,  
save for the neon Roman numerals on my Timex, which I thought often  
of unhooking and launching into one gorge  
or another, following 'the call of the void,' and following that  
with my eyeglasses, my wedding ring.

To flex the fillet knife now, to fill a sack with gill and gut,  
the steamy rush from a fish's last lust before it calms and accepts  
the fatal air, completely, to end its suffering,  
is to be the god my father was.

The reel clicks its inches as the sinker quickens,  
and the hook's barbs (no escaping) become the medicinal thistle he drank  
the penultimate summer, as tea,  
to heal his far gone liver. How faint the purple  
tips of burdock, boiled and strained  
in sickly well water. The jaggedness and lurch of those days  
was insane, the wreck of him, ghostly in the brackish,  
bitter in-between.

With no friend but vigilance, I watch  
for a thin spasm, for what is hidden, weed-stowed,  
to rise. On my overturned crate, with my hands nearly empty,  
the Milky Way's a toxic spill, but pretty,  
and the lake creaks like a deathbed  
above an assembly of walleye and perch, schools  
of gliding symmetry, arguments and dispersals, ultimately  
reuniting in wholeness, beauty.

The last summer, when he was permanently drunk,  
I stood along the highway with him and a dozen strangers, car doors  
ajar, as if pulled by an alien beam, seeing the starlings swerve,  
and felt my soul quiver, and I looked at him  
with such love it was almost horror,  
and turned from his jaundiced face and grin  
to a girl in the ditch, playing as her mother took a drag,  
and fixed on the daisy chain she was making: braiding the stems, arranging  
the damp, white petals, the velveteen (never again)  
yellow centers, and tried to become her, her impulse to make  
something of the waiting, the hours.

*Paula Bohince* USA



Runner-up



## The owl inside

It was the owl who called me outside.  
Boobook, if I know my owls. And I know my owls.  
Nothing too mystical about it;  
this was a reminder to take out the bins.  
Green bin. And regular. I near sprained my ankle  
dragging the too-heavy grass clippings up the too-steep drive.  
In the dark. I terrified the possum with my clatter. We jumped.  
His landing more graceful than mine. He wasn't hauling a bin.  
In fact, it was numinous: scorpion moon in a cloud ring,  
Bleeding out into the mottled sky like thoughts through an  
empty evening. If no one else felt the connection: owl, bin, ring,  
then the revelation is solely mine. And that is as it should be.  
Afterwards, I stood statue still  
in the small woods behind the solemn house;  
my chest too bare in this near-cold,  
absorbing moonlight like a witch.  
I sought to record the sound of the owl  
to play back to you later –  
once I had caught it, I realised I never would.

*Ivy Ireland* AUSTRALIA



# Shortlist



## At Moeraki

Midweek. Midwinter. The village  
is pared back. At dusk

the houses on the hill go black.  
Only here and there a window shines

and a slippered lighthouse keeper shuffles  
between chair and cupboard, bath and bed.

In the bay the fishing boats lilt at anchor.  
Beneath their hulls the ocean shifts in sleep.

Ale-bellied, full, we take our tavern talk outside,  
searching for it on the stone stoop beneath the stars.

Still they are lost, the words we want  
for that thing on the wall inside and what it did

although they knock and knock, these words,  
behind the tongue. The boat ramp stinks of brine.

The moon rises slow and golden from the headland.  
Old eye. The dock is matted with weed and slime.

Queen's shilling. Shanghai. Press gang. Cosh.  
The words we've been casting for are caught.

Deckloads of the disappeared come up now on the hook.  
The bay's awash with them, awash.

*Sue Wootton* NEW ZEALAND/AOTEAROA

## The sail-maker's wife

She knows that the work of lungs is more necessary than that of a heart, or the blacksmith's forge. It is the unfolding that matters: how a letter comes apart once untied, how tissue unpacks itself and swells within the thoracic cavity. This is you keep a woman alive the longest. This is how you float

in dark places. In any given girl, there is a vast ocean, curving blackly around the hip-bones, rising to break white against coral bleach teeth. Her smile is strung with wreck until she can taste the survivors on her tongue, a dozen men who heeled towards the lighthouse and fell down at its knees.

The sail-maker's wife knows how to break her own feet, just so, on the rocks and still swim, how to bleed the cold sea a new hot current. She knows how to take on water and still rise with the tide. Once she flew herself a banner into the remaking breeze; once she was a billethead, scabbed with salt.

She thinks the shore is no place for a gull whose mate is yet skimming the water, and that vivisection destroys but unpicking rebirths. She can unseam an old pleated skirt for a bolt of easy cloth; she can unweave a shirt for stitches. She has taught herself how to sew for ships and flying knots.

It takes practice to unfold the lobes, two in the left, three on the right – undoing God's origami is its own art. She has rehearsed the jump, spinifex grass slicing her ankles, topsail streaming, hope-in-heaven squared for flight. She knows now, when the time comes, she will not flinch away from the dive.

*Madeleine Dale* AUSTRALIA

# Selfie w/cathedral, Eurydice Cameo, from an epigraph drawn at random from a hat

– *Blow Out the Black Sky*

if it's not too much trouble,  
if it's not too much to ask,  
when you're done with it, I mean,  
and the moon, you know, that billiard cue  
with the sign that says: 'Sponsored By?'  
blow that out, too.

Blow out the black sky,  
if you would, and bring in the blue.

The Party Members from Chengdu  
have most of all the money in the world.  
They tour the museum of Europe,  
kicking the tires. But the museum of Europe  
is closed for lunch. What to do  
but wait for the 13th Century to return,  
while 'the markets' flicker on a screen.

Meanwhile, zucchini flowers: flour-dusted and fried.

You eat them with your hands, amid the smell  
of sweet smoke and cheese,  
the sun warm on your arm

and Eurydice  
sits down next to you on a bench and doesn't speak,  
lights a cigarette, blows out the match, and looks  
at the view of fields across an Etruscan valley  
thick with gurgling agriculture, and waits for you to make  
a smart remark. And sometimes there's nothing to say.

The 13th Century depicts this as a dove,  
because you have to put *something* up there,  
I guess, and called it many things – Holy Ghost,  
the slender reed that becomes the hand of God,  
depending on the artist and the period.



## The swallows are chasing

And the swallows are chasing God  
midair, skimming the green pools,  
edging the cliffs. The swallows are  
chasing God, building their nests  
in the O of his name. The swallows  
are chasing God, and we must chase  
the swallows as far as our flat feet  
and wingless backs will allow: around  
the fat cottonwood, over the gravel,  
across the bridge that spans El Rito,  
past the Bear Spotted Here notice, down  
to the tip of the massive ruby sky.

*Kimberly Williams* USA



# Longlist



# I can feel the world about to fall

off the edge of a precipice.

The hermit crab makes  
its home in a plastic

doll's head. The swan  
has gathered grocery  
sacks as nest  
to lay her empty eggs.

An orca carried her

dead calf above  
the waterline for seventeen days

because her grief  
is deeper than the Pacific.

I know you don't want

this poem void of dancing  
bears and circuses.

You want cotton candy,  
train rides around

the zoological park. You want  
elephant rides, carnival tunes, dogs who  
never bite or bark.

*Tayve Neese* USA

# To a hedgehog, as slice specimen

*'The patented Tissue Tracing Technique after Dr C. von Horst makes it possible to produce slice specimens of less than 0.1 mm in thickness.'*

Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt

May you be sliced  
thinner than corn silk  
till your innards glow.

May your quills in cross-  
section grow thick  
as thatched grass on a hill.

May your spine curve  
a segmented worm. May your  
stomach crumple to leaf.

May the pale circles  
of your sweet intestines  
pebble the ground.

So let your good bladder  
swell a puffball  
the ancient colour of vellum.

Your rectum petrify,  
a neat black plug  
of fertile mud,

likewise the old blood  
that stoppers  
all your snail-dark places.

May you hang thin  
as a snake's excoriated skin  
left in a tree,

thin beyond the beating  
of boys' boots and sticks,  
beyond car wheels, bricks,

thinner than weather.  
May the brief storage  
of your body      untether

like fine rain blown  
in sheets across landscape  
letting the light

pass through.

*Debbie Lim* AUSTRALIA

## Tasso – Fondènèg, Haïti

A baby-faced *restavek* gripped a machete  
the length of my arm and, in a single neat

stroke, severed the head of a goat. Two  
other *restaveks* strung the carcass by its

hind legs while the youngest drained blood  
from its neck into a silver bowl. Their blades

pared fur that peeled as easily  
as my husband and I pulled back our sheets

last night where we laid, kept awake by the crying  
of what we thought to be a colicky

baby. It was actually this animal –  
waa'ing and baa'ing, aware of its fate –

to be stripped, sliced, separated from its heart  
and lungs; its insides doused with water. Later

when the *restaveks* served us browned pieces  
of goat resting on its bed of rice, I did not think

of those expired eyes, but rather of how I live  
in New Jersey where I purchase meat

neatly shrouded in plastic and not here,  
as one of the workers, *restaveks*,

who have to cleave, gut, maim, wipe brows  
damp with sweat and clots, and fry meat

they will not be permitted to taste.

*Sakinah Hofler* USA

# Naming the Animals

*for Deborah Bird Rose*

## I

*...we already turn the young child  
around and force it to see form  
backwards, not the Open that  
is so deep in the animal's gaze.*

Rilke

In my daughter's first book of animals  
each page presents a cabinet of curiosities,  
an odd archipelago of creatures – lion, wombat,  
dinosaur, dolphin – preserved in a sterile white sea  
and keeping a polite distance from one another  
like good Englishmen. Abstracted  
from forests and mountains  
a gorilla in purple-spotted overalls  
does a funny dance, waving a banana  
as a toy rattle. Without herd or waterhole  
an elephant spouts a shower over its hind and  
grins like a smuggler who's landed a deal.  
The leaping silver body of a dolphin  
hangs like a horseshoe on a bare wall.  
Caught in a corner a clownfish perdures  
apart from anemone and family.  
All appear equally happy in habitats  
sparser than the cruellest of zoos.  
Is this the way to introduce their names,  
isolate as a kangaroo frozen by headlights?  
Would it invite confusion to illustrate  
an insect's resemblance to a pattern of twigs,  
a flock of geese flying as a unified body,  
fish scales scintillating with the sunlit sea,  
the face of a giraffe genuflecting at a pond,  
reflected with a halo of foliage and sky?

*...the dance became transformative. No longer was it an enactment of the powers of life, but rather it inhabited those highly charged powers.*

Deborah Bird Rose

But even this would remain a mute object,  
 the animals' static shapes to point at  
 and 'animations' – lacking true distance  
 for imagination's leap, metamorphoses –  
 feature bratty children with squeaky voices  
 only in animal costumes. How far we've departed  
 from the corroboree, dancing the emu,  
 dancing the crocodile, children  
 learning through imitation  
 to walk the emu walk, peck  
 with a hand and an arm turned neck,  
 becoming the animal in human guise.  
 Incubating in the larynx, the name then hatched  
 from the child's mouth – like face paint  
 carefully daubed by a parent and the first sounding  
 note of the song – potent with the whole emu dance.

*Luke Fischer* AUSTRALIA

## The careless shore

That terrible indifference  
which expends itself  
on cold sand, on the  
caked calves of lifesavers,  
that boils its energies in  
churning the sand,  
removing the marks of  
footprints, maple leaf  
seagull prints  
terminating into air,  
a child's question marks  
flung into the water,  
the following constellation  
of a dog's claws.

So like the careless  
shifting in the dark gut  
of the universe which  
takes a smut snowball  
of rock and ice and  
flings it at the Earth:  
that brutal disregard  
of consequence.

The lifesaver works  
for the hours of minutes  
at breath and pause  
while a silent crowd gathers  
and the waves pound  
their apathy and erase  
the boy from the beach.

Long after the world ends  
like a rock hurled  
out of an empty sky,  
the waves are still rewriting  
the pristine sand.

*Damen O'Brien* AUSTRALIA

## Crossing the Sun

All that is true at once:  
sea ice melting close by while  
we fall in love. How leaves,  
also falling, now reveal  
Myna birds, exiting branches  
as though they, too, are  
discarded fronds. Diving down,  
returning – towards what –  
as though anything could  
remain of what was. Illusion  
pervades this place, leaving  
nothing – everything –  
but this endless *trace* inside,  
the yearning to make it material.  
The apparition sounds:  
major fifths chasing  
minor sevenths,  
intoning endlessly,  
looped through  
struggling synapses.  
The mind cannot know  
where to put this, only  
the numinous body knows;  
and not fully then.

*Ivy Ireland* AUSTRALIA

# An unstoppable force meets an immovable object

At the roof of the Rockies is the watershed  
of America, the great divide,

where you can stand astride  
the continental split, can gob your spit

(each gene-coded cell of it) one hawk to east  
then west – then watch as each

begins its slow  
globular journey towards opposing waters:

Pacific – deep, entrenched  
and quarrelling fire; Atlantic –

dogged wrecker of ships, beating grey  
determination on its coasts.

This is how a body can be pulled  
in two directions:

my mother, newborn and uprooted  
to a hospital crib,

her parents' marriage  
gone to tectonic drift

and both her grandmothers warm  
colliding fronts from either side.

They say this mountain was a man  
once, who wished to go on forever

and was granted. A strong  
desire phrased badly –

though I too have wished  
to be landscape in a foreign age,  
  
to be cribbed in whole forests of life,  
to be more than enough,  
  
to undergo  
the conflicting tug  
  
of oceans, take heart  
from their fierce competitive love.

*Katie Hale* UK

# Border Separation

*June 2018–present*

Stuff the lilac back into bud,  
wring its plump trumpet until  
milk gutters down the overfed

spike. Drain each strawberry  
of its blush, and hang the sun  
on a hook in a far closet.

No more music, cut the radio. Its  
spitting volts, unfry, and coil all cords.  
Sweep shimmy, shake, bass flooding

us with dank drubbing. In Las Cruces  
a statue weeps trophy-colored oil  
but for all our scans and graphs,

our casual laughter, no one wonders  
why she's crying. Any almanac can  
tell we've got it coming. They say

the great horned owl swoops in  
silent as a ghost, its voluminous  
fringe scissoring wind, swallowing

gusts up into each quilted wing.  
Maybe stealth is no more than fear  
confused by talons. We'll debate it

as black holes of philosophical size  
serenade us, grinding out universal  
blues sixty octaves below middle C.

For some, it's vital to take a child's  
doll minutes after dragging her mother  
toward an idling truck, ankles chained.

Some souls are so empty, they drum  
beyond sound – a kind of cosmic dirge.  
What does it mean to love one another?

To gaze into the cataract of a hunger  
moon and admit you see a man  
thrashing against his own weight-

lessness. What does it cost to float  
mylar sheets over six-year-olds,  
stars in a disregarded constellation,

tell them they're not allowed to whisper,  
to touch, to lean on each other? No. Don't  
go to this parade. Melt blacktop back to

syrupey tar, and fuse macadam into rock.  
Reel in roads of any direction, for  
the old math never was math after all,

the plus sign just a black X blown over.  
We know better, how to add, subtract,  
to fiddle the line until two and two

becomes four for me, dust for you.  
How to unmake a man, to divide him  
into copper, lead, skin loose as a parachute.

To rewind his story until it's nothing  
but seed, seed, thirsting in dry white earth.

*Allison Adair* USA

# Oliver

I watch the lizards wander. I don't feed them. They feed themselves. One is pale pink with green eyes. An Asian house gecko. *Tchak, tchak, tchak*, it chirps. I reply, *I'll ask the questions here*. It lives in the kitchen and hides behind the stacked plates. Scurries over window sills and

architraves. There are certain things that we never get over. This is what I know, but a child doesn't know this. Take my aunt, for instance. All through my childhood I'd heard stories about my dead cousin but I didn't know what to make of them. His photograph is in the glass cabinet

in the living room with my other relatives. If he had lived I wonder if we would have liked each other. Would he have sung me nursery rhymes? *Jack and Jill went up the hill ...* My aunt would constantly talk about him. Up to the day she died, the portrait of her four-month-old boy

was on her bedside table. A black and white photograph. Oliver is sitting in a high chair. It must have been taken in winter as he is wearing a jumper, tights, mittens and a woollen cap. Pieces she would have knitted herself. This was her hobby and there was no money for fancy

clothes. She never told me how it happened. The full story. I was never able to speak to her about this because, as a child, I was seen and not heard. But how do you talk about the dead? The dead you didn't know. How do you talk about things you don't understand? She told me

many times that she spoke to him every day. I never thought to ask her what she said. Did he answer? Are the dead supposed to do that or do they send a sign? Do they send a lizard to walk over your table? And how do you know what are the things that you should talk about?

My mother spoke about him. He died at nine months old. Over the years she told me several versions in her kitchen while washing the dishes. She said, *The Communists did it. There was no medicine*. Tito and his crew. Another time she said *They wouldn't give him any medicine*

*because they saved antibiotics for members of the Party*. Another time she said *He died of pneumonia*. The final time while loading the dishwasher. *He died of pneumonia and whooping cough*. The mush of memory among the suds and water. The skink that lives under my

dishwasher runs out to search for any food that's fallen on the floor. It sees me and takes off. A small moth is flying near the light on the ceiling. The other lizard spots it. No gecko glue to make it stick. Its upside down world enabled by billions of the tiniest foot hairs unseen by the

human eye. *Jack be nimble, Jack be quick ...* It runs and grabs the moth in one go. A couple of chews and it's devoured. Tragedies carve themselves into our thoughts and take over our lives. A woman at work, thin, pale, closed as a vault, railed at me for some triviality. I spoke to a

friend and said, *She's had a lot of sadness, I know.* The woman's young child died of leukaemia at five. How do you talk about that? Only in whispers or in quiet corners that are still and inhabited by small reptiles. Pseudo-pets that feed themselves. My aunt fed on thoughts. We

feed them to ourselves. Her loss had a relentless hunger. And in her solitude, thoughts fed on themselves. When my aunt was very ill in hospital and the breast cancer had metastasised, we didn't know how long she would last. It had been eating her up slowly. Sitting by the bed,

my mother said, *She'll go soon.* I asked, *Why?* Mother looked up and said, *I dreamed of her with the child.*

*Rosanna Licari* AUSTRALIA

## This is what happens

It's Sunday afternoon and she's in the wash house standing in stocking feet on the roof of the old doll's house, the one Uncle John Murphy made, and she's rocking backwards and forwards

...bored, bored, bored...

*rebod rebod rebod rebod rebod rebod rebod rebod rebod rebod rebod*

She's thinking about visiting the 'You can always come tomorrow' lady in Loxley Road. Yesterday, she stopped her and her best friend, Sandra, as they were coming home from the park just as it was getting dark. She said, did they know where Loxley Road was and would they take her there? She said she'd give them both a chocolate biscuit if they did. They wanted a biscuit but didn't go with her because they were late for their teas and so the lady said, 'You can always come tomorrow.'

*wormroot moorwort wormroot moorwort wormroot moorwort,*

Sandra's gone out after her Sunday dinner with her mam and uncle Frank. He rides a motorbike with a side car for Sandra to ride in. Sandra's mam puts both arms round Uncle Frank's waist and sits behind him on the bike. Sometimes, Uncle Frank takes her with them to the Breakwater and she shares the side car with Sandra. They sit side by side on the seat and there's room to stretch their legs right out. Feet and bottoms nearly touch the ground. Uncle Frank closes the plastic hood over their heads and they wave at everyone but they're gone before they can turn round to see if they wave back. This Sunday they left her behind.

The Loxley lady promised her a chocolate biscuit.

*You can always come tomorrow*

*Can you always come tomorrow?*

One little girl knocks on the door  
One woman's head turns in the dark  
One woman's heels tap-tapping on the floor  
One little girl come to say hello  
One woman opens wide the door and,  
O  
One little girl, inside she goes ...

*Moya Pacey* AUSTRALIA

'I procured the children, who would more readily accompany a woman than a man alone,'  
Myra Hindley, 1963–1965 Moors Murders, Manchester UK. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1995/12/18/UK-murderer-denies-shes-a-psychopath/9920819262800/>

## New Year's Eve, 1999

Daylight weakens. One century  
is folding into the next.

Half the world away is midnight.  
In England, in their single beds,  
my parents are sleeping.

Their parents are gone.  
I am the last of the line.

Headstones hewn from Midlands slate.  
Graves in older countries still.  
Perhaps there are no graves at all,  
shattered, toppled in long grass.

Fragments, words passed on.

The cart that never made it from Orel,  
but broke its axle,  
so instead of getting back that night  
he had to put up in a shabby town,  
at the inn . . .

and the wars and snows and trudging  
and the struggle through the birch woods  
and changing a name just in and out of recognition  
and trains rattling through foreign towns at night  
and four dark flights of stairs  
and a sister gone to the bad  
and God becoming fainter  
or not at all  
and cribbage in air raid shelters

and waving the Union Jack when relief came  
and cricket from the Oval on a small black-and-white screen  
and the first children coming home from university  
themselves and altered and themselves  
and forging a virtue out of forgetfulness  
and a virtue out of memory  
and one yet greater good of misremembering  
or simply forgetting. . .

What holds?  
What is there to hold?

The last of the sun  
is crimsoning into the world.

*Roger Craik* USA

## My father's robe

Whispering, my father's robe drapes  
my lap like midnight. Fabric sounds,  
one sleeve slipping against the other.  
This darkness. This black thread.  
Mending as one blinded, bending  
low like praying. I am weary  
of this robe's aging, the body  
in the garment. Another sermon.  
Even in his eighty-first year,  
my father nests in his high pulpit,  
flapping sleeves on flung-out arms,  
measuring the width and depth  
of a god's promised love.

Hand over hand, he greets  
his congregation. After the last  
hand is shaken, I reach up  
and like wings of crows  
rising, his arms swallow  
me in, lift me, my stories  
kissing his robe, his eyes searching  
for another in need, and always  
one approaching. Shifted  
from two arms, to one, to down,  
I clutch his robe as I do a hand,  
folding myself in its midnight,  
All around are green and endless fields.  
Breezes rustle ears of corn  
in rows straight as Bible verses.  
Multitudes listen.  
Stories rise to tell themselves.

*Anne Knowles* USA

## Star soup

My indigent mother  
Always boiled bowls of malduk-soup\* for me.

When I returned from school,  
she seated me by the porch like a special guest.

Bearing a table with a pale porcelain bowl,  
she came out of the kitchen with care and caution.

Stars floated atop the steaming broth.

Sometimes the moon was atop the spoon.  
Soon my stomach was full.

The clattering sounds of barren bowl and spoon  
where spoon and star once collided  
Laid heavy weights upon her chest.

From the eyes of my mother,  
crystals of starlight streamed out.

*Kwang-Kyu Kong*    REPUBLIC OF KOREA

\*malduk-soup: a soup in which there is much water without solid ingredients; a symbol of poverty in Korea.

# My grandmother's side of the story

I call him Scrooge. He's on his last legs.  
These days his jaw hangs open  
a loose hinge leading into a dry quivering cave.  
Morsels of food move around in it for minutes on end  
and the children, giving up, take them out again.

Thursday night they brought in some foolish instrument with black buttons.  
They wanted to remember his voice.  
*Marry again*, he said. *Someone to care for you when I die.*  
I make shushing noises for the benefit of the listening black spools.  
*I am too old for that.*

When they were gone I asked him  
to say – that – again?

Even with you  
I have always been a creature of four in the morning.  
The heads of anchovies must be sliced off, and soaked, and  
put aside in big wet bowls before I could make them into something I could sell  
people eat.  
My clothes were never clean  
they smelled of wood fire  
you could read my offerings for the day from the stains.

For sixteen dollars I could've sent the kids to English school.  
You wouldn't give me sixteen dollars.  
You said in English school they would forget God and worship money  
And I couldn't borrow sixteen dollars in time from anyone anyway  
Because sixteen dollars were big at the time and it was a losing fight.  
So the kids didn't go to English school  
They went to factories in the end.  
They were good kids  
They bought me a new house, pots and pans, a chance  
to do nothing and feel bored.  
*What the hell were you saving up sixteen dollars for anyway?*

The children play songs of praise in the house now, hang billowing white curtains  
in the doorway.

The baby bird that's been visiting the flowerpots for a month  
they feed with small cereals.

The collecting angel, they say, makes its visits known.

I threw a peanut at the bird.

I lean close to the old man's ear, the one less deafened by the heat of many medicines  
and I say –

*Food does you no good anymore.*

*I think it's time you left.*

*Sulastrī Noordin* SINGAPORE

# The things they carried on scooters

speed hope resentment endurance, three  
to four people, generations, pairs of worn  
rubber flip flops

micro-harvests of rice, ginger,  
coconuts, fragrant curry leaves  
bundled square, one thousand  
fragile, quotidian eggs, caged ducks, a snorting  
pink hog

burning cigarettes and suspended plastic bags of *kopi*  
hot or cold, the occasional silver bullet  
of an open beer can. an entire restaurant  
sidecar of red-hot coals

(like all of us) STIs known and unknown,  
the sleeper cells of chlamydia, perennial herpes

another scooter,  
rolling meta-

a pond in a pyramid of blue  
water cooler jugs

tropical pragmatism.  
we have lanes; they have asphalt  
sometimes

dirty, bundled American money  
and white people.  
genocide tourists

amputees. the long  
short brown arms of US  
and Soviet land mines

micro minis  
sweating johns

a wagging pinkie and the rare  
offer of weed

the fluttering  
darting hive mind  
of the traffic bee, the individuated  
node in the swarm

*Darryl Whetter* SINGAPORE

# Shapeshifters

(an immigrant fantasy)

## I.

Sleepwalking for centuries and tired of bumping into walls, the monsoon people prayed to the gods for exile. On the first sign of favour and grace,

they bandaged the stumps that used to be toes, pressed their foreheads on the back of the elders' palms and prepared to leave for Otherland.

Island folks, the tides made for their youthful bodies, those that walked the streets of the plaza till daylight for duck eggs and song, bright lights and McDonalds.

They swam with snakes when the waters swelled over bridges and perched on trees drinking beer, waiting out the flood waters.

In their mind, Otherland and roads that throb like the web-work of their own amphibious bodies.

They tucked their wings into dark jackets and flew above the islands, its towers tall and beaches crystalline from the bones of sleepwalking dreamers.

## II.

There were four winds and a fickle sun in Otherland. It broke their skin into scales and bumps like strawberry. In new skins as fish or fruit, they watched

the winds change the shape and colour of trees: branches heavy and red as a school of salmon are herring bones on fishnets in somebody's yard the next.

What's constant: the red earth lined in blue froth, the green sea at the warm edge of the land's fertile underskirts. Wind people, they circled above this new dwelling,

pricked their palms and bled on its four corners. The air thickened with the humming of the ancients, the atonal howl of a dingo prowling.

## III.

Slight and slim, they fit into the cracks of low rent share housing in suburban lawns prickling with legs of upturned furniture.

They laid sardine-packed in the sun-bleached foldout in a room lit low by an altar for the Mother.

In the morning, their new lungs have grown high past the collar, for breathing in the cold and talking about the weather.

When weather talk had fanned as much fire as it could, they wore their hearts up behind their ears, a curve of the neck, or as a gap in the teeth like camouflage or open targets.

But the open roads spoke in nutshells and privacy statements and the neighbours preferred to know neighbours as new cooking smells and *videoke*.

In the city streets, people throw coins into hats for their neighbours' dances, stories of war as songs to strings and frenzied drumming.

#### IV.

They coloured within the lines and kept the desk lights on for longer.

Some changed the colour of their hair.

Some trained their tongues like molluscs whipped to submission. Eventually, it clipped words and bent vowels as well as knees hold their shape before altars.

They kept their thoughts about families and neighbours close to their breasts and listened instead to the yard, the hung clothes drying, rotating like a headless ghost chase, inches apart and never touching.

Their strawberry bumps and scales have sloughed off to new skins tough and thick as those of pachyderms.

Heavier now, mostly from the weight of new skin, their old wings withdrew into their ribcages. It worked just as well for new jobs with heavy lifting, or temp ones, cleaning and caring.

The younger of their stock, time has reshaped so well that one of them made it to reality programming. For 'realness', the headlines called her 'cyclone' and other names from nature.

Outside the spell of TV, a woman scratched the starlet's neck, screaming you're 'a dog', a 'black monkey'. The air thickened with the humming of the ancients, the atonal howl of a dingo prowling.

# Martyr

*'Many among the vast crowds... carried white flowers tributes to an anonymous man who had fallen to his death the previous evening after unfurling a large protest banner on scaffolding near government headquarters.'*

*'Organisers claimed that nearly 2 million people turned out on [June 16 2019], which would make the demonstration the largest in Hong Kong's history.'*

*The Guardian*

Until a pair of wings grows  
on my dead body, there'll still be news  
about the fluked tail of fatalism, or the worn  
lace socks of which. Yes,  
absurdity has legs.  
It walks slowly to us, but don't  
back off. Hello, white flowers. Hello, origami swans.  
One of you is alive;  
the other, more so. Remember, a caterpillar dies  
not because of its hundred feet,  
but its tininess. Hello, stinky times.  
Hello, rhapsodic feet. Now I have more swans  
than ponds, prayers than pain. Hello, hymns  
in D-flat minor, ribbons interweaved  
as if wishing badly to begin. Cheer up –  
Isn't *bad* a moving process relative  
to power? And this world  
always slow in its giving? Until you're caught,  
let the moon be your head  
drunk on a wider route  
on a borrowed map. Until then, clean  
your rage-toned limbs  
in the shower, before someone taps on your wrapped  
silence, clasp your face  
with axe-hatching hands.  
Until the police

start breaking faces. Until you break  
all shower heads.  
Just because you're high on freedom doesn't mean  
you have to settle on the eyes  
you're born with and condone what you see  
only using emoticons. Does the news  
say my head is a sun-faded soda can,  
a savaged plum, or I'll return  
as a moth, paunchy? Altitude makes you think  
what to waft or retain.  
One can never run  
faster than a cloud  
that has decided not to move.  
I did, the gift of sweat  
taking the lead. The street  
feeling its candlelight, a grip.

*Nicholas Wong* HONG KONG

# The silence of Emma Gonzáles teaches us about language

*for Sam Hamill*

In America, a young man learns that to kill is language enough. From the muzzle, which means to hush, to gag, the phonemes of his rage interject themselves into seventeen stories, ending in the smothered dreams of thirty-four parents. To mourn a child is to beg a hole in the earth for answers: What are we willing to endure? What act will be the unspeakable next? The absence of voices fills with the sound of blood congealing on a classroom floor. Outlines where a life used to be saturate with empty talk. A politician sweeps the room with the shrapnel of scripted gibberish. Such vapid discussion. How do we amend our narrative before we can't bring ourselves back from the dead? A young woman reads the names of her classmates, then stops, stands, says nothing. Heartbeats mark the time in the millions gathered to hear her. Cold wind cuts across the Tidal Basin, sighs through naked cherry boughs. The national breath. Bodies accumulate in the voids between words. We learn nothing when our silence lays our children in the ground. What, then, when a child lays our silence at our feet?

*Matt Hohner* USA

# Blackface

Paint trucks collide on highways / centuries to mop the mess with boxes of issues /  
traffic anted to forever / angry wasps / insect larvae / witchetty embryos / honking  
foetuses / mad maggots screaming for release from their little tins of tense flesh / peel  
back the lid and fork em out like bad oysters

gulls dive on turtle hatchlings / cops and ambos have their lunch ...

Anyway, enough of my dreamtime. Break's over.

I got a job spraypainting smashed corpses in a paintshop, matching colour swatches  
of blood and skin and tissue, people like wallpaper, like carpet samples.

Yeah, lots of jobs if ya want 'em – cop, mortician, taxidermist, forensics investigator  
crossing that black crime-scene tape to jigsaw together a skull, or examine a popeye  
man who made a mobile of himself in a police cell, or a kid chased by cops who got  
kebabled on a fence, or a man who got cooked like a cup of soup in the back of a  
paddy wagon ... microwaved – *fucken just hose the cunt out, disinfect with ammonia,  
bleach, or we'll never get rid of the fucken stink ... Yes Sarge.*

... plenty of jobs – coroner, undertaker, knife sharpener, grievance grinder, black  
hole, bottomless well of ghost-mouth sorrow ... oh sorry, those positions have gone.

Eva wanna just chuck your identity down a well? / Dump it like a body where no  
one's eva gunna find it? / Just scrape off your skin like eggplant peel and chuck it all  
in a big skin bin? / (*Where's ya wheelie bin? I wheelie bin in jail, but don't tell no one,  
hey?*)

Coz I quit. I'm done with Notions of Nation and Issues of Identity and Iniquities of  
Injustice and all that knackers truck of Belonging.

Fuck Belonging. I quit. I'm taking retirement from Identity. I'm hanging up a sign:  
gone to Bunnings, gone to Ikea, gone to the movies. No issues today, unsolicited or  
otherwise.

I'm done with time and race and justice and injustice and reconciling this and that  
paradox and hypocrisy and impossibility. I'm done with all that shitty history and  
making sense of senseless savagery and human agony

I'm done with acknowledgements and apologies and welcome to countries and  
smoking fucken ceremonies and experts and blackademics ... I just want to go to

Bunnings. I just want to go to Ikea. I just want to worship at some consumer temple of white goods and white gods. No more trying to make sense of the senseless.

Here's a photo of two blackboys spearing iPhones in Sydney Harbour on Christmas Day 1801. They used to be that abundant here you could scoop 'em out of the harbour with your bare hands while busloads of Japanese tourists softly fucked stuffed koalas in the background.

Crank up that Circular Quay techno didge show busking for cruise ship blimps with reverberating clap sticks and fat blackfellas with body painted McDonald's guts.

I'm done with Issues. Fuck issues. I just want to go to Ikea and buy shit. I wanna go to Bunnings and have a dreamtime watching home renovation shows and tiling my bathroom.

I just wanna watch big loud dumb Hollywood movies that don't have John Pilger or any injustice angle, or any worthiness, or any redeeming features, or any agenda beyond CAR CHASES and SHOOTING PEOPLE and BLOWIN SHIT UP!

Just for today no pesky theft and murder and rape. Just for today my skin ain't black crime scene tape. Today is No Agenda Day, No Invasion Day, No Race Day ... that's what today is

Today all of you reffos here, which means everyone, come together like a big ole mixed lolly shop of joy and have a free kick, a big drunk barbeque on me, it's guilt free, identity free, penalty free, lactose, gluten, msg and race free, you're getting off scot free, it's on the house, it's on me, no entrance fee, just think of me as a big black Jesus who suicided in a cell so you could all live well, who sacrificed herself like a crazy bargain king so you could all gain free admission to Dreamworld and all them other paradises in this girt by sea kingdom come of white goods and gods, and just take your super and steer the country like a giant cruise ship and call at all those poor little brown sinking pacific islands made from floating plastic shit from Ikea and Bunnings ...

but then you wake up in a cell with a cop pissing on your face  
and think fuck, another day at the coal face.

*Tug Dumbly* AUSTRALIA

# Gunshop

Between the space for fast food counters and Tescorama kitchenware  
is [www.commando.sk](http://www.commando.sk),  
on its left window a placard showing brown bear Mama and cub,  
on the right (where else) the giant silhouette of a soldier  
looming against the skyline in full combat gear above his cub  
who's flat on his belly aiming an air rifle with telescopic sight.  
A young gypsy presses his nose against the glass.

I enter and inspect the ranks of camouflage pants and jackets  
for active men and women, girls and boys. I move clockwise  
along the interior wall past all manner of hunting knives,  
steel, carbon, some double-edged, some saw-toothed to gralloch a deer,  
a vitrine containing silver hip flasks and quality watches  
set to Moscow, London, New York even local time.  
The gypsy asks me politely for some money.

In the back left hand corner the manager, flat-stomached  
with lank, longish hair parted in the middle presides  
over a display of guns from air pistols to assault weapons  
costing from 330 to 700 Euros.  
From his knowledgeable reply to my enquiry on the cost  
of a Parabellum he could be a fan of the John Wick franchise.  
Less courteously he hazes the gypsy out of the shop.

I cross to the right hand corner; samurai swords with tassels,  
then Brazilian machetes and walk towards the counter by the door  
where a pretty blonde could sell me green or red berets, t-shirts  
striped blue and white, gas and petrol brass or enamel lighters,  
survival kits for days in the forest playing paintball games  
and a range of baseball bats and caps for all ages.  
Outside the gypsy flashes me the penknife he's lifted from the shop.

*James Sutherland-Smith* SLOVAKIA

# The feast: A choose your own pleasure poem

## I.

Welcome to our feast.  
There's something for everyone,  
for every imaginable hunger. Even yours.  
But if you see food as strictly sustenance,  
if you find eating a chore,  
stop reading now. This poem isn't for you.

## II.

If you are gluten-free, please skip to stanza four.  
If you are vegan, feast your eyes on stanza five.  
If you are pescatarian, get your fish in stanza six.  
If you are lacto-ovo vegetarian, head for stanza seven.  
If you are raw, go straight to stanza eight.  
If you keep kosher or halal, find stanza nine.  
If you can eat it all, dance your vast palette  
to the very last stanza.  
None of these? Stanza three, please.

## III.

If you are a Breatharian, read between the lines,  
inhale and exhale with all the punctuation marks. Feel fed.  
If you only eat certain foods on certain days of the week,  
if you can't stand certain textures, if you can't handle  
certain foodstuffs touching other foodstuffs on your plate,  
grab your hand sanitizer and make do.

## IV.

The word flour wasn't even whispered  
anywhere near this *Soup du Jour*.  
No breaking bread here.

## V.

Nothing has a face on your table,  
only a pulse.

VI.

You hunger to get back to where we came from,  
salty, salty primordial sea.  
You prefer anything that looks crustaceous,  
prehistoric, gilled and metallic.  
One eye looking up toward the sky,  
the other toward the soon to be polished platter.

VII.

All the gifts of the living beasts:  
butter, chocolate, cheese.

VIII.

Your table is a bed of earth.  
Pull what you want from the soil.  
Get dirt under your fingernails,  
get dirt all over your teeth.

IX.

Countless cuts from creatures  
with split hooves who once chewed their cud.  
No worries, there are several lines  
between any mention of milk and meat.

X.

Go back to the beginning.  
Savour every last word of this poem.  
Now spit out the bones.

*Sarah Kobrinsky* USA

## The office of poetry

It was never bustling but  
the front counter had pamphlets and an Enquiries sign,  
an eager novice or two offering advice  
under smiling portraits of the greats  
who laboured upstairs in their rooms  
and could not be disturbed.

With dedication and the right connections  
one might rise through the ranks,  
burnishing couplets at first.  
Then it was the slow grind  
through villanelle, sestina, sonnet,  
before rejecting the lot  
for an affair with free verse that lasted years,  
until the siren call of haiku  
with its dainty promise of grace.

Beyond the glossy reception space,  
the polished floor and bright displays  
of Published, Collected, Selected, and Best Of's,  
were dimly lit miles of manuscript files.  
Long corridors of the unpublished  
went down and down beyond sight.  
Rumour said there was a furnace of papers there  
that kept the place going.

In the war everyone did their bit –  
the lights on late  
as junior clerks assembled odes to courage  
for their seniors' morning glance after tea and scones.  
All gone now, of course,  
the poets and apprentices  
digitised and sleeping on the starry way  
or under dust on untouched shelves  
and the Office of Poetry up for sale –  
this most attractive site ripe for redevelopment.

*Steve Evans* AUSTRALIA

## The artist as architect

The painter – singing light  
into the ache of holding.

In the place of his eyes,  
crocuses.

His ears – the chamber  
for the noise he makes  
against the canvas.

He calls in:  
the poet. They devise  
pinholes, bullet holes  
made of words – to keep  
the light  
from vanishing.

Petals float  
like dust at the ends  
of the stanzas,  
brushing but  
never landing  
on the passersby.

The poet – tapping sound  
into a net of falling.

They decide: no walls  
will rise. The paintings  
emerge in the shape  
of birds, of people, six  
cows, a dragonfly.

The poems hang  
in the trees  
as if they belong.

*Kristen Lang* AUSTRALIA

## Of the fruit of the tree

Did it (as she reported in that flap of a note  
hanging on the fridge) taste good to her?  
What mystery was she trying to convey,  
what was she looking for  
in the gold mantle between skin and stone?

To eat an apple, leaving others behind  
since one could hardly eat them all, seems  
unremarkable, a gesture, hardly a sin

To eat every plum was a fruition  
a challenge to the notion they were his to be taken.  
She said nothing. He was none the wiser  
judging by the lack of any answer.

He knows nothing of the way it whispers to her –  
blackwash in the foliage,  
floating nightbuoy  
where the branches are thickest  
where all the stories converge  
where the darkness at its centre speaks.

In our growing knowledge of where we were heading  
we planted a tree that would always be early  
into budbreak, early into leaf-fall,  
becoming a different shape while last year's lingered,  
fretwork in the frost

Anyway, he had no idea what was in the fridge,  
never regretted what could be replaced through the snaplatch years.  
But she was dismayed by how much could be taken

Somehow the way she holds the dimpled sphere  
the tender token of its corona  
seems to fit the fable better than the apple's bitter seeds,  
its spat success, strewn before strife, before war.

Sparks sprang from my mattock like a gangster's matches.  
Still, it grew: backweird limbs determined to cross  
even as they carved into one another. Yet you mourned  
every pruning: how could I not love a tree so dear to you?

so she leaves this note on the fridge, saying  
she's sorry she's eaten all the plums et cetera...  
thinking of another life they might have led  
she says sometimes,  
testing him, testing them.

they don't peer back, shoulder to shoulder, into the gold haze.  
Their departure unproclaimed, no celestial font,  
no blazing escutcheon sees them off

Heartstock. Dark fruit amongst the darker leaves.  
Summer ends with a thunderstorm, a gold and purple flourish,  
you angrily sorting detritus in the shed,  
me watching from the kitchen,  
the sparse and speckled savour  
of antique words in my mouth:

forgive me

I have eaten

*Isi Unikowski* AUSTRALIA

## Graves for failed theories

Emergency is white as a polar day on the equinox.  
Tomorrows don't exist. Faces, muted – sfumato,  
never unbroken, precise in their impreciseness,  
like storms on Jupiter. Waiting, four hours long  
by four hours wide, is tailor made for unfolding  
lives like leaflets – catch the sound of tabloid  
pages crumpling – wings of caterpillars cracking  
open their chrysalides. Velcro timely ripped, tuning  
out of the world, tuning in to interiors – (Living)  
in parentheses.

It's so easy to rest your eyes on the nervousness of others,  
their restless legs jiggling, so easy to swallow your pride,  
open a monologue with the big unknown upstairs,  
as insurance – a 'just in case'. Lost in a thread, deep  
in the web of webs, there's a name for my condition.

The app recommends I write a reverse bucket  
list. Before he died, Stephen Hawking theorised  
the universe is a hologram.

Siri, I'm anxious. Are you awake? Is there an eloquent way  
to die out loud?

'It sounds like talking with someone might help.'

Siri, go fuck yourself.

'I don't know how to respond to that.'

I theorise a body, like a mountain  
has no lines or borders, the first  
meaningful sound we make is our own  
crying and it's only the midwife  
that recognises imperceptible flourishing.

In a lab, paper is crumpled into a ball,  
then uncrumpled, seventy times, but the paper  
never stops forming new creases.

Hours ago I took a long slow drag,  
it stuck to the roof of my mouth.

I'm still waiting for the hit.

It's these tablets, you see. A smoke ring takes the shape  
of a lung wide enough to hold a storm.  
At the triage window, a mother holds her child close to the glass,  
'Spiritually, she's off. She's not normally this irritable.'  
When it's my turn, there'll be a reckoning with the vowel  
at the end of my name. In 21 days I'll be a non-smoker.  
'Warning, there are side effects', meaning: Don't fuck this up.  
The verclininte is the blood-red apple, tricking my receptors  
to sleeping death. Admire me. Last night I dreamed a doctor  
offered my cigarette (my dopamine) to a raven. It's a side-effect.  
Inside, the sun is burning midnight. Outside, it's bucket dark.

*Davide Angelo* AUSTRALIA

The title of this poem is taken from a quote by Omer Gottesman, a physicist, and quoted in 'This Is the Way the Paper Crumples' by Siobhan Roberts, *The New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2018. Parts of lines 28–30 are taken from the same article.

# Logically, an analysis of mayflies

writing dissertations about lilacs should focus upon  
whimsical entreaties:

Start with eager oxen debating transatlantic debacles.

Furthermore, be less.  
Extenuating circumcisions weigh less heavily on cattle

pursuing a policy  
of entrenched catfish. Investigate genital herpes  
musically attaining

Nirvana & Pearl Jam, & accentuate relationships  
between sea cucumbers  
& the overall health of marginalised populations  
of Emperor penguins.

Heat up your macadam. Freeze out albino pandas.  
Learn to negotiate

with impertinent tree frogs. A first foray into  
the unexpected joys  
of interspecies antagonism should be highlighted  
by predatory aggression

between wild turkeys & bonobos. Carefully assess  
flamingos mingling

with locusts, & applaud the efforts of yaks,  
specifically concerning  
the construction of yurts & commercial space  
for any vacationing

frozen embryos. Consider smallpox's expansion.  
After dabbling in  
bioengineered crochet-work, make inroads through  
the procrastination  
of hermit crab comprehension. Laugh with,  
but not at, hyenas,  
be at one with 2nd-hand 3rd-parties, & dialogue  
with archeological ruins.  
Ideally, gnats must be comforted by the confusion  
of verbose treatises.  
Raise the bar with drunken cockatoos who frisk  
endangered marsupials.  
Cancel all appointments with errant albatrosses  
without regard to  
fostering biodiversity, toss expendable primates  
into trash receptacles,  
yet be gracious, laying your eggs in those  
abandoned to their fates,  
& let them hatch, let them go, freely melding  
into our messy egos.

*Jonathan Greenhause* USA

## Parable (for all intents and purposes)

My song, my chiaroscuro Camaro,  
sits on my desk like a newly-minted poem.  
I admire its curves, its chrome,  
the lullaby of its engine *thub-thubbing* away  
at a traffic light like a burbling infant god.

I love how it grips the road. I love its open secret:  
that it doesn't exist, doesn't care that it doesn't exist,  
doesn't give two shits about any of that existence stuff.

And yet it has come into being, nonetheless.

Its two headlights stare fiercely into a future  
that I can't decipher. I can't quite say whether, up ahead  
it sees good or bad in our intents and purposes.

And it won't say what's coming next,  
won't supply a telos, won't apologize  
for being mostly opaque and unhelpful,  
the way poems so often are.

Why is it a car, for instance? Why a Camaro?  
Why not anything else in the world?  
Why not anything else that ever happened  
in all of time? Why not the Yucatan asteroid strike?  
Why not two pigs walking a cat on a leash?  
Why not an Albanian dictator from the Cold War years?  
Why not Enver Hoxha, for instance,  
who, by 1983 had built more than 173,000  
hardened bunkers in his country  
that were never used as bunkers or for anything else –  
while roads were left unbuilt and people starved?

Why not him? To these and other questions  
arising late into the night, my song,  
my chiaroscuro Camaro, sits as silent as a sphinx.

Weeks pass. Years pass, and still nothing.

In old age, I take to calling it ‘The Enigma’  
– which isn’t a very good name for a muscle car,  
Camaro or otherwise, but it still fits.

Outside, you can see the stars –  
you can see Saturn align with Mars  
on the great plain of the ecliptic  
through the windows, long shattered,  
of my chiaroscuro Camaro.

There’s no word for this in Albanian.

Weeds grow around it. Someone has stolen its tires,  
put the car up on blocks salvaged from a bunker nearby.  
Someone tried to turn the bunker  
into a cheese factory. Someone else  
turned it into a place to stay on AirBnB  
while visiting Albania.  
Inside, a young couple make love –  
their love cries ricochet off the concrete ceiling  
in a manner Enver Hoxha  
could not have imagined.

*Mark Svenvold* USA

# Car with the lot

*for Minh Nham*

Two decades, since stepping  
into an automobile cattle yard,  
felt uncomfortable, but necessary,  
to replace our hoon-stolen 4Runner.  
*People are always saying I resemble Kim Jong-un.*  
The Toyota business manager looked Korean.  
*You'll find Peacocks, Seagulls, Pigeons,  
Magpies and Quail out here.*  
*Peacocks are management, with puffed up strut.*  
He gestured outwardly.  
*Seagulls are yardmen, eyeing  
new customers, like chips.*  
*I'm a Pigeon. I relay information.*  
*Magpies circle the Second-hand.*  
*Quail are Service.*  
On his desk, a neat array  
of Salesman-of-the-Year trophies,  
handles-on-hips.  
*I see you got Gold this year, I commended.*  
*What's next? Platinum?*  
*No. Retirement.*  
Big Kim Jong-un smile.  
*But you're still young, I said.*  
*Yes, I know, he cooed.*

*Joe Dolce* AUSTRALIA

## Seven slices for a blood lover

1. Those undressed nights  
we shared  
blush and rebuff me  
with Jason Bourne  
jabs and chops.
2. Spelunking down a Lifeline bin  
near your last residence  
I scored a discarded  
sheer black chiffon blouse  
and wore it as a bandana,  
Paris 68 style, on visiting days  
until your scent seeped through  
and began working the ward  
like a lap dancer.  
Matron said one of us had to go.
3. At Edgar Alan Poe midnight  
hearing the secret tap  
of our old go-between, Miss Love,  
I retract my dead locks,  
peel away a hair plastered  
at 47° to detect fresh stealth  
attacks by white cell Ninjas  
and open wide, just in time,  
for Missy's soggy Valentine body  
to crumple in my arms.  
*Stabbed*, she gasps, by *a demonic mute*.
4. I climb and climb  
your stairs.  
Next thing I'm toppling  
from a luminous green  
Grimm bro's Monsanto beanstalk  
and some yokel is calling *me* a giant.

5. My ghost writers claim  
you're haunting them.  
Their best scenes are riddled  
with poltergeists  
on cage fight steroids.
  
6. The PI geek I hired  
to dog  
    your grey web steps  
is suing over an OCD virus  
    he caught from my tablet.  
*Oozing from every byte*  
    his affidavit says.
  
7. Here's my deal.  
One last  
bone marrow kiss  
and I'll go                   quietly  
into the gurney-squeaking night.

*Roger Vickery* AUSTRALIA

## A state funeral remembered

A recent spate of biographical  
movies reminded me of a state funeral  
watched, in flickering black and white,  
and relayed by, then, technologically  
innovative satellite, from frozen London,  
beset with wintery gales,  
to hot and dusty rural New South Wales  
and, although young, I was well aware –  
as when seeing Turner's depiction  
of 'The Fighting Temeraire' – that  
I was viewing the end of an era:  
Britain was burying Winston Churchill.

But it isn't the pageantry I recall:  
the artillery salute reverberating  
in the still, frigid air or the slow,  
measured tread of the sailors,  
leaning and swaying on the ropes  
in unison as they hauled the gun-carriage  
up Ludgate Hill's slope to St Pauls,  
packed with sombre dignitaries;  
or Queen Elizabeth breaking convention  
to receive the commoner's flag draped coffin;  
or Menzies' eulogy from the crypt,  
lauding how Churchill lit 'lamps of hope';  
or Handel's *Death March*;  
the bugler's call to reveille;  
the RAF flying-past in his honour or  
the cranes lowered along the Thames.

I remember most the coffin's journey,  
by train, to Bladon's country cemetery,  
and the ordinary citizens who lined the route,  
waiting to pay homage: the be-meddled men  
who stood at attention in ill-fitting uniforms;  
the man wearing a dented metal helmet  
saluting from a roof; passers-by

who simply stopped and removed  
hats or bowed their heads in respect;  
the dignified elderly woman, wrapped  
in coat and scarf against the cold,  
holding aloft a sign which read:  
'Thank you and goodbye'.

*Jeremy Gadd* AUSTRALIA

## Two sisters on the Old Moth Road... A true tale

3 Ravens speak of soft water:

It starts with a glimmer on The Old Moth Road  
a figure carrying something indistinct  
breathing a footfall on a beautiful twilight.

Always there's an edge of a distant city  
a sunset, perhaps, that's about to be put down  
some flesh squealing in the rubbing dusk.

There might be wet leaves clinging to a bough  
breath shining and juicing to a tongue  
two sisters spurting & giggling in the dark.

But this is not a memory... no whispers  
are imagined happening between a stone  
forgetting and a flicker remembering,

it's what's still to come: a country  
arching and falling away into the weeping  
the years ahead that shadow backwards

the silence of all the young deaths  
that look at you, naked and in tears,  
the cries that are to die with them

a light that blinks out behind you,  
a son who goes mad in the homestead,  
a glimpse of the squatting Sisters, the Makers.

See, now, by the evening, how the Sisters go with you  
the one with the other, taking you the immigrant  
in the middle, and touching you into the dark.

And hear, then, this figure  
breathing down a dirt road to night-fall  
the blast of the shotgun silent as it goes into his children

Nobody hears the echo  
but the scribbling two sisters breathing  
hard and wading over a starlit river

'Till shadow and moonlight catching them  
brushing the ashes from their eyelids  
fear and burning over forgotten water.

There's laughter now, coming again from the river...  
The wild girls giving up their juices,  
that figure shivering in the beautiful smoke of evening

And what comes again is the future's dread  
the gilded sheen along the barrel  
again and again, the self-whisperer

Scratching his skin the hard road  
The same figure, starting its walk again  
The saddest of clicks...

The same, figure, breathing, and walking,  
the shadow's footfall

3 Ravens speak:

*John-Karl Stokes* AUSTRALIA

## Late winter, Canberra to Sydney

These meagre scoops  
and rises

where frost-scoured grasses stretch across  
stony fields and gullies

are suddenly alive  
with sprays of wattle

startles of vivid yellow  
pungent and heady in sharp air

an unveiling sun;  
on either side of the lane

leading down to a house  
the tenuousness of peach blossom and

something nudges  
pressing at the fray of winter things

unfolding  
piecemeal

its full and incipient narrative  
of leaf-bud, flower –

the persistent dance of bee and fruit and seed

pollen and earth and moisture to  
mark

this unassuming slide  
a season's single and

endless retelling

*Rose Lucas* AUSTRALIA

## Who are these bees?

I shelter from sleet  
under a tree flowering  
in the cold of December.  
Ivory buds dangle like grapes.  
They'll turn to fruit I guess.  
But I don't know this valley,  
this country. I don't recognise

this tree, these out of season blooms.  
How do they survive frosts and snow?  
I won't be here to see the fruit.  
The buzz above is deafening.  
How many bees are here to make  
this sound thick as honey?  
I count only three fat, hovering sugar plums.

What a noise three bees make  
in an unknown tree,  
around an unknown flower  
they're helping to fruit.  
This is how they spend  
their beneficent lives  
in this quiet valley.

*Erin Shiel* AUSTRALIA

# Ctrl+alt+del

You quit the cursor, the drive to town, the rain  
at noon, the glue and gasoline that *got your nose*.

And the ritual of late, of pothole and pitch –  
torn, mangled, stitched out of rage or envy.

Almost, give up the *almost*, the *nearly*, and *not quite*.  
Retire, undistinguished members of the *just shy*.  
Quit your elephantine *about*,  
and whatever filled your tank but left it empty.

Surrender the pistol that triggers the rifle  
that fires the canon that launches grenades.  
Ignite the fuse of memory. Memory  
is no act of terror. It can't win wars,  
is not a weapon. Forgetting isn't a crime.

At dusk, the rain is without enemies, the roads  
you drive or not. The throbbing cursor feels no love  
for the letter, word, or sentence. Punctuation  
can't comprehend its own sentence.  
You can't comprehend your sentence either.

By evening, hands are still, are closed eyes,  
are the fan's noise, hushed  
by the *can't's*, *won't's*, and *never's*.

You watch for clouds when it's clear,  
seek a clearing when it's clouds,  
each road, a composition played by your car's tires.  
The replica you who does your bidding is as real as freeze and thaw.

Yes, at the sink you sniffed the thermos  
your father raised to his lips each night  
near the end of his life in the afterglow of television.

In the lab, your eyes watch words  
dots-per-inching forward, volts and watts,  
and then nothing.  
Not a glimmer. Not a spark.  
When the brain skips a beat, the heart follows.  
Gravel heard at dawn, crushed by foot or passing vehicle.

*Cindy King* USA

# All I know as of December 5, 2018

Before rain  
was rain-  
fall. There is a certain  
return when all the leaves will  
have  
fallen,  
branches  
as breakages  
of the sky,  
only the evergreens  
are strong  
enough to bear holly, to cling  
to their fruit or pine.  
I am sorry  
I am not  
a coniferous tree.  
Overhead,  
the albatross  
is still searching for  
its lover, the alba-  
tross has lost  
its lover. It circles  
the border- lines of the shore,  
retracing the ocean's lines of retreat.  
And the violence  
of  
it all,  
the  
gaping

mouths of the  
 sea  
 creatures  
 upon  
 the sand, washed aground  
 pure  
 by  
 circumstance. Do you remember  
 dear water  
 entering  
 their  
 bodies. Today  
 I am beyond recognition.  
 I am beyond fog.  
 To speak of loss,  
 is to speak  
 of elephants'  
 grief.  
 At the wake,  
 gentle against is the spine of the trunk  
 the calf.  
 Gentle is the rain  
 pattering,  
 the nature of  
 water,  
 dear water  
 with  
 the memory of  
 mother elephant.

I

dream.

Light

is

but

a

dis-

tin-

guishing

factor

in

cloud

scape.

I

fear.

It

is

not

yet

time

for

the

mother

elk

to

awaken

their

children

with day,

not

yet

time

for

the honey-  
bees

to

draw

up-

hill

for

nectar,

not

yet

time

for

the  
their

stars to  
final

turn  
wheel

towards

absolution.

Somewhere,

not

yet

morning.

*Patricia Liu* USA

## Coyotes laughing

When the forest changed you  
Changed. Its hearty growth  
Fell like leaves  
And left the floor strewn  
With golden intentions of a season.

Verdant pedantic bodies of trees stiff  
With buds, clinging to the sheets of dawn;  
Hanging impotent and unseeded.  
We listened to the vinyl record of jazz  
From the night before. Some Davis number.  
We both recognized the trumpet  
Calling the band out of the woods.

Your arms cast a shadow  
Across my face.  
I could hear your voice.

It was a voice which spoke through  
The waters withheld from Ham.  
Designed to carry him away from  
The edges of the garden which  
Knew him.

In the forest I could hear  
The voices dancing around the coyote,  
The laughing scoundrel;  
They were beautiful, long and full of vines.  
Naturally, he drank of their fragrant wine –  
Kisses, laid upon him by  
Oiled fingers who touched his chest  
And anointed him with  
The sweat of Gader'el,  
Leading his steps into the deep forest  
And carving his name  
Into the divided branches of the  
Tamarisk tree at Gibreah.

We watched the coyote nip  
The edge of my garment.

The forest changed, and I  
Changed; even though I brought  
A hammer to nail into the  
Gopherwood.

*Tamarah Rockwood* USA

# Dragonfly

I saw it dangling from the web like a chanteuse  
lowered on a swing in some dingy Thirties speak-  
easy, its gossamer wings a gown three paychecks  
long. I thought I could rescue it, the way men suppose

they can rescue a woman like that, and cut it down.  
It fluttered, one wing still trapped in a sticky sling  
I tried to unbind. Its vain attempts at flying  
reminded me of old war films, the way doomed planes

are shown turned upside down before disappearing  
from the screen. The dragonfly kept landing  
on its back. I saw there was no more mending  
I could do and began wondering

what was right, half-Jain, half-Jew in my deliberations.  
I could not bear to kill it, but hated  
its suffering. The spider waited  
while I lived with the idea of collaboration,

then began again its instinctual vocation.

• • • •

Now the dragonfly is suspended in mid-flight –  
a crippled angel, or that ‘Winged Victory’ at the Louvre  
(here, more aptly, ‘Winged Defeat’). I feel it disapprove  
of me, even in its frozen state, the way a slab of meat

rebukes my weak, carnivorous heart.  
I’ve often wished to change the ‘natural order,’  
as if old age or what the spider did were murder.  
Instead I strive to use each part –

dinner, leather, fertilizer and, sometimes, art.

*Jennifer Rose* USA

## Hot metal, cold type

Upstairs in the steampunk sound of industry  
men's voices bellowed  
above the clank and clatter of linotype machines.  
Men in dark blue aprons with ink-stained hands,  
rolled-up shirt-sleeves, steel-capped boots.  
Men reading upside-down type. Men grimy  
with sweat and slog, rolling trolleys laden  
with galleys and galleys of leaden slugs.  
The thud and thunder of words, jibes and laughter,  
replaced with urgency as the day progressed to night –  
hammering towards the deadline.  
Stone slabs, concrete floors, metal rulers, metal trays,  
metal saws – metal on metal on metal  
and you were a man amongst men.

And I downstairs in the cool new composing room  
with the same deadline  
hushed in the carpeted surrounds and  
the click and clack of keyboards.  
The perfect place for women –  
as clean as a kitchen, as bright as a hospital, clinical  
but for the overflowing ashtrays.  
The supervisors in ties and fresh shirts.  
Galleys of lead replaced with strips of waxed bromide paper.  
Scalpels sliced blocks of type, moved and pasted them  
like collage in kindergarten.  
Green lines of code on computer screens  
and the mainframe in its sound-proof, dust-free room.  
Clean and ordered and safe.

You were hot metal and I was cold type.  
You were upstairs and I downstairs.  
You with your wild hair and ink-stained hands.  
Me with my shy smile, slicing through type.  
The night rolled on and on and on  
until at last the newspaper was put to bed and the press  
came to life, rumbled in the basement,  
shook the building. Shook the night.

## Sleep talking

When the puppeteer of insomnia pulls at nervous threads behind your eyes, you watch your lover, his shape etching into the sheets, like initials being carved on a tree, while you attempt to isolate the root cause of your sadness. Feeling into the black quietness, you begin to hear murmuring – his syllabic slips of the mind, made in the bedroom where you wait for nocturnal soliloquies, hoping for more bedside comedy – a sequel to my *rainbow llamas* the beloved, psychedelic mountain climbers kidnapped by *Glen*, the *fucking asshole* who returned them a few days later, because *they stink*, these dreamscape companions who have set the precedent for absurdity, though you remain surprised each time a string of letters is delivered to you, straight through his open mouth, well outside of business hours – and tonight begins with *vexillology* falling into your lap, yelling. You lay there, laughing inside your brainstem, so as not to distract him from his imagined students – decaffeinated first years whose circadian rhythms he is trying to reset, wanting them to be enthusiastic about the studying of flags, their history, and symbolism – before he retires quickly curling his limbs towards his chest, as if being packed into a briefcase at the end of the day, heading home to honour stillness before he speaks again, whispering *leeks, mushrooms, rice* with the same anxiety and speed as the march hare that wears a pocket watch and hides in a children's book, you remember last night, the way the recipe and stove were ruminated over and the meal, served as the prelude to a discussion of failures to invite integrity and respect to the gathering of concerns – past, present, preemptive, scattered over the coffee table next to the *tissues... Tissues* used to remove inky traces of confrontation from your eyes, your fingers mimicking tweezers plucking out splinters one by one, knowing the pain dulls but the blood remains troubled for a time, as he is now, his voice lapsing in and out, *I'm s-orry*. *Sorry. P-lease*. You hear him drowning under theta and delta waves,

trying to resurface into the waking world,  
where all you can do is tell him, *I know, I love you*  
again and again, until he reaches out to hold you  
as he does, when you are both feeling the aftershocks  
of intimacy and the heat that burns away language,  
leaving only breath to carry notes  
fine-tuned to each other's names.

*Grace Dwyer* AUSTRALIA

# I've let a man

*After 'More than one man has reached up my skirt'  
by Natalie Sceners-Zapico*

I've let a man lie beside me while I  
lay very still  
until he eventually rolled over  
and slept  
I've let a man fill me with such delirium  
then suddenly grow cold as if touched  
by ice  
I've let a man leave notes  
on the windshield of my car  
calling me all the names  
hidden  
in the faces of men

I smiled, I cajoled, I stroked  
*There there* I said

I have suffered a man . . .  
I did not know it was suffering  
I did not know I could have twisted  
his hand,  
stopped his wrist  
I did not know I had a deadly eye –  
alligator deep –  
a nictitating membrane that released  
the witch

I've let a man tell me 'I'll knock you out.'  
quiet me, when I was drunk  
and wanted to leave the house  
to drink more  
I've let a man whisper in the dark  
'I'll strangle you if you move again.'

*Wes Lee* NEW ZEALAND/AOTEAROA

## The luckiest

I recall that day the heraldic genie sat on the footpath  
propped by the wall, drunk to his rollicked white-eye.  
He said 'What you got to be worried about?  
You're the luckiest girl in the world!' I smiled,  
prized open. I'd been walking home  
down Grey street, given a leg up by a benevolent drunk  
who stunk of piss, had an undercoat of resin-filth.  
Later at The Pogues concert a man randomly came up to me  
on his way to the bar, shouted 'You're the luckiest girl in the world!'  
I stood bamboozled, hood-winkled, grabbed his shirt, yelled  
'Why did you say that?' He just walked off as my world  
surrendered to song. Shane MacGowan held the microphone –  
steadied himself with the stand; on a steely thread  
of bluesy babble. His drunkard's face wrecked by booze,  
though none of us pitied him, he sang those ballads  
as deep-sea shanties, Morgan Le Fay on his tongue,  
vodka numbing his papilla, made vowels echo, consonants clang.  
And, he roused me on a broken strand, bound me  
to a motherland forged of kindred-rogue songs.

*Natalie Rose Dyer* AUSTRALIA

## Nude bar

I wanted to write about the dressing room, how, if I ever had a harbor, that was it. Those rooms with those women. And how stupid excited I was, like all the other tourists, when I paid the extra fee to view the harem of Topkapi, only to find the drabest part of the palace complex: flat white walls, bare stone floor. Why didn't I expect that? I, who had known such places and knew better. Like everyone else I was lured by the fantasy question, 'What went on in there?' Here's what goes on backstage: a lot of naked women, sure, but they're not training for fellatio on bananas or rubbing each other with lavender oil. They're bickering over who gets to sit in what chair. They're not spreading their legs on a bearskin rug in front of a lit fireplace. They're spreading the word about who's tipping tonight, and who never tips. They're complaining about the new girl. Occasionally, passing a joint. They're doing homework, possibly for your class. There's very little fighting but sometimes big talk of fighting. There is no decor, just some old carpet and a bathroom big enough for 1.5 people to shower and shit. What did you imagine? What did you come here for?

*Kathleen Balma* USA

## Having a picnic with Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich on an autumn day

The sky here is thick with so much blue that there's possibly no more blue left elsewhere in the world. The trees still have enough leaves that we can sit underneath and enjoy the light playing on our feet.

We lie down, slurping green grapes into our mouths while we talk, Marlene and Greta angling their bodies slightly so that their heads rest together.

I feel slightly left out by their closeness, but Marlene reaches her left fingers across the blanket until she finds my hand, softly folding her fingers around mine. They can't see, but I smile.

Greta is chattier than I'd expected, but I guess that's half because people are rarely their public persona and half because she's dead

and not really here. She talks about the movie she went to the night before, the lead actor a bit too in love with himself. The scriptwriter replaced so many times that who knows what the story was actually meant to be.

During this she has sat up so that she can weave a daisy chain, slitting a hole in the stalk with her thumb nail so that she can link

the next daisy through. Greta finishes by making it into a complete circle, something I have never succeeded in doing, and crowns Marlene. She makes two more crowns, for her and me, and then

we take turns holding buttercups underneath our chins; none of us can remember what the shine of their petals on our skin

is meant to reveal – money or love or adventure – but we dutifully contemplate the interaction of buttercup beneath chin.

I sit behind Marlene and slip my fingers through her blonde hair,

combing it over and over again until the only thing that would make this less weird is to braid it. And so I do, even though I'm terrible with hair,

dividing her hair into three sections, one much thicker than the others, taking each section over and hold, over and hold, over and hold.

I seal the braid off with a hair-tie Greta finds in her wallet.

It doesn't look too bad. But it's hard to imagine Marlene  
ever looking bad. Do either of them get up in the morning and sigh

at what they see in the mirror? Do they use concealer to hide  
blotchy bits on their cheeks? Do they give themselves facials  
on a Sunday night in front of the television?

We eat the last of the sandwiches and Greta opens a second  
bottle of champagne for them while I drink coconut water.

We talk and laugh and occasionally let our bodies fall across  
each other as we enjoy the afternoon. The sun and food  
and laughter make our eyes heavy, and we fall into sleep,

fighting it by trying to talk but the words slowly slip deep  
into our mouths and wait there. Breezes fan us gently

and we curl into the comfort of each other, slipping arms  
around one another and letting the day take us. We wake  
when the sky is moving through its sunset wardrobe

of colours, and when I look at Marlene, with her daisy crown  
askew and eyes looking up through her eyelashes, I lean in

towards her a little, unsure whether I want to look at her eyes  
or her lips. Her eyes are settled with certainty on my mouth,  
and I wonder if we'll kiss. But of course she's dead, not really here.

*Paula Harris* NEW ZEALAND/AOTEAROA

# Listening to Nick Cave on the radio in Wangaratta

## 1.

Nick Cave wrote this song  
in Berlin, as high  
  
as the railway bridge  
he used to jump from  
  
into the Ovens River,  
tilting towards freight trains  
  
like Quixotic windmills.  
Kaleidoscopic  
  
splash between landing  
and disappearing.

## 2.

He didn't disco  
-ver Leonard Cohen  
  
in his friend's brother's  
vinyl collection  
  
until he lived in Wang  
and his whole world changed.  
  
Drugs never held this much  
appeal. He had pot  
  
-ential, his teachers said.  
Could have been someone.

3.

Wiping the river  
from his shining eyes,

droplets scattering  
like crystals of light,

looking back towards  
the confluence

of past and future;  
that moment of wonder

when he broke free  
from this earth and flew.

*Christopher Breach* AUSTRALIA

## If Keats was still alive, I might be even creepier...

He was here when we arrived – sitting in the corner, fiddling with a glass of red wine and picking the skins off a pile of chilli roast groundnuts. He was chewing the kernels with caution, but you could see his cheeks beginning to flush. It would have been discourteous to look more closely. His pale yellow shirt had a faint roseate watermark and the beige linen jacket folded neatly on the seat beside him was creased and stylish.

The best bit about coming here with you is the talking. We listen to each other for hours, so any intimations of impropriety are cosmetic and irrelevant. However, when evening sunshine spills through the stained glass, the curves and hoops of your delicate metal ornaments sparkle, as do strands of silver woven into your blouse. I think you know I want to be the clothes you wear, arranged as you wish and required to touch your skin.

*Oliver Comins* UK

# Portmanteau

## I.

Under a bare bulb on my camp bed  
brown legs scaled from river-sun,  
our swimmers full of breeze  
on the line at dusk. The room is all

camphor laurel & airless heat  
from a winter lockdown. No TV  
or insect screens, mosquito drone  
giving way to a wall of cicada sound

that dies out in a dull ring  
of porch-light. Our playing cards  
are worn as linoleum – childish Old  
Maid as insect bodies amass beside

the bed, a transparent midden lost  
in miniature. The crickets begin with  
the heat, a tide rising early as my  
father, glazed with sweat & irritation

in blue singlet tidies his kapok bed  
above the lapping river. We clean  
the fish trap of slime and leaves,  
follow crab-trails, eat our stale loaves

the texture and taste of Esky-foam &  
open the paisley of insect bites absent-  
mindedly with a nail. Holidays  
melt like vanilla cones – home

to high-country, swamped in  
brown serge, felted blazer & badge  
the effort a day demands far more  
Pyrrhic than a Spartan war.

2.

A false Valkyrie, fresh hatchling in  
high boots. Popping of plugs, speed  
wound down to nothing. The bike  
stalled, defeated again by misfires.

In full moonlight its orange tank  
is a patina of reflected gums  
& rising steam. A long walk down  
a dirt road to the only payphone

for miles. Despite my pocket ringing  
with loose change, who would I call?  
My parents dead, my sister further.  
I lived in a share house, mealtimes

with dealers, the strange Danish  
leatherworker. Home was a kitchen  
scuttled with roaches, two dogs,  
no one close. This was independence.

Too scared to hitchhike, too broke  
to buy a car, how to change the plugs?  
The bike lay on the ground –  
an awkward animal, cold as roadkill.

*Julie Manning* AUSTRALIA

# The grackle

It is the basement bird –  
naturally placed in the aviary  
bargain bin. Its tail is longer

than its body, its feathers more  
brown than black. It insists on hopping  
(not flying) and caustic in how

it mimics a smoke detector battery  
at the end of its life – one to  
two screeches per skip. Yet

it's no swooping seagull. It's not even  
cousin to the owl, who  
with his knowing claims no

relation to what is common.  
It's not the robin with its red breast.  
It's not a jay bragging about blue.

It's just feathers on two legs bouncing  
and grousing and blurting false  
alarms beneath the tilting palm tree.

*Kimberly Williams* USA

## Learning the world

Deep in the cave, the lack of sun  
loops its soft wire round the skin  
of your wrist, seducing you  
or scaring you, you cannot tell,  
the same grip leading you in,  
repelling you out.

The wire creeps into bone  
and out of the cave you are still  
deep in the cave, your pale double  
drawn by the closeness of stone,  
entwined by its stillness.

You've inhaled  
a little darkness, a tinge of you  
breathing under the ground. You reach  
for the edges of the blue with the dark  
tips of your fingers, your footsteps  
drowning in the grass. You tread  
so that nothing will crumble, the light  
burrowing into your skin, how

all of you – you know it now,  
the skull, the flesh, the self –  
was always porous.

You are made  
of straw and illumination.  
You fold the hollows of the cave  
into your chest. And the hour,  
fleet, unstillable, spills again,  
again, into your veins.

*Kristen Lang* AUSTRALIA

# Content

*tell yourself that anytime now  
we will rise and walk away  
from somebody else's life.*

*'A Dream of Foxes', Lucille Clifton*

Always the water falling  
into the pond below, fish  
with their mouths open,  
hungry circles below the surface.

The sky wide blue and broken,  
air thrummed with cricketsong  
rising and falling – halting  
abruptly, the silence filled

with birdcries and the low groan  
of a man in pain or in love.  
Mid-afternoons like these,  
you cannot imagine the life

you left behind, all marble  
and leather, gilt mirrors and gold.  
These days, there are metal tools,  
pooled sweat, and our tireless

hands. Moving to make room  
for the other, the giving up of dead  
things, taking into our selves only  
what we have earned, and is sweet.

*Eileen Chong* AUSTRALIA

# Biographies



## Judges

TRICIA DEARBORN is an award-winning poet whose work has been widely published in Australian literary journals, as well as in the UK, the US, Ireland, New Zealand and online. Her poetry is well-represented in significant anthologies including *Contemporary Australian Poetry*, *Australian Poetry since 1788* and *The Best Australian Poems*. She has been an invited reader and panellist at many literary events, including the Queensland Poetry Festival 2018, the Quantum Words Festival of Science Writing 2018, Sydney Ideas 2018 and the Sydney Writers' Festival 2012. She is on the editorial board of *Plumwood Mountain*, an online journal of ecopoetry and ecopoetics, and was a guest poetry editor in 2016. She has received a number of grants from the Australia Council, and has been awarded two residencies at Varuna: the Writers' House, including a Residential Fellowship in 2017. Dearborn's previous collections are *The Ringing World* and *Frankenstein's Bathtub*. Her third full-length poetry collection, *Autobiochemistry*, was published earlier in 2019 by UWA Publishing.

PAUL MUNDEN is a poet, editor and screenwriter living in North Yorkshire. He is an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Canberra and a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of Leeds. For the British Council he has covered a number of scientific and humanitarian themes as conference poet and edited the anthology, *Feeling the Pressure: Poetry and science of climate change* (British Council, 2008). The inaugural director of Poetry on the Move, he has published five collections, most recently *Chromatic* (UWA Publishing, 2017).

KEI MILLER is a Jamaican poet, novelist and essayist. His most recent poetry collection, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, won the 2014 Forward Prize in the UK. His most recent novel, *Augustown*, won the Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, the Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe et du Tout-Monde, and the Prix Les Afriques. He holds an MA in Creative Writing and a PhD in English Literature and is Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Exeter. Kei has judged many prizes including the T.S. Eliot Prize, the Gordon Burn Prize and the National Poetry Competition in the UK. His forthcoming collection of poetry is *In Nearby Bushes* and a forthcoming collection of essays is *The Most Important Things*.

## Poets

ALLISON ADAIR's recent poems appear in *Best American Poetry* (2018), *Kenyon Review Online*, *North American Review*, and *ZYZZYVA*; and have received the Pushcart Prize (2019), the Florida Review Editors' Award, the Orlando Prize, and first place in Mid-American Review's Fineline Competition. Adair teaches English and creative writing at Boston College.

DAVIDE ANGELO's poems have appeared in various Australian journals, including *Overland*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *WA Poets Inc*, *Visible Ink*, and elsewhere. He lives in Bendigo, Victoria.

KATHLEEN BALMA is a Fulbright fellow, librarian, and navy veteran. Her poetry has appeared in the *Montreal International Poetry Prize Anthology*, the *Pushcart Prize Anthology*, and various literary magazines. Formerly a resident of Spain and Australia, she works at New Orleans Public Library.

PAULA BOHINCE is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Swallows and Waves* (Sarabande, 2016). Her poems have appeared in *Australian Book Review*, *The Australian*, and *Island*, as well as *The New Yorker*, *Best American Poetry*, and elsewhere. She lives in Pennsylvania.

CHRISTOPHER BREACH is an emerging writer who has won the Lord Mayor's Creative Writing Awards, been a finalist in poetry competitions run by University of Canberra, Australian Catholic University and the Australian Poetry Slam, and participated in *HARDCOPY*, a writing masterclass and professional development program run by ACT Writers Centre.

EILEEN CHONG is a poet who was born in Singapore of Chinese descent. She is the author of eight books. Her work has shortlisted for several awards, including twice for the Prime Minister's Literary Award. She lives and works in Sydney, Australia.

OLIVER COMINS lives and works in West London. *Oak Fish Island*, his first full collection, was published by Templar Poetry in 2018 and launched with a reading at Keats House in Hampstead.

ROGER CRAIK is Emeritus Professor of English at Kent State University in Ohio. He was born in Leicester, studied at the universities of Reading and Southampton, and taught as a Fulbright Scholar in Bulgaria and Romania. His latest full-length poetry book is *Down Stranger Roads* (2014).

MADELEINE DALE is a Brisbane poet. She holds First Class Honours and a University Medal in Creative Writing, and is currently completing an MPhil at the University of Queensland. Her work can be found in *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *Voiceworks*, *Plumwood Mountain*, and *Stilts Journal*, among others.

JOE DOLCE is a composer & poet. He is the 2017 winner of the University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's Health Poetry Prize. He has been published in *Best Australian Poems 2015 & 2014* and in *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, *Canberra Times*, *Quadrant*, *North of Oxford* (US), and *Antipodes* (US). He was awarded the Advance Australia Award in 1981 and the 25th Launceston Poetry Cup. His latest collection is *On Murray's Run*, 150 poems and lyrics selected by Les Murray, Ginninderra Press, 2017.

Poet and satirist TUG DUMBLY has performed as a radio regular (Triple J, ABC Local Radio) and in many schools and venues. He's released two CDs through the ABC, twice won the Banjo Paterson Prize for comic verse, and three times won the Nimbin World Performance Poetry Cup. His debut print collection *Son Songs* came out in 2018.

GRACE DWYER is a 24 year old psychology graduate and Masters of Education student. She aspires to become an English teacher and make poetry more accessible, meaningful and interesting for students. Grace's poetry has previously appeared in *Text* journal, *The Grieve Project* and *Words in Winter*, Trentham.

NATALIE ROSE DYER-STRIBLING completed a PhD in Creative Writing at The University of Melbourne (2017). She earned an MFA with an Australian Postgraduate Award (2010). Her poetry and essays appear in esteemed literary journals. Natalie was Researcher-in-Residence at The University of Amsterdam (2018). She currently teaches at Deakin University, Melbourne.

STEVE EVANS teaches creative writing. He writes poetry, prose and nonfiction, is an international journal's literary editor, and prose editor for an Australian journal. He has published seven poetry collections and edited or co-authored five other books. *Animal Instincts* (poetry) and *Easy Money* (fiction) are due out in 2019.

LUKE FISCHER is a Sydney-based poet and philosopher. His books include the poetry collections *A Personal History of Vision* (UWAP, 2017) and *Paths of Flight* (Black Pepper, 2013), and the monograph *The Poet as Phenomenologist: Rilke and the New Poems* (Bloomsbury, 2015). For more information see: [www.lukefischerauthor.com](http://www.lukefischerauthor.com)

JEREMY GADD is an Australian poet whose work has appeared in literary magazines and periodicals in Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, Wales, Canada, the USA, India and Germany. He has published four volumes of poetry, two novels, two collections of short stories and had scripts professionally performed.

ZOLA GONZALEZ-MACARAMBON is a teacher and writer from Cagayan de Oro, Philippines. Her works have been published in various national and international publications including *Cordite Poetry*, *Asian Cha*, *Peril*, *Misfit*, and *The Literary Yard*. She is a PhD candidate at Monash University.

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE was a runner up in America's 2019 Foley Poetry contest and a recipient of 2nd Prize in Cannon Poets' 2018 Sonnet or Not Poetry

Prize. His poems are forthcoming in *Columbia Poetry Review*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Salamander*, among others.

KATIE HALE's debut novel, *My Name is Monster*, was published by Canongate in 2019. She is the author of two poetry pamphlets: *Breaking the Surface* (2017) and *Assembly Instructions* (2019), which won the Munster Fool for Poetry Chapbook Prize. She is a former MacDowell Fellow and Wordsworth Trust Poet in Residence. She regularly runs poetry workshops in schools.

PAULA HARRIS lives in New Zealand, where she writes poems and sleeps a lot, because that's what depression makes you do. She won the 2018 Janet B. McCabe Poetry Prize and has a poetry chapbook *i make men like you die sweetly* (dancing girl press, 2019). [www.paulaharris.co.nz](http://www.paulaharris.co.nz)

SAKINAH HOFER has won the Manchester Fiction Prize and Sherwood Anderson Fiction Award. She was a finalist for the Manchester Poetry Prize and the Sandy Crimmins Poetry Award. A former chemical engineer, she's currently a PhD student and an Alfred C. Yates Fellow at the University of Cincinnati.

MATT HOHNER holds an MFA from Naropa University. Hohner recently won the Doolin Writers' Weekend Poetry Prize. An editor for Loch Raven Review, Hohner's collection *Thresholds and Other Poems* was published by Apprentice House in 2018. He has new work forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner* and elsewhere. He lives in Baltimore.

IVY IRELAND's most recent poetry collection is *Porch Light*. Ivy has been awarded the Australian Young Poet Fellowship, the Harri Jones Memorial Prize and the Thunderbolt Prize. Ivy completed her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Newcastle and her poems, essays and reviews are widely published.

SHARON KERNOT's work has been published in a variety of magazines, journals and anthologies including *Mascara*, *Verandah*, *Southerly*, *Best Australian Poems*, *Island Magazine* and *Australian Love Stories*. She is the author of two novels, *Underground Road* (Wakefield Press) and *The Art of Taxidermy* (Text Publishing).

CINDY KING's work appears in *The Sun*, *Callaloo*, *River Styx*, *Cincinnati Review*, and elsewhere. Zoonotic, her book-length poetry manuscript, will be published by Tinderbox Editions in 2020. Her chapbook, *Easy Street*, is forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press in September 2019. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Dixie State University.

ANNE KNOWLES has worked as an animal keeper at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo. As nursery keeper she raised newborn Amur leopards, jaguars, and bears. Later, she taught high school English Language Development. As a poet, she was awarded first place in the San Luis Obispo Poetry Festival.

SARAH KOBRINSKY was the 2013–2015 Poet Laureate of Emeryville, California. Her first collection, *Nighttime on the Other Side of Everything*, is forthcoming by New

Rivers Press (November 2019). She was born in Canada, raised in North Dakota, seasoned in England, and tempered in California.

KONG KWANGKYU (Kong Kwang-kyu) is a poet born in Seoul, Korea. He started his writer's career through 'Dongseoh Literature' in 1986. He has 7 published in journals and has poetry volumes *Soju Bottle* and *To Paju* along with a prose collection, *Fresh Sadness*. He has won the Yun-Dong-Ju Literature award and many more.

KRISTEN LANG has published *The Weight of Light* (Five Islands Press, 2017), *SkinNotes* (Walleah Press, 2017), and *Let me show you a ripple* (self-published, 2008). She won the ACU Poetry Prize in 2015 and was short-listed for the 2019 Dorothy Hewett Award. She lives in North-West Tasmania.

WES LEE has two collections of poetry, *Body, Remember* (Eyewear Publishing, London, 2017), and *Shooting Gallery* (Steele Roberts, Wellington, 2016). She has won a number of awards for her writing including The BNZ Katherine Mansfield Literary Award. Most recently she was awarded the Poetry New Zealand Prize 2019 by Massey University Press.

ROSANNA LICARI is an Australian poet and writer. Her work has appeared in various Australian and international publications including *eratio* (USA), *Shearsman* (UK), and *Wild Court* (UK). In 2019, she completed a Residential Fellowship at Varuna: The National Writers' House and is the poetry editor of online literary journal, *StylusLit*.

DEBBIE LIM lives in Sydney. She was commended in the Poetry Society UK's National Poetry Competition 2013 and has received the Rosemary Dobson Award (2009) among others. Her chapbook, *Beastly Eye*, was published by Vagabond Press in 2012.

PATRICIA LIU is originally from Oklahoma and is currently a junior at Harvard University. She studies English with a secondary in Mind, Brain, and Behavior. She is interested in the way words can harm and heal — and how poetry can begin to repair the universe and its sorrow.

ROSE LUCAS is a Melbourne poet and academic at Victoria University. Her first collection, *Even in the Dark* (UWAP 2013) won the Mary Gilmore Prize; her second collection, *Unexpected Clearing*, was published by UWAP in 2016. She is currently completing her third collection, 'This Shattered Eye'.

JULIE MANNING is a poet and visual artist. Her poetry has been published in the *Australian Book Review*, *Cordite*, and the *Grieve Project Poetry* anthology. She is currently working on her first book of poems.

TAYVE NEESE's full-length collection of poems, *Blood to Fruit*, was published in 2015. She's the Executive Editor of Trio House Press and a member of the Concord Poetry Center in Massachusetts. Neese lives in Fernandina Beach on a small barrier island off the coast of Florida.

## SULASTRI NOORDIN

DAMEN O'BRIEN is a Queensland poet. Damen was joint winner of the Peter Porter Poetry Prize and has won the Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize, the Welsh International Poetry Competition Poetry Prize, and the Ipswich Poetry Festival amongst others. Damen has been published in *Cordite*, *Southerly*, *Rabbit*, *StylusLit* and other journals.

MOYA PACEY published her second collection: *Black Tulips* (Recent Work Press) in 2017. She co-edits the on-line journal, *Not Very Quiet*. Recently she's been published in *Meniscus* 7:1, *Not Very Quiet* Issue 4, and *Fem Asia*. She was poet in residence at Elizabeth Bishop House, NS, Canada October 2018. <https://not-very-quiet.com/>

TAMARAH ROCKWOOD is an award-winning poet, playwright and fiction writer. She has authored one poetry book, *Petals of Magnolia*. Currently, she is completing her ALM thesis in Creative Writing at Harvard Extension School. Her, her husband, Ben, and their 5 children live on an island in Washington State.

JENNIFER ROSE was born in Evanston, Illinois (USA), in 1959. The author of two poetry collections, *The Old Direction of Heaven* and *Hometown for an Hour*, she is currently working on a prose memoir. She lives near Boston and works in the field of downtown revitalization.

ERIN SHIEL has had poems published in *Meanjin*, *Cordite* and *Australian Love Poems*. She has completed a Masters research program at the University of Sydney in ekphrastic poetry inspired by Australian contemporary art and is working on her first collection.

JOHN-KARL STOKES is known internationally as one of Australia's most courageous and innovative writers with many prize-winning, publication, and performance awards. Stokes is on a passionate mission: to bring plain speaking into emotional writing. 'Truth is the most exciting thing for the listener. Truth lives also in the theatre. Rhythm is everything.'

JAMES SUTHERLAND-SMITH lives in Slovakia. His most recent collection is *The River and the Black Cat* published by Shearsman Books in 2018. For his translation work he has received the Slovak Hviezdoslav Prize and the Serbian Zlatko Krasni Prize. Selections of his translations of Mária Ferenčuhová's Slovak poetry and Rajko Dzaković's Serbian poetry were also published in 2018 and a second selection of translations of the poetry of Mila Haugová is about to be published in Britain by Arc Publications as well as a selection of the poetry of Ján Gavura in Slovakia.

MARK SVENVOLD's recent poems have appeared in the 60th Anniversary issue of Poetry Northwest and are forthcoming in Western Humanities Review. He lives in New York City where he is intent upon finishing his third book of poems entitled *Orpheus, Incorporated*.

ISI UNIKOWSKI is a PhD candidate in the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University. His poetry has been widely published in Australia and overseas, including the *Australian Book Review's* 'States of Poetry 2017' website.

ROGER VICKERY has won over 70 awards for poetry, fiction, plays and scripts. His work has been published in many anthologies and magazines, here and overseas. His poetry wins include the Bruce Dawe, WB Yeats (twice) Banjo Paterson (twice) and Lane Cove awards. He has been a finalist in The Irish Fish Prize, Canadian Magpie Award and the UK Keats-Shelley International Prize

Dr DARRYL WHETTER is the author of four books of fiction and two poetry collections. His most recent book is the climate-crisis novel *Our Sands*, forthcoming from Penguin Random-House. A Canadian, he is the inaugural director of the new MA Creative Writing at Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore.

KIMBERLY WILLIAMS has an MFA in Creative Writing from University of Texas El Paso. After living in the southwest part of the United States for twenty years, she moved to Canberra to work on her PhD. The places where she's lived have inspired her poems. She is originally from Detroit, Michigan.

NICHOLAS WONG is the author of *Crevasse* (Kaya Press, 2015), and the winner of the Lambda Literary Award in Gay Poetry. He is also a recipient of *Australian Book Review's* Peter Porter Poetry Prize in 2018 for his poem 'Taipei, 101'. He teaches at the Education University of Hong Kong.

SUE WOOTTON lives in Dunedin, New Zealand. Her novel, *Strip*, was longlisted in the 2017 Ockham NZ Book Awards, and her poetry collection, *The Yield*, was a finalist in these awards in 2018. In 2020 she'll spend several months living and writing in Menton, France, as the Katherine Mansfield Menton Fellow.

## 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 globalisation, and its affordances and pressures on cultural producers, whether individuals, communities or organisations.

