

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS ARGUED THAT A POEM IS 'A FIELD OF ACTION': A PLACE WHERE SOMETHING HAPPENS, A PLACE WHERE THERE IS INTENSE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD. THE POEMS IN THIS PRIZE ANTHOLOGY BEAR THIS OUT, IN FINDING THE MOST CONTEMPORARY LANGUAGE AND STRUCTURES IN WHICH TO DEAL WITH THE AGE-OLD CONCERNS OF LOVE AND OF DEATH: THE VERY STUFF OF BEING. THESE POEMS TEST THE AIR; SHIFT PERSPECTIVE; CHALLENGE TRADITIONS; CELEBRATE - WITH EQUAL ENTHUSIASM - THE PAST AND THE FUTURE, THE BUILT AND THE NATURAL WORLDS.

MOMENTS 2024 UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA VICE-CHANCELLOR'S INTERNATIONAL POETRY PRIZE



moments



UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA
VICE-CHANCELLOR'S INTERNATIONAL POETRY PRIZE 2024

MOMENTS

*The University of Canberra
Vice-Chancellor's
International Poetry Prize*

2024

MOMENTS

*The University of Canberra
Vice-Chancellor's
International Poetry Prize*

2024

First published in 2024 by
Centre for Creative and Cultural Research
Faculty of Arts and Design
University of Canberra
ACT 2601 Australia

This publication is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

© the authors of the individual poems contained in this volume, for their poems
© the publisher, for the publication concept, layout and design

Prize administration: Katie Hayne with Janhavi Salvi
Publication editor: Jen Webb

Publication design and layout: Caren Florance

ISBN: print: 978-1-74088-598-0 electronic: 978-1-74088-597-3

Cover image: Photograph by Oskar Speck depicting a group of birds standing on a beach at low tide.

Reproduced via Flickr Commons, with thanks. ANMM Collection ANMS0545[314]

https://www.flickr.com/photos/anmm_thecommons/39641321631/in/photolist-23oY8QB

In the 1930s Oskar Speck was a German adventurer, who paddled his kayak, SUNNSCHIEN, from Germany to Australia. He departed from Ulm, Germany, on 18 June 1932, paddling down the Danube. During his seven and half year voyage, he stopped at ports in Germany, Austria, Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran Jaya, Papua New Guinea and Australia. He arrived at Saibai Island, in the northern Torres Strait, on 20 September 1939. Upon his arrival at Thursday Island Speck was arrested as an enemy alien and interned for the duration of the World War II at Loveday and Tatura Internment camps. After the war, he settled in Australia and worked in the opal industry. Oskar Speck died in 1993.

This publication is available in digital form here:
www.canberra.edu.au/research/faculty-research-centres/cccr/resources

Contents

<i>Editor's Foreword</i>		7
<i>Judges' report</i>		8
<i>Winner</i>		
Anthony Lawrence	Trying on my father's clothes	11
<i>Winner, International</i>		
Jeannie Wallace McKeown	Global South	15
<i>Runner-up</i>		
Roxanne Bodsworth	Remembering the rain	19
<i>Highly Commended</i>		21
Lachlan Brown	Cut common	23
Brian Patrick Heston	Jersey Aubade	25
Mark Svenvold	Why I love my broken calliope	27
Patricia Sykes	Breathing in public	28
1: LEVELS OF INGENUITY		31
Mara Adamitz Scrupe	The Sea of Agassiz (& other histories)	33
Louise Wakeling	evolution	35
Lynette Thorstensen	Lizard Island	36
James Laidler	Blue banded bee (<i>Amegilla Cingulata</i>)	37
Jo Gardiner	In search of a teachable moment	38
Julie Elizabeth Velde	The winking eye of grief	39
Lee Knowles	Angela's house	40
Ian Reid	From the rivers to the seas	42
Harvey Soss	It was such a pretty face he had	44
James Sutherland-Smith	Signal	46
Joseph Gosper	Cryptogyps	48
Harper Otawka	The train	49
David Atkinson	Run of the river	50
Reward Kunik	Landscape of a man killed by a snake	51
Glenn McPherson	Trakl's forest	52
2: ARBITRARY INCIDENTS		53
Ellen Campbell	Joyce and Mike and Jude and Parker and Thelma and Louise	55
Adrian Hookway	The grand controllers	56
Grace Kelley	Rusty nails	57

2: ARBITRARY INCIDENTS (*cont.*)

SJ Finn	Deglutition in a goose	58
Paul Dawson	They, Tiresias	60
Shernite Arnold	The contract	62
Harvey Soss	His name was Yitzhak	63
Roxanne Bodsworth	Courage	65
Michael Chang	GO BEFORE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO	66
KP McCarthy	The off chance	67
Madisyn Simington	Jared	68
Rhonda Collis	Like an African woman	69
Joe Dolce	Walt Disney Looney Tune typewriter paradelle	70
Brian Daly	pepper me	71
James Sutherland-Smith	At the rope park	73

3: EXHALING WONDER 75

Tug Dumbly	After church, 1975	77
Lynette Thorstensen	dark sky sanctuary	79
Claire Gaskin	the sunflowers hoist their halloween bladders to the averted moon	80
Harvey Soss	Choose some other language, dear	81
Patricia Sykes	Derelicts and Discards	82
Aaron Leyshon	Obsession	84
Michael Auty	to an end	85
Kimberley Abraham	Cages	86
Stacey Garrett	Role model	87
Devika Singh	Feast with my demons	89
Kim Graves	Man in rubble	91
Ben Egerton	The blessing	92
Roxanne Bodsworth	Breathe	93
Sarah Meehan	Saturday morning, Main St apothecary	94
RachelSimone Wyley	Epilogue	96

Biographies 105

Editor's Foreword

The University of Canberra has, from its inception, been very committed to the world of creative writing. Creative and professional writing were among the first courses offered, following the establishment of what was then the Canberra College for Advanced Education (1970). Two decades later, when the College was restructured as the University of Canberra, the creative writing offerings were expanded to include Masters and, later, PhD degrees. The University held an annual short story award, supported a centre for creative writing studies, and published an annual anthology of new creative writing by our students.

In 2014 the Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize was established by Professor Stephen Parker, and it immediately attracted submissions from across the globe. Its judges were well-known poets and editors, drawn from a number of nations and communities, and with a range of knowledge and expertise in poetry and language. The winners and runners-up include internationally known poets, as well as those who were still establishing their profile.

This tenth iteration of the prize has followed a similar pattern. It received submissions from some 900 poets, located in the Anglophone nations of Australia, Canada, the UK, the USA, New Zealand and South Africa, as well as a number of EU nations, poets from Middle East nations, across Africa, Asia, and Central America. These poets include writers who are new to the form, those with a global following, and those at all stages in between. Each has a particular set of insights and concerns, their own use of language, varying degrees of participation in the forms of poetry, and a clear passion to find the right mode of expression for the things that matter to them. The judges' report, on the following page, provides more detail on how they responded to the whole corpus of entries, and what they were looking for when whittling down the entries to the finalists.

For those who won, were shortlisted or longlisted, our congratulations. For those whose poems were not among that group, we want to acknowledge the value of the poetry, and to appreciate your engagement with the form. As the judges note, selection of poems in any competition is less a reflection on the quality of individual works, and more a reflection of the judges' personal tastes and interests. Please keep writing, and keep sending your poetry out to readers.

The cover image for *Moments* (2024) has been selected by our designer, Dr Caren Florance. This untitled photograph is captioned 'Photograph by Oskar Speck depicting a group of birds standing on a beach at low tide'. It records, quietly and with poetic concision, a moment he experienced during his kayak trip from Germany to Australia. This moment in time, and all the moments of his remarkable voyage, speak to us of the multicultural voices that build the corpus of poetry; the sustained work involved in creating and constructing a poem; and the close and empathic attention artists pay in the making of their work.

Professor Jen Webb, Editor

Judges' Report

One characteristic of the many submissions to the 2024 Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize is an implicit speaking about connectedness of experience across our natural and human world. Aside from this observation, it would be a feat to distil into short and true generalisations the diversity of their voice and craft. Certainly, the plurality of more than nine hundred voices is testament to a healthy enthusiasm for poetry.

Poetry will always be in the eye of the beholder. One judge's first place selection may find its way into another judge's slush pile. Such is the nature of judging a poetry contest, especially one this large and with so many outstanding entries. It's a very subjective process.

Co-judging a poetry contest from opposite ends of the globe offered its challenges, but whenever we conferred and compared notes about our choices, we discovered they were the same, or not far from it. We had agreed without agreeing that all good poems share the basic elements of imagery, a distillation of language, tension, density and what's at stake: in other words, how vulnerable did the poets become in sharing their work? These were the parameters we worked within, and from which a longlist, shortlist, finalists and winners were selected.

The longlisted poems in this anthology showcase the diversity of imaginative voices that are asking readers to read and think differently in our contemporary world. Those poems bring personal and collective contexts into sight in a plethora of poetic styles, both experimental and traditional. They aim for attentiveness and delight in playing with words.

Anthony Lawrence's 'Trying on my father's clothes' was chosen for its rhythmic expository tensions and precision of word-choice. Its discursive turning over of thought holds subtle and quiet witness to a young self's discovery.

Jeannie Wallace McKeown's 'Global South' is a plain-speaking, colloquial poem. It conveys a careful awareness of cultural sensitivities and of language, speaking from a personal experience to the heart of contemporary political and social conversations.

Roxanne Bodsworth's 'Remembering the rain' is a compelling invitation to notice anew our altering climate, and our own vulnerabilities. Through an imaginative evocation of memory, its compression of thought and language evokes sensory image after image of the living need for rain as sustenance.

Michelle Borzi and James E Cherry

WINNER

Trying on my father's clothes

It was the year our Prime Minister went for a swim
and disappeared.

My father said he'd either stroked out
to meet a miniature submarine like the one
that came to grief
in shark nets in Sydney harbour during
the war, or been broken by breakers on a reef,
his body carried
away on the tide. While my father was at work,

I tried on the black suit he'd worn to the Prime
Minister's funeral.

The sleeves went past my knees
and the trouser legs folded like the bellows
on a squeeze box.

Coins flipped out to the floor when I kicked
the fabric away, so I searched the pockets
of his other clothes
for things he'd forgotten or hidden.

I knew people kept secrets. I'd heard stories
about the sisters
who lived on the corner. Tall and thin,
they wore long grey dresses and bonnets, finished
each other's sentences,

hissed when I rode by on my scooter,
and weren't even related. In the breast pocket
of his cricket blazer

I found a book of matches
with a woman's face and phone number
on the cover.

In the lining of his raincoat, sticks of gum
and a pack of menthol cigarettes. In a folder
beneath his shoes

I found photos of naked men and women

on a bed. I recognised one position from when
an eel I'd hooked
 had tied itself into a figure of eight,
then slipped in and out of the knot
as if the act
 of repetition were enjoyable. I closed
the wardrobe quietly the way you close
a bedroom door
 when someone is sleeping, or sick.

WINNER,
INTERNATIONAL

Global South

Every Australian, every New Zealander,
 opens their conference slot
 by announcing whose tribal land
 they are speaking from.
 Land now built over with concrete and glass,
 hidden from the ancestors' eyes.

It's a recognition of a bloody past,
 evocation of a lost future.
 No one there to stand up, argue that, actually,
 the name is incorrect, or mispronounced,
 or the land is contested.

For speaker and audience
 it is Ngunnawal land, Turrbal land, Gadigal land,
 and here lie the buried bones to prove it.
 No one contradicts the speaker.
 No one seizes the mic to say
 "give it back!"
 Perhaps it is all too different now;
 perhaps they are too few.

Here, the displaced are still alive.
 Folks recall their forcible removal
 to places drier, stonier, further away
 from the bones of their families,
 and white people.

Even if the land was lost 60, 80, 200 years ago,
 enough descendants remember
 their ancestors with fondness
 to wish themselves un-dispossessed,
 and able to return home.

If, from the podium,
 I say I am speaking
 from amaXhosa, amaZulu, Khoe-Sān land,
 you will know, straightaway,
 by my face or my voice,
 that my ancestors displaced their ancestors.

It is a reminder of a current injustice,
not a panacea for a past crime,
and I am reminded
that my parents' ashes may be strewn here,
but their parents' parents' bones
lie buried in a colder country, far far away.

Yet the paramount chief greets me,
smiling, before my talk.
"It's IXam, right?" I ask.
"Am I saying it right?"
"IKorra" he corrects me gently –
"the one sitting over there, he's IXam".
A deeply significant difference, and I had missed it.
I practice the click sound.
I am very bad at it, but he is very polite.

"I'm so glad you're here"
I say impulsively, meaning
I'm so glad you're actually here,
still, every breathing cell of you,
shaking my hand with more kindness
than I feel I truly deserve,
about to stand up and speak
from your land,
with my English tongue.

RUNNER-UP

Remembering the rain

when it fell rhythmic on an iron roof like a mother's heartbeat
incessant lullaby for those cocooned within

when the clouds lowered to the ground and I walked through their softness
to hear the deluge pouring like a waterfall into the iron tank

when it made tracks and pools in the layers of silt like a woodworm
tracing its passage beneath the bark finding a way to go deeper

when the earth softened beneath my feet walking on sponge-like topsoil
instead of grass that crunched and dirt hard as concrete

when the eucalypt oils expanded dust washed from their leaves
and we drove through the bush to inhale the geosmin

when the rivers collecting the run-off swelled broke free of their banks
overran the land as though reclaiming territory

when the valleys and plains became lakes reflecting the sky
while only waterbirds and snakes were granted passage

when we didn't know it would become a memory
to be called upon while dreaming

on the crumbling banks
of a dry riverbed

HIGHLY COMMENDED

LACHLAN BROWN
BRIAN PATRICK HESTON
MARK SVENGOLD
PATRICIA SYKES

Cut common

...the two-headed man has half as much of twice of everything
Bruce Beaver, Letters to Live Poets (XII)

i.

after // hearing a weird biracial
 insult directed at your back //
 you search memories using facial

recognition // gawking at diss track
 escalations in the soundclouds
 (cirrus & serious) // these slack

conversations drop their shrouds
 over us // always predictive always
 productive // stock photos of crowds

inhabit the present // new days
 establish themselves like an optionless
 future // you're obvs-asian through the haze

through the login details of the windless

ii.

afternoon // summer continues with
 prayers encrypted into these leaves
 & with parks that appear on the fifth

trip around the block // part of you believes
 all terms & conditions are systematic
 theologies in disguise // what else receives

such grateful assent? // the apophatic
 profits pay out when any device
 loses its attachments // the static

of sparrowsong is data's hidden price //
 these seasons just autoplay don't
 they? // you've got to click twice

to prove you're no robot // won't

iii.

you include all ethnicities from the out-
set next time? // the city's passing faces
form an unsatisfactory playlist // doubt

is its own lock screen // uncertainty graces
each password attempt // the financial
year will end like a catechism with traces

of old arguments // & substantial
rmb gains (o those gains) // when did you
log in & tamper with the circumstantial

avarice? // yeah that's not a new
crime // that's not even hidden // the ad
follows your wandering eyes through

these circles: thumbprint, watchface // bad

iv.

advice now transposed into a singable
bak cham gai recipe // you accepted everything
when you signed up // e.g. winnable

arguments that must always cling
to doubly-inhabited premises //
when a roast duck quacks it's another ring-

tone non-echo myth // he menaces
you & it goes straight to voicemail //
he fashions a sixteenth-note nemesis

from a dummy account // fail-
proof plan // man // hi-hat
pattern you love but can't nail //

transcribing the new year // chopping white chickens // & all that.

Jersey Aubade

A thousand thousand seeming
miles into Turnersville,
New Jersey, my aunt's front yard,
my grandmother in a lawn chair
on a Sunday morning,
her gnarled feet pale against

the grass. I dig beside her
with my plastic shovel.
Striking something hard,
I reach into the hole I've made
to find a cat's skull. It's stuffed
to its eyeholes with soil
and smells of flowerpot.
I say, sabretooth
then lift him to show
Gram. All his heft leaks out,

leaving the skull
hollow. Gram's smoky curls,
singed with black, flames
into an annulus when she leans down
to see. Her eyes, milky
with cataracts, struggle
to find me. They stare across

the cul-de-sac to where
two sycamores shush and sway
in the breeze. A hawk sails
above, but it's so far off,
I can't see it beyond
its own pure screech.
Finally, Gram grips

the skull, sliding her fingers
from snout to dome, exploring it
as she might the face
of the brother she lost
to Spanish Influenza,
her first husband, who didn't
return from war –

her eldest daughter, who
smiled her last in a bedroom
brightening with dawn. Gram's sight

was clear then, but how
could she resist the feel
of an eye socket or brow ridge –
those forms and shapes beneath
the shallow skin of her loss?
Gram pulls her hand

from the skull, settles it
in my hair. The day grows
hot as the sun climbs.
And we sit for a time
just like this
until our shade shrinks away.

Why I love my broken calliope

Because, outside, the snows of history,
neck deep already, are like a backlog
of patent applications,
each invention a design upon my obsolescence.

Because when I wheel out my broken calliope,
its pipes gleaming like tarnished rainbows,
its bellows smelling of the swamp, a turbid burbot
camped out in its F-hole, grammy,
who can no longer speak,
awakens and points at my broken calliope.

Because whoever played it last played that song
about the chicken that got everybody high.
It was the perfect song to play on a broken calliope.

Because, late at night, you can hear it
whisper things like “knitting needles”
and “around the bend.” Go ahead,
all you Monte Carlo computer models,
try to guess what it says next. I’ll swim back
with it –
a duck murmuring softly between my teeth.

Because my broken calliope is broken
in just this way, and in no other way.

And because whatever’s to be found there
arrives in raku accidentals of being,
in the lower-case, snake-handling, holy ghost
sense of quotidian steam rising, just now,

from the roof of Rat World below city streets,
Calliope’s pipes venting all that comes and goes,
all that comes and goes but never dies.

Breathing in public

1. *Prologue*

If "*Perfect order would be cold!*"¹
then breath is evidence of chaos?

each warm suck and thrust
each covert and overt exhale

invisibly shared.
This morning's eupneic

rhythm in proof
of the sweet-breathing

function of lungs
as if the AI era

is a mere horizon event
and our humanity

in no danger
from that which it creates.

2. *Epilogue*

It is nothing, it is everything,
the desire to preserve
self from self, self from other

history in every detail
every grit, whether to bathe in
or perjure it

the private and public
of any life's express motive
and tool

any exfoliant's drool
an example
of abrade and smooth

no tally or subtraction
only the multiple smudge
of fingerprints in the code of DNA

perhaps in a surge of trust
we might exit misgiving
garbed or naked

and build a communality
whose selves find comfort
in each other's perplexity

who speak
not for each other but to
who do not rue the world's

circumference beds
where *other* by *other*
we sleep head to head

perhaps even stand watch
at the margins
in gargoyle mode

suitably grim
as if to ward off
an era of hate.

¹ Molecular Consciousness. Francoise Tibika

I
LEVELS OF INGENUITY

MARA ADAMITZ SCRUPE
LOUISE WAKELING
LYNETTE THORSTENSEN
JAMES LAIDLER
JO GARDINER
JULIE ELIZABETH VELDE
LEE KNOWLES
IAN REID
HARVEY SOSS
JAMES SUTHERLAND-SMITH
JOSEPH GOSPER
HARPER OTAWKA
DAVID ATKINSON
REWAND KUNIK
GLENN McPHERSON

The Sea of Agassiz (& other histories)

i. a storm & a lake

shake me & I crave them who'll never return
 – in the snow blown whiteness looking out from new I dream them – the last
 ones left packed & those graveyards (reporting the ground is frozen at least six
 feet deep) & sharp as a turn that storm slap a century past – an Arctic blast down
 from Saskatchewan: sleet & snow & winterkill (those rows upon rows of milkers'
 heads clamped in stanchions) no feed to feed & we thought *light out quick* – as if
 we could – but didn't from this southerly end of the end of the icefield & here:
 miles of buried beaches like any grooved to shoreline – sometimes erosional &
 sometimes depositional – it's said you can track it unearthed around Lower & Upper
 Red Lakes & Lake of the Woods up near Winnipeg at the southernmost tip
 of the Laurentide's run northward as it rushing ebbs meltwater southerly through
 the Minnesota River Valley & westerly from Canada to Alaska easterly to the Great
 Lakes & there are depressions too in this land: some shallow some deep some
 carved from bedrock shored as loamish sand at the last sheet's retreat

*

& yes we knew about these sediments (we've crossed other oceans just for this)
 Lester soil black from river leavings 10,000 years old & we know about primordial
 deltas wending swaggering scouring slinging: you can still see miles
 -long strandlines from a 1,000-foot-thick iceberg's dragging out the waters' bottom
 melting fast floating catastrophically down to the Atlantic & even streaming north
 via the Mackenzie to the Arctic – looking out from new – that flooded icy torrent
 released from the Sea of Agassiz triggers then a thousand-year cold spell across
 the old world all from a late Pleistocene inland ocean in Minnesota

ii. January 1918

*Today, as we battle through another global pandemic ... and one that is again ravaging tribal nations –
 it is fascinating how we can turn back 100 years in history and see the exact same fears, reactions, and outcomes,
 in a way that is more personally relatable ...* National Archives, The Influenza Epidemic of 1918

they talk now of *dagwaagin* a new opening of the heart of fall (from the guts
 of winter) a time for trees to set their roots – deep slumbering – alongside
 that giant white mammoth so fast asleep / but no just nodded off until the last blizzard
 blares *April* (count on it) & still it's walkable / our paths tunnelled between six-
 foot drifts – a friend asks me *why history* – & I think of 1918 & a war that took
 sixteen million & an epidemic that swept in & took fifty million more more
 & more & more than any other on record & I think a hundred years
 is a drop in the bucket & do we know more now from nothing new or less?

*

Entry for the Standing Rock Reservation: "Card Files Relating to Indians in World War I" – National Archives

STANDING ROCK *129 Indians went to the War from this Agency.*
12 deaths, most of them from Influenza in the Army Camps. 3 died in France.
Many returned as NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS. The parents were willing
for the boys to enlist and contributed to the cause, liberally.

iii. through the lens of a Brownie No. 2 model F

30 January 1918: A small unit of 400 Ukraine soldiers, many of them cadets, delayed a Bolshevik force of 4,000 from entering Kiev. – Encyclopedia of Ukraine

you look like raindrops on striped tulips (in the eyes of the beautiful
beloved) or water-glazed cursive rolling disinterested as a river – or the other
way around / dormant as a wintering-over animal asleep in a hole in a pock-
burrowed path (you the creature of ages' passing / the tiny survivor
pictured in the background of a small photograph) – this silvery impression
of exposed light – in the now near-defunct chemical process of a world

where sinning is so much warmer than absolution & forebears are so much
more relaxed when extant but in this upright season please give up your wayward
ways – you are going hard *very hard* – ease up to the naval & the roots / take
the sensors at the tip of the shoot bend your stalks & leaves to the light
hold your camera to waist height & compose your subjects at the approximate
centre of the eyepiece: wife & children lined up beside your brand-new lap-sided
white-painted farmhouse – or maybe it's your stall barn / your team & wagon –
look down into the unmarked lens (no border no meridian) & take a breath
hold it. & only then depress the shutter release

evolution

always the next level of ingenuity:
 stone clubs crushed flesh and bone
 then iron weapons drove it up a notch –
 sword and lance struck sparks from stone.
 innovation leapt ahead of armour
 tools of the hunt pivoted to war –
 slingshots, poison arrows, quicklime
 poured from murder-holes in castle walls
 lives uncounted trodden into mud

poets? fantasists, Plato says, liars
 “twice-removed” from the real.
 their models for young men’s thought
 and action should be well-behaved gods
 or heroes, not teary-eyed warriors
 with no decorum. (That’s you, Achilles.)
 poets who want to gain a niche
 in his Republic should write about
 courage, honour, sacrifice, all that.
 (Homer didn’t make the cut)

if those rare birds were ever
 on the wing, they’ve fled. instead
 kamikaze drones take flight
 lethal birds or unmanned bait.
 a “rod of God” might pulverise
 from space. where are the heroes?

white phosphorous burns to the bone
 with a chemical fire, but surely poets
 don’t imagine it’s some harmless
son et lumière to light the scene
 or thrill a New Year crowd?

short-range or long-range
 missiles or drones fly-in-fly-out
 like gods of casual death, all hit-to-kill
 with names like Patriot, David’s Sling,
 Arrow and the loitering Zouari –
 so are we here again where we began?

Lizard Island

Back then, all seemed white sand beaches and snorkelling with
Bat fish.

Back then, we flew all the way to Lizard Island in a
tinpot Cessna,
six shaky landings
the engine coughed but did not falter.

Back then, we went diving with manta rays,
shared smoke-cooked sea bream, knocked back
pineapple and vodka, filmed the resident goanna Stavros,
we laughed at Adrien's expense,
there was always laughter at Adrien's expense
because of his beauty and his vanity.

Back then, Dan and Mia got us there
to paperbark and pandanus swamps
Mark and I, and the others all turned up
a clan, raucous and robust. After then, Mark
died of cancer, Dan and Mia married then divorced,
Mia married Paul who also died of cancer,
I moved to France and married Jean-Pierre,
Dan is now with his beloved Allegra, who
miscarried twice.
Adrien is still with Peter and they are well,
we lost all radio contact with David,
our pilot.

Back then we saw seventeen cuttlefish in a row,
shimmering in their black and white kimonos.

Back then, the skies were brazen and boundless,
brimming with sea eagles.

Back then, were the longest, stretching tides,
hordes of barnacles and starfish,
secret coves, one for each of us.

Back then,
there were water buffalo on the landing strip.

Blue banded bee (*Amegilla Cingulata*)

What escapee is this that darts among
The greenery? A flash of blue and black
Beneath the wisteria gives you up
– little fugitive – trying hard to build

Your future off the scraps left behind by
Those busy European types; who horde
Their gold in factories of industry
And guard their wealth with stings, prepared to die.

Out of the *terra nullius* of my
Imagination you arrive and dance
No hive mind to bind you – pollinating
Flowers of thought. Does your kind remember

The seasons before the strip mining of
Pollen? Before the Queen? Before the Swarm?

Note: The Blue Banded Bee is a native Australian bee. It does not live in a hive with a queen. It lives a solitary life. Blue Banded Bees are about 11mm long and have bands of light metallic blue fur across their black abdomens; reminiscent of a prison shirt. Unlike European honeybees, Blue Banded Bees use a method of 'buzz' pollination. According to the University of Nevada's Leonard Lab in the US, about eight per cent of the world's plants need to be buzz pollinated in order to reproduce.

In search of a teachable moment

How do you look into eyes grey as the ash of twin fires
and teach a fawn she's safe, when, scented by dogs,

her mother lies shot down to dirt at the forest edge?
When she was dragged alive but broken from under

the heavy body while the hunters gathered round
for a photo, poured the heart into the crystal glass

of lust and drank to the last drop? With a hand
on her electric fur, with a calm and steady

voice in air peppered thick with winter lead? How
do you say: have faith; stay here with me while

I tend these wounds (even though bone whitens
your red fur), and soon you'll blaze through trees?

How to instruct a deer to be still, to watch and wait?
Surely, she'll learn you mean no harm, for last summer

didn't you glimpse where she lay drowsing in the scent
of hot grass while fish slept beside her in a brown

stream? Didn't you keep the fire of that scene,
and carry it close to watch again on winter nights?

Can't she see you've sooled off your father's dogs,
carried her inside, and from her forest fetched fresh

grass to chew and sweet water to drink? How to get
through to her, when she speaks only the tones

of condensed moonlight, not the clear language
of walls? When she bloodies her head against all

offerings of sweet grass and argument, and turns
her ear to listen for that other voice – the one

that sounds like dappled darkness, the tap of rain's
fingertips on leaves? That voice you cannot hear.

The winking eye of grief

The winking eye of grief
 It caught me in a dream
 A restless passenger cast adrift
 As my body lay deceived

My chest became hollow fear
 The past suddenly so near
 A child full of awesome thoughts
 Of river gods and giant frogs

The anomaly becomes my home
 As love denies your vanishing act
 A stranger now, I click my heels
 And at fate's hand, I make a pact

By chance, I insist you are a star
 Beyond matter or scattered weight
 Yet I hold your tiny handprint
 Framing this earthly delay

You are the current
 And the rainbow bark
 The towers and the seas
 You are the snowy hills of yore
 Green spirits dancing across moonlit streams

You are the creature in the clouds
 My final memory

Angela's house

Still lives in the stocking looped
from a lattice arch, snowdrops
pushing through grevillea.

He wished her back. Newly
transplanted from Italy with a voice
darker than her eyes, she was not
what he'd ordered. But there was
no vessel that would take
that parcel, kicking back.
He must live with this.

In the old country
she tried the lock.
The light took her
to a courtyard
heavy with vines.

Heard
the bird call
a young man
drew from the sky.

Sun warmed
her skin and the day
spread to the comers.

It was rough, this new country.

So she built the house with family money,
hands unafraid of dirt or romance –
the Juliet balcony, the heart-shaped pond.
Painted herself a life. Someone
was always brushing down the generations,
none of them originals. The children, theirs.

In a back room, Angela dragged
through a window the olive branches
of her childhood, twigs around her wrist.

In this house built wide,
family flitted in and out.

Angela saw beyond, waited
for her own mother to bring
the hundred gate keys of a town
grown tired along with the lives
they all could have managed
had there been more time
and take her home.

From the rivers to the sea

Rivers have minds of their own
 changing course capriciously
 sweeping aside settlements and slogans
 sceptical of destinies
 but sure of a destination.

I've known a few, how they can twist
 their insistent restive way
 deep into the lands they own.

Our childhood's backyard garden seemed
 chock full of smooth round stones
 the residue of times
 when a wider Waimakariri
 nameless back then
 flowed through our place from across the plains
 on its long push towards a shore
 later dubbed the Pacific
 though that was merely ancient geo-history
 until a latter-day shuddering of the earth
 exhumed the river's buried parts
 in a violent liquefaction, reclaiming soils
 usurped by suburban invaders.

Did I say "our place"?

The placid river I'm looking at now
 is no respecter of persons or cultures
 and doesn't mind whether you call it
 the Swan or the Derbal Yerrigan
 because all the water it carries
 will bid farewell to identity when it empties
 into the Ocean currently known as Indian.

There's an old river often crossed
 in songs I used to hear:

*I'm just a-going over Jordan
 just a-going over home.*

I know little about its territorial sides
or perishable rights or wrongs
let alone its immortal longings
except that the sea where it comes to a stop
regardless of whether you like to name it
al-Bahr al-Mayyit or Yam HamMelah
is a dead end.

It was such a pretty face he had

The cyclist who found him at first thought he was a scarecrow,
 Motionless and tied to a cornfield's fence, not knowing his name,
 Matthew Shepard*, or his species. Or his age, not quite twenty-two.
 Only, the blood was real, the blood is always real.
 And the skull fracture that might have served as a bird feeder
 Had he hung about any longer, all askew, almost unrecognisable as human.
 – Tortured, – beaten genderless, – pistol-whipped into a smoothie
 By those rhinestone cowboys who gave him a lift,
 Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson of nearby Laramie,
 County seat of Albany County, Wyoming. A couple of rodeo clowns
 Putting the boot to him, apparently having nothing better to do
 Than to joyride this gay man into oblivion.
 Shifting the clutch away from neutral into ill intention,
 A queer-killing mechanism kicking in.

Perhaps his wounds dripped HIV
 On those straights who smacked him ugly, his only defence
 Against the hate they hit him with. He had it, the HIV.
 Their lawyers, of course, obliged to defend the Cain in us,
 Would later claim justification, a simple robbery gone wrong.
 Contending that this swishy hitchhiker had come on to them
 One cold October night in 1998, the North Star being closer than gay rights
 To that high plains country where mustangs ran free and homosexuals did not.
 Arguing that the deceased's hand touched a knee, not inadvertently
 But deliberately. That their clients, good ole boys, went queer-crazy as anyone might
 Whose knee was brushed by a "faggot". An acceptable term of reference
 In those days among Wyomingites boasting chaps of militant machismo,
 The sort of leathery-skinned swaggerers Matthew Shepard would never grow up to be.

They call Wyoming the Equality State, not much of a nickname.
 Not so billboard terrific as the Big Sky State of Montana next door.
 Showing little *Brokeback Mountain* imagination,
 Somewhat lacking for a licence plate.

Still, the murder of Matthew Shepard caught our attention and held it.
Meet the Press and *A Prairie Home Companion* wanted to know, as did we all:
 When the former altar boy was beaten, tied up, and left to die,
 Left hanging there as a latter-day Ecce Homo, his assailants having skedaddled
 Back to their rat holes, where, pray tell, was the equality, the companionship, in that?

Brought before the court in matching orange jumpsuits, identifying them
 As guests of the DOC, the Department of Corrections, guilt followed them
 Like a ratcatching dog. Confirmed by what in earlier times would have been called
 A hanging jury. Prodded by bailiffs to “stand up straight” and “act respectful”,
 Their complaints – that the handcuffs gripped them too tightly, chafing their wrists –
 Drawing laughter from reporters and court buffs considering all the evil that they’d done.

Two life sentences, consecutive, those lowlifes got, along with a prison buzzcut,
 The bludgeoner, McKinney, without hope of parole. Time to be served as yardbirds,
 Wings clipped, migration out of the question. With only the taller Russell able to glimpse
 The guiltless sky through the high, barred window of his cell, the shorter Aaron
 Forced to stand on the collected works of Dostoyevsky lent out by Larry the library guy.
Crime and Punishment offering an apt lesson in course correction. Captivating inmates

Who were allowed one hour of relative freedom in the yard each day
 To build muscles that would soon decay, a timeout corner in which lifers deadlifted
 Their lives away. Where an incautious word or look could get you shivved.

How fortunate for his killers, then, Cainites by nature, that we no longer live
 In Biblical times, that an-eye-for-an-eye justice is as against the law as murder is.
 The courts in Gomorrah or Sodom would have seen them hung as Matthew had been,
 Strung thumbs-up on a fence to be picked at by crows. Cawed and clawed to death
 Pursuant to natural law. Transformed into a bloodied mess of a dark shadow
 Shapeless against the corn. With no more say in the matter than a scarecrow has.
 Or a child who comes into this world nameless and stillborn.

Signal

A signal picked up from Proxima Centauri,
not white noise nor the low-grade mumble
of radiation in the void between stars,

is sweet and regular nudging intellect
like a voice intoning a Sanskrit mantra
broadcast from a device in a neighbour's garden,

soothing unlike the techno he prefers.
rising and falls no more than a third
round a central note, an eternal sentence

like those that two snails on the garden step make
undulating as they extend false feet,
one with stripes alternating white and brown,

the other a faint opalescent green,
both a semi-solid geometry,
both spiral galaxies as the night descends

and the new moon becomes visible
flat as a scar left by a vicious lover
or lop-sided smile or silvery eyebrow

lifted in amusement yet illuminating
“the dark night and the fear of the waves
and so terrifying a whirlpool”

indicating that you've been recognised,
acknowledged, yet permitted no further,
that you've felt rage penetrate like a knife point

but let the pain dissolve in the tart comfort
of wine poured out too often, that you deserve
neither greatness nor infamy nor even love.

Other signals have emanated from remoter stars
before Hafiz wrote and pierced the pearl,
before Apelles painted a straight line

inside a fine line inside a master brushstroke,
before a bevelled flint incised in a cave
an eyebrow shape that nature simply couldn't make.

These signals pass through you if they haven't
already dissipated in the void's black wine
whose taste is fatal. For once you've drunk deep
you'll recall neither eyebrow nor light nor signal.

Cryptogyps

the last thin searchers
 had flown south,
 scouring hill and plain

the fat carrion of yesteryear
 would not be seen again

the songs of the flesh-glutted
 generations that had passed
 with dreamless mineral hearts
 to dust, they heard no more
 at last

they'd left the cliffs blood-splattered
 and the nesting grounds awry
 – such squabbles are expected when
 demand outweighs supply

they gave no thought to nesting now;
 they dreamed of mouldering tongues
 and fields of slaughtered gunhinarrung¹
 yawning at the sun

and over dotted camps and song-
 roads, ravening in the night
 they swept, blackbirding, yearning,
 in their slow and ceaseless flight

the small and naked heads set low
 amid the vast black wings –
 now north they went
 and south again

and gazed on fading things

¹ grandmothers

The train

I watch the train fill the world in its windows, consuming light, wiping its lips
 the seduction of karma pushes the city, immense city, dreaming about real law,
 young boys gunning up gangs, hens squawking in clouds of smoke,
 I lean forward, chlorine induced, sunward trauma, this is a summary, some data, some
 babies, three-years-old, with their sugary tummies, carrying black plastic bags
 for their shoes, and they run in the empty aqueduct, charcoaled,
 bees drop dead, stung at dusk, gas lamps illuminating neon green and black
 graffiti, the city doesn't know
 the marks of my brother's fingerprints on Amoeba records, black fossils of sound
 Swim deep,
 drum up bits of salt from the earth with your feet, unmask men, watch them sway,
 Ride past the Minutemen, the glittering mosque, warehouses,
 blank billboards, get rich quick dramas, sponsor a monk,
 Singing to the old volcanoes, dead tar pits, predict my spiritual, fortune
 teller grasping something in plaid pants, brimming star maps, for empty mansions,
 Marilyn Monroe's mausoleum drawer, some plots between palms,
 telephone poles to telephone poles, where some hang live wires, those that carry
 their buckets of minnows for dinner, strung out in time, Adidas,
 that swing in the orange night, where fruit bats wash their children,
 stunned by the sum of cracked sidewalks and juniper bushes
 the train, a ray in the city where for a moment
 I see Matisse's dancing orange figures, legs thick with blood rich marrow,
 unnamed body parts, blurred water drops of blue, open as cut star fruit.
 Riding past the drunken dynasty, more hieroglyphics, scrap metal, tan faces,
 distilled in cave paintings,
 sweeps my hair back, the sweetness of walking in mud, and a kiss as deep as rum,
 train cuts through the world, the sinking and falling of a warm chest
 I have to keep my mind on the kids at war,
 arms drawn, eucalyptus trees, their ghostly bodies, sweeping the rails as we pass,
 hang limp over the walls of San Juan Capistrano mission,
 the unharvested fields of the coast
 Sea fills the train car with light, warms lungs like accordion lanterns,
 another way, we carry atmosphere
 back to arid, lost to topography, machines soaking in dust

Run of the river

At birth you seep, a streamlet soaking;
 you leak along a slender canal.
 The world seems pristine and callow;
 you press, shallow water palpating
 unsighted pebbles, the gurgle
 like a massage of the mind.

No vigour or vigilance required,
 a trickle develops to a flow.
 Too remote for anglers,
 trout lift to gossamer flies
 artless in the air.
 Impression of a platypus

slips from the surface silence;
 a white egret claims you
 as his territory, stretches
 his origami wings.
 Grains of grit waft away.
 Sprawling out, you encounter

headwinds defying the ripples,
 now wading wavelets galvanised
 in the deepened shoals.
 Discouraged and exposed,
 you seek to grow but confront
 the challenge of transfiguration.

You stir to assemble your resources,
 your reserve forces. You burnish
 a sequence of incidents into a medley
 of sapphires, you awaken to the savour
 of overhanging red gum pollen.
 Swallows skim their painted watercourse.

You glide then race towards the coast,
 sometimes confident, but after a downpour
 uncontrolled, soundtrack of the surge
 scouring sandstone conceived before antiquity.
 As you approach the denouement of day,
 you and your tidal current rush to death in the sea.

Landscape of a man killed by a snake

on a painting by Nicolas Poussin, 1594

If God is present in the sweeping gesture,
then there I was again, washing feet,
on the oily wood of a camphor tree.

And you, skin softened by ficus leaves,
crafting masks of paper mâché
with a cache of unmarked letters

quarried from historic graves.
We were nameless ourselves,
presocratic, we didn't know things

but the wetland buzz of courlans,
just rhythmic enough to be perturbing.

And across the tarn, a child,
sculpting, with molten wax
the dark monochrome green

of citrus thorns.
And who we were didn't matter
to the petrified waters,

to the mirror-collage of Eurasian carp,
all promiscuous in their reflecting.

Around here, our lives play out like landscapes –
idyllically out of focus,
without subject,

just the virescence of brushstrokes
de-weeding the path –

another detail
thrown in the lower left.

Trakl's forest

Admit we have not gone far into the mouth
 Of Trakl's forest before losing our way.
 In the distance, a heavy thud, as if a terracotta roof
 Tile dropped, having taken so much moss and leaden rain.
 Clouds, reaching an understanding of dark birds
 Experimenting with blue on the horizon, without the pale body
 Are unresolved: an act of severance.
 Who told us we were being followed better than night
 In a stranger's house and the wild-growing peach
 Tree still green with tiny fruit against the window
 Of a bare room where we must sleep knowing we have arrived too early?

Admit to one another that the gate we think
 Is locked, is never locked and the listening skin
 Is but one appetite that feeds imagination. That in flying,
 As our children did, we hate the thousand passions of dense earth
 With its unpolished stone and the crude intellect
 Of the old woman who, after death, was fed burning coal.
 Ancient smoke sits low most of the time offering,
 On the off chance we'll take it, to keep movement a secret.
 Every ten to twenty years our hands agree
 And touch, our fingers lock becoming one
 Where all the town gathers after war a small wisdom.

Admit, says the quiet pond, we are clear and deep
 During autumn, and willing to take your youth.
 They have removed all feathers.
 They have clamped-out buckled scales.
 They have wept. We have carried to the shade,
 Like priestly garments, a near deathly desire
 To live forever, lingering in the interval we call
 Valley, heavy with sandstone and tall pink eucalypts
 Pressed from damp, blue thighs, to wait,
 Patiently, as the loathsome wilderness hardens.

ARBITRARY INCIDENCES

ELLEN CAMPBELL
ADRIAN HOOKWAY
GRACE KELLEY
SJ FINN
PAUL DAWSON
SHERNITE ARNOLD
HARVEY SOSS
ROXANNE BODSWORTH
MICHAEL CHANG
KP McCARTHY
MADISYN SIMINGTON
RHONDA COLLIS
JOE DOLCE
BRIAN DALY
JAMES SUTHERLAND-SMITH

Joyce and Mike and Jude and Parker and Thelma and Louise

We wake up at the house of Joyce and Mike in Comic Court
 On Saturday. The east wind flaps the curtains in our room
 And sweeps us out of bed for breakfast. Tamsin woke at dawn
 To help Joyce with the horses. Rowan figures that he'll keep
 To Sydney time. They've only got the weekend – they fly back
 On Monday. Jude and Parker circle, bump our elbows, force
 Their heads onto our laps for hugs or scraps. They're gentle dogs
 And we all fall in love with them. At ten a.m., the air-
 con switches on. We close the windows, keep the heat out – rain's
 Unheard of here, except on Tamsin's brolly, wet from East
 Coast's deluge in her Uber-dash to catch the plane. We joke
 About the Sydney raindrops – *smell them* – when she puts it up
 To dry outside the back. And then we check our phones: the Cooks
 In flood submerged the footbridge near our place; our neighbour, Sean,
 Sent us a pic to show the watermark that's half-way up
 Our garden fence. And Sylvia said our house is fine and she
 Took Tashi for a walk around the streets, and photographed
 The cars whose owners left them parked beside the road in dips
 Where water rose, and seeped inside the bottom edge of doors,
 And look, you'll see the muddy mark the river left behind.

And here in endless West Australian heat and air that dries
 Your membranes out and causes nose bleeds, Joyce and Mike
 List all the eucalypts around their place that dropped their boughs
 In random paddocks; fences need repair; a branch fell on
 Their shed two months ago. They want our help to haul a net
 And cage their pond, so ducks can't flock and make a mess, although
 They feel a bit of guilt because the water birds don't have
 Much choice with wetlands drying out. Their house is shaded: fruit
 Trees grow, and olive trees; a cottage garden out the front
 With lavender, and tea trees, flowering nooks to sit and gaze
 While Thelma and Louise, alpacas, roam at will to scare
 Away the foxes from the chickens' coop. Despite the warmth,
 The sun seems slow to rise above the Darling Range, and plays
 A gentle light that casts long shadows: just to look, you'd reach
 For autumn cardigans and sniff the cooler breeze that you'd
 Expect to come from off the distant sea, this time of year,
 But here we are, the season's out of whack. We drink our tea
 And chat about our separate East-West lives, the wet and dry
 Before we drive to meet our dad, and Jim and Di, for lunch.

The grand controllers

We are The Grand Controllers and we're at our work today,
We like to be in hideaway, we haven't much to say.
We choose to be anonymous, you do not know our names,
But we are here and everywhere, it always is the same.

We keep a careful watch on all our subjects day by day,
Enforce the rules; keep them in step with games we like to play.
You see, we are the puppet masters pulling all the strings,
Controlling all our subjects though they don't know what it brings.

For centuries we and others have been plotting every move
And day by day the time draws near to show what it will prove.
Dance the game of life my friend, the end is drawing near.
Our plans are falling into place for everyone who's here.

Step to the left and to the right while we stay out of sight,
Resist and try to break away, we'll pull the strings more tight.
Don't try to buck the system if you see things go astray,
for we're the ones who're in control and we're not going away.

We'll pull the strings and you will jump, you have no choice my friend.
You will obey our every move right up until the end.
It won't be long and you will see our plans fall into place.
The finish line is now in sight to finally end the race.

Rusty nails

I run to meet you at the Coles parking lot
when streetlights only turn on once I've passed them.

Eucalypts are tall skeletons, fingers stretching out to hide the moon
and the path is steep and rocky and a little muddy.

It is 5am and we sit in the dugout of a baseball field
that we climbed a fence twice your height to get to
sleet angles in and puddles in the space between us.

I admit that the glass inside of me is broken
as the sand becomes muddy
and the grass in the centre of the field starts to well.

You look at me and say:

"I know."

It's warm, and it seeps into every crevice that I own
a steady thrum –

I know I know I know.

I open a door and watch a crowd push out
until the room is empty,
and I realise they took the furniture with them.

I wake to the sound of a glass bottle rolling away from me
and you are there.

The left side of my mattress is yours
it stays warm.

You are an immovable object that resides on top of me
you blow blueberry-flavoured nicotine into my face.

I think you like me.

Dark red crescents do not leave my neck when your hand does
A reckless driver,

you run red lights
you run stop signs.

The bang of a car door
my eyes grow wet.

Your mattress bleeds
a clump of my hair blows along your floor
like a tumbleweed.

Deglutition in a goose

It was the night a cyclist came along the lightless road
 at breakneck speed,
 body to shoulder, helmet to head.
 I felt like a ship had taken me out,
 my metal pendants wiped of stones,
 the shock, the worst and best thing.
 No notice, no choice. No knowledge
 of a body riven in bone-deep bruising,
 the feeling of having been punched for hours on end
 yet to announce itself.

It was also the night
 my two best friends were in my loungeroom,
 drum-kit assembled, guitars tuned,
 my hollow-bodied bass sitting in its stand,
 a valve-amp warmed up and humming.
 One hour's practice before I knew
 epinephrine had kicked the can down the road,
 postponed the reflex arc.
 But clocking off, homeostasis up and running,
 things went back to haywire.

The goose proved it. Made to swallow bismuth nitrate
 – an upgrade on the pearl button a dog was given
 the month before – Doctors watched
 the capsule's carriage down the alimentary canal.
 Muscular propulsion conveyor-belt style (a traveller) until
 the goose, mid-waddle – whacked or jeered at,
 shouted or laughed at (it's probably easier to
 scare a goose than you would think, especially one
 outnumbered by mammals). Poor thing, had no option
 but to shut her system down. Gut cessation seen on vitascope,
 its waves coming to an eye-smacking halt.

To calm her properly and get the show on the road,
 I like to think they sang to her,
 Something from Dan Quinn: *The Band Played On*
 or perhaps a rendition of *Auld Lang Syne*
 No matter the detail,
 Cannon confirmed circular molecular perpetual movement
 in light of unruffle, promptly returns.
 The goose's internal stoppage in front of those doctors
 gave way to the normal quacking and honking
 a goose is bound to make as she *moments*.
 And those doctors (enthralled) raised their hands
 and rutted their boots to render the sound of hooves on the hunt,
 scaring her, no doubt, over again.

Of course, humans can suffer similar perturbation.
 I'm my own experiment day in, day out.
 Mostly in the form of internal machinations,
 No need for a man on a bicycle to throw me off my dial.
 (Think frozen after a slippery remark – something sexist,
 all of it threaded with past burdens.)
 Because in that pause of smooth sailing, railway tracks lying
 along my meridians, my proficiency for yelling
 at a man about the warning a light gives when strapped
 to the handlebars of a bicycle coming from the dark,
 has its own blindside. And I'm thinking:
 head up, eyes closed, belly extended and backbone curled:
 surfing the road, just the slowly slowing – as if nature
 knows a thing or two so when chaos rises,
 I'm at ease on the fourth floor
 waiting for things to get underway.

They, Tiresias

Tiresias lives
 pronouns: he / she / they
 spanning generations and identities

today / the myth distorted amidst the spread of mis-
 information: what triggered his seven-year
 gender transition, what blinded her
 but gave them prophetic vision?

The wiki for this mythic figure has it / that he posted
 a video of two conservative / ruddy-arsed politicians
 rutting liberally in parliamentary chambers
 while on the dark web / it is said / that he
 witnessed an unnatural transaction / between a bat
 and a human / in a Wuhan wet market.
 Either way, virality ensued, and whether
 it was the Fates or the Deep State, Tiresias
 was transformed into his Other.

Silenced Tiresias, seven years living as a woman
 her mornings littered with catcalls as common
 as birdsong, learning to grip the echo-stepped air with a key
 between her knuckles each nocturnal homecoming
 habituated to a ceaseless loop of online threat and request
 until she returned to maleness / with newfound empathy

for the embodied experience of women. Except
 “he”, Tiresias, had no right to write this experience as “I”
 and so could not tell her story, only bear witness to her past
 in a fictional memoir about the burden of privilege
 pilloried online as blind to his own entitlement
 his classical lineage in western culture

Eyeless Tiresias, reduced to a bit part provocateur / on talk show panels
 quizzed on whether / he had better / orgasms as a man or a woman
 or prodded / for polemical commentary on gender essentialism
 did they become the gender she felt on the inside / or do we all perform
 a form of drag? / before / an anonymous donor on GoFundMe

granted the gift of an Other eye, a second vision, and with it
epiphanic release from history, from cultural pruriency
for they / are not / and never were / male or female
but both / and neither / at the same time.

The contract

Are you tired of living next to abandoned houses?
 Are your fingers broken and lung smoking from rubbing two pennies together
 while on herbal mind potions?
 Are your gaping nostrils eroded?
 Telepathy foxed in interior coding
 A sea of these enemies' selling potent identities on every park bench and vacant street post
 It's obscenity everywhere you look, there's street hoes,
 wearing little to no clothes, with minds high and heads low
 and your home is smack dab in inescapable limbo,
 You tapping your heels "a place other than home, please go!"

Sharks hunting to kill, see you as raw dripping meat inside a vast ocean
 And you're a guppy moving slow in a comatose with a wound open

Tired of chasing dime rodents?
 And finding "not open" "not hiring" "not doing anything
 for you" spokesmen?

Tired of all of the hidden motives?
 Ever wonder why you're smoking and overdosing?
 Cause liquor stores decorate every corner like white lotus
 And they propagate this fix as a mechanism of coping
 You a trick, sucking on a white lingam and chasing solace
 And the media instilling how difficult a component
 To quit smoking a day, they smearing their own campaign,
 Incepted discouragement injected deep in my brain
 I'm self-inducing psychosis hallucinating a way

So, if you're tired of being stuck inside a maze
 You'll need design roping
 See the way that it drapes around your neck!
 A most divine token
 Wear this when you high hoping
 Close your eyes and jump forward
 Tr-tr-try to look a-a-live, f-f-focus

Salesman stutters, swats locusts.

His name was Yitzhak

for R., my friend

As her father was being dragged away, casually marked off a checklist,
His faded elegance not strong enough for forced labour at Daimler-Benz,
His card stamped with a fatted calf's expiration date,
His defiant Shema in all likelihood having pissed off a guard,
He called out to her, "Remember my name, child." His last words to her.
That she had survived was a miracle in itself, only years later
Able to purchase with her totemically American credit card a lampshade
Without experiencing the usual feelings of scorpions climbing her spine,
The fear it was some friend of hers whose skin had been flayed. A cousin

Or classmate. If the Allied troops had waited just one more day to advance,
Their sanitising tanks and trucks mired down in the mud
Or engaged in suppressing skirmishers who stood in their way,
Rearguard Aryans whose blonde hair and stiff salutes made them easy targets,
Camp liberators might have found her remains, gold fillings prised from her teeth,
Positioned atop a pommel horse composed of corpses. Her slim, gymnast's body
Arrested in the act of vaulting towards freedom. Eichmann's poster girl for Zyklon B.
With not enough flesh left on her bones to serve as soup meat. Pick a number, any number
Between one and six million, and, cursed by the math of it, that might have been her.

Having decamped in Bronx, New York, she endures this Holocaust Remembrance Day
Alone, her grown children having mothballed their heritage. These 24 hours of mourning
Reminding housewife and investment banker of how close they'd come to not being born.
Oh, they might pick up the phone, knowing how deeply shards of Kristallnacht had cut her,
Recurrent nightmares of their Bubbe and Zayde reduced to soap to celebrate Oktoberfest.
Her mother in a yellow dress; her father, a retailer of luxury goods, putting on Prussian airs
To drum up business. Well-regarded despite his Jewishness. Goyim, angling for discounts,
Boasting of having "Jewed him down". All but pinning a yellow star on his chest. The sort
Of thoughtless remark that might get him killed if the Nazis caught wind of it. Which they did.

She has since felt herself half-baked, an unpuffed pastry snatched from the oven too soon.
How was a girl, fatherless and motherless before having bled, supposed to become
A woman without a mother, hair done up in a bun, to pat her on the head;

Urge her to finish her homework; point her in the right direction. Be her Kaddish compass.
This night she will light a candle in their names, say a prayer in Hebrew, a curse in English,
The latter with a bitter taste. On this Day of Remembrance, in Bronx as at Yad Vashem,
She remembers them all. Father mother sister brother. Their hurtful truth. And painful death.
But her father especially, calling out to her, "Remember my name, child." His words tattooed
Like camp numbers on her brain. His name was Yitzhak; hers רת [Reu't], Americanised to Ruth.

Courage

is a blood-soaked thing,
drenched in the downpour
that follows combat and disaster
(which are the same)
held up like a star to guide,
pinned to the chest
as though it were possible
to capture something of the heavens,
steal from the realm of the gods
to decorate puny humanity,
lift us from the muck and grime,
elevate us into white marble monuments,
so children can gaze upwards
with stars in their eyes,
sleepwalking into disaster
until they, too, can be decorated
and show they have walked into
the pathways
of the gods.

GO BEFORE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO

enough!
 i know u don't recycle
 throw him some odd jobs
 this red meat
 be appreciative like the womyn
 u sneezed on
 in the street
 男神
 mr perfect
 adonis
 prince charming
 a SMILE costs NOTHING
 i miss the adoration of fans
 the brutal waves of gowanus
 "sometimes i wanna touch u"
 well, why don't u
 that nameless dread
 is longing:
 surreptitious sex
 strong impression, gleaming body
 dark eyes, puffy lips
 if i love u
 why should u care
 life's incidences feel so arbitrary
 i'm scared i'm just a curiosity
 terrified as he has so enriched my life
 wondering if i've had any effect on his
 last love
 his last *great* love
 (there will be more)
 love as risk
 love as admiration / negation of self
 an ordinary poet
 bashful
 just one of many
 many others

The off chance

You're happier in my dream
than I thought possible, so I whirl
the promises and escapades, cast
them a short lifetime, on the off
chance they amp you at twelve
when you bite into ice cream,
and again perhaps at seventeen
with a clumsy caress, and so on
for years until early death. Or
well beyond, as we're wishing.

On the off chance that looped
narratives quicken the senses,
warp time's arrow, as you plumb
and suck thick melts, fate a-totter,
each instant a bloom richer,
more fragrant.

Now it pours back from generous
you in vegetable profusion, as you
give to receive to give for giving,
and we sustain a tidal to and fro,
casting from star to star the
dear seconds of our regard.

Jared

i pulled the knob off the door this morning
and by afternoon i was asking the cherry blossoms if they loved me, too
walking through my house at night, i bend my knees more in case of steps
and i turn my feet inward or out, so as to not stub my toes in the dark
on the corners i cannot see
my therapist asked me to list ten things that make me happy,
five of them are different versions of you

Like an African woman

This land of sun stunned stone and turquoise
This land where languages blend
And are so far removed from ours as to throw out balance
This land, Gusarica Beach, Vis, Croatia, sets the scene

She strolls past us pushing a stroller as we sun on the boardwalk
She strolls past two pink lizards and then stops and looks to the sea
And tells us she's looking for a suitable place for the baby
She strolls, made taller by her kitambaa or head wrap

May I sit, she asks, just like an African woman?
May I ask your ancestry and she answers Tanzanian
And I say, then you ARE an African woman
May I add, she says, I live in Vienna and have lived in Europe since sixteen

She taps my arm, I have always wanted to visit Canada
She gazes long at me through her glasses
And I tell her it's expensive
She says no-no-no, her fingers the exclamation point

Walt Disney Looney Tune typewriter paradelle

Mickey Mouse made Minnie miss Mass.
 Mickey Mouse made Minnie miss Mass.
 Mary's mad mother menstruated monthly.
 Mary's mad mother menstruated monthly.
 Monthly Mass made mad Minnie miss.
 Mary's mouse mother menstruated Mickey.

Headless chooks helplessly butt hedges.
 Headless chooks helplessly butt hedges.
 Bloody oath Billy bit Betty's boney booty.
 Bloody oath Billy bit Betty's boney booty.
 Betty's boney oath chooks bit Billy
 helplessly headless butt bloody booty hedges.

Quick brown foxes jump over lazy white dogs.
 Quick brown foxes jump over lazy white dogs.
 Typing tediously triggers twitching tendonitis.
 Typing tediously triggers twitching tendonitis.
 Twitching white foxes jump tediously over
 quick dogs typing lazy brown tendonitis triggers.

Headless Mickey butt twitching over Minnie.
 Mary's menstruated mouse bit Bill bloody.
 Monthly Mass mother tediously made
 mad typing chooks helplessly lazy.
 Miss Betty's dogs tendonitis jump hedges
 boney foxes brown oath triggers quick white booty.

Note: The paradelle is a demanding fixed-form poem, invented by Billy Collins. It consists of four six-line stanzas in which the first and second lines, as well as the third and four lines, of the first three stanzas, must be identical. The fifth and sixth lines, of each stanza, must use all the words, from the first and third lines of the stanza, and only those words. Similarly, the final stanza must use every word, from lines 1, 3, 7, 9, 13 and 15, of the preceding stanzas and only those words.

pepper me

pepper me
 pepper me
 paint me an enemy
 cast out the questioning, wandering mind
 the desire to find a common direction
 a way to align
 a path through this dangerous place and time
 quick pick your side
 fall in behind
 three-word slogans
 party lines

colour me
 colour me
 outlie and other me
 post post-truth
 into post-reality
 see what you want to see
 objectivity is not the objective
 scorched earth perspective
 points of view
 points of contention
 sell umbrage and outrage for maximum attention

mock me
 mock me
 shame me and shock me
 the loudest voice
 the illusion of choice
 amazon earns
 the amazon burns
 leaving stockpiles
 of consumer profiles
 our own true selves
 pre-packaged on virtual shelves
 no longer greater than the sum of our parts
 our lives end where the algorithm starts

in the extremity
you can't just unfriend me

pepper me
pepper me
paint me an enemy

At the rope park

for my grandson, Téo

The casually employed grouse
over a slope with their trimmers,
grazing monstrous hornets in orange vests,
a gabbling buzz that gobbles
vetch, clover, dandelions and grass.

A single swallow surfs the air
rising on invisible thermals
over the ropes and wooden pillars
up which children clamber helmeted,
then jump to nets as grandparents stare.

Nothing's been spared on a day so hot.
The long wheatgrass on both riverbanks,
flecked with reds and blues of poppies,
ripples a pelt of bleached seedheads
either side of a spine of water.

Grandparents and grandchildren have come
out of repainted housing blocks,
yellow and russet almost like autumn
when the young return to school and the old
recall what has been left undone

in lives never pleasant as the path
along a riverbank nor joyful
as a daring slow-mo leap from heights
to land on stretched safety nets
then roll laughing into new cut grass.

3
EXHALING WONDER

TUG DUMBLY
LYNETTE THORSTENSEN
CLAIRE GASKIN
HARVEY SOSS
PATRICIA SYKES
AARON LEYSHON
MICHAEL AUTY
KIMBERLEY ABRAHAM
STACEY GARRETT
DEVIKA SINGH
KIM GRAVES
BEN EGERTON
ROXANNE BODSWORTH
SARAH MEEHAN
RACHELSIMONE WYLEY

After church, 1975

Walk to a friend's place
from a scumbled sky
greased yellow with wool-smoke
of bushfire

down a side drive
past a woodpile
into a backyard
of corrugated chickens.

Hot wind smacks ammonia.
Baked chook shit
burns the nostrils.

Shed door drums shut
open
shut.

Twin crucifix clothesline
transepts
a'clack
clack
bashing with sheets
a poor tent
of end times.

Punched eye of the sun
soups through a haze
moted with insect cinder
and ash.
Balefully cawing waves
of black cockatoos
fly over miles of bush
run through
by the Devil's thumb.

Hot wind about licks
out your lungs
as you're blown up
a back ramp.

Screen door shutters shut
shut
shut

And you're in.
Sanctuary

as a fire truck cries up Judge Street
and sirens from the edge of town
wail in antiphon
to the choir of gums
batoned by the westerly,
a Punch & Judy treeline
of infernal puppetry,
thrashing and bowing,
thirsting for the promised end.

dark sky sanctuary

here in dark sky sanctuary

tilt back your head,

further,

further

anchor your feet in the red rock

listen now for the dingoes' howl

breathe in, enough,

enough

now exhale your wonder

as Badurru¹ lights up the ink

the Seven Sisters lurking

have decided to join in

and leap from the chorus

behold this, for not just anyone can touch this

here in dark sky sanctuary, the snakes don't come out at night

lie down, stretch out on *terra munificus*

see the silent crackle and fizz of the shooting stars

the trickster Mimis laughing

the moon takes her turn to dazzle

lifting eyes to her horizon

she lights up the mulga bush

the paperbark

the wide-eyed marsupials

here in dark sky sanctuary

far from thoughtless tampering

we might find a place

where we forgive.

1. A Yolngu word for the Milky Way, in the Djambarrpuyngu Lunggurrpuy language.

the sunflowers hoist their halloween bladders to the averted moon

obscurity hoists its words to the riddle of remaining the last time future thought of obscurities' averted faces averted faces riddle with meaning in the hands of children future thought hoists averted obscurity averted obscurity riddles the thoughts future faces hoist averted words to the swells of obscurity in the hands of children halloween bladders shrivel and swell the halloween bladder in the hands of children meaning remains in the hands of averted children the sunflowers hoist their faces to the averted moon to avoid the last time of thought the future averts obscurity in words averted faces obscure the future in the hands of children in the riddled hands of children children in the hands of halloween hands averted faces the riddles hoist the thought the swells avert thought the swells avert hands the hands avert faces the hands hoist averted faces the hands riddled with thought hoist the averted faces to the obscurity of future thought the hands riddled with meaning the riddling of constant aversion the time the last time the last future the last future time riddled with future riddled with time the hands of children riddle with time riddled with remaining time riddled with remaining meaning the hands of children in the hands of children riddled meaning and remaining thought thought riddled with remaining future words shrivel with the last future the thought riddled with remaining aversion and diverted faces sunflowers in the hands of children avert their faces sunflowers shrivel and swell with obscurity the moon a halloween sunflower in the hands of the averted children avoiding their faces avoid future avert faces the moon hoists its averted face its words obscurity the last time of a future thought constant meaning remains riddled in the hands of sunflowers sunflowers and their hoisted faces

Choose some other language, dear

I am decidedly not a polyglot, not versed
 Even in Old – Olde? Auld? – English
 As you well know. Your ecstasies spoke in tongues to me.
 When you would read Chaucer aloud, stopping occasionally to explain
 About the miller's daughter, I could hardly follow,
 Lacking that genius loci necessary for multilingualism,
 Being a fallow field sort of guy in whom seeds
 Of French and Spanish – one year each – refused to grow.
 Unlike you not able to parse road signs in Farsi
 Or locate a restroom in Galicia. However urgently I had to go.
 “La plume de ma tante” forever engendering a Rubik's Cube puzzlement in me.

So leave me, if you must, with a cat-o'-nine-tails tongue-lashing
 Of words I won't understand, that send me running to an online translator.
 Tossing back over your shoulder some goodnight and good luck
 Salt in the wound: “Auf Wiedersehen, Liebchen, Liebe ist kaputt!”
 Or: “Au revoir, mon amour”, “Zàijìàn”, “Proshchay”, “As-salaam alaykum”.
 Intelligible to Germans, French, Chinese, Russians, or Arabs respectively.
 To you, perhaps, but not to me. Employ love's lost language
 Of souls in limbo, a leave-taking allowing wiggle room
 Like the Hebrew shalom. Pull from your grab bag of lingoes
 A polyseme star I can wish upon, some valediction-cum-salutation
 That could as easily mean hello as goodbye.

Derelicts and Discards

Words as strays
adrift for want of
connective rhythm.
Written and abandoned
somewhere between nuance
and nuisance, they litter
the years, birthed

but not raised.
Now on the edge
of their existence
I am forced to exhume.
Self as sabotage
doubt as espionage

though sometimes faith
tiptoes among the forensics
not to furbish a toxic
majesty but to retrieve
images, thoughts, lines
with life yet embedded

even shadows will yield
to the sun's fertile lick.
Time's genitals though
cannot promise success.
Mind must sex itself
play the fool
embrace the feast

as on this wet July
day. After dreaming
of creation's furnace
I wake to old jottings
burning my tongue
...little pallid operas
...the clarity cellar
...isobars of insanity
...fallacies by tinpot gods
equally potent

the tug of resistance
 is akin to the wrinkle
 on my cheek after
 having lain all night
 on imagination's
 precipitous ridge

if such proved
 to be a finality,
 a shipwreck
 of the senses,
Breathe me Raptured
 could not survive
 as a title-in-waiting

as always
 it is the irritant
 subconscious who taunts
 with what I already
 know. . .

*do your best
 do your worst
 no mythic key
 can turn a poem
 off or on.*

Obsession

Surrounded always looking inward, inside out, outside the cars drive by a flurried rush always going somewhere, getting there, getting better. I wonder what it is that drives me. And then, of course, I wonder what this nebulous *me* can really be.

Learning, sure, I love to learn, reading too, curious to hear the outpoured thoughts of other people's inner lives. I could perhaps distil upon the page a list of my desires, hopes, ambitions, dreams. But what, if it turns out there is no *I*, would that even mean?

Should I reflect then instead on understanding how the words to me, in orders strange, sound.

Strange that I should struggle so to pour out, decant like foetid rested wine, the many thoughts and fears that hold me hostage. And then, when I suspect it most, release me in a happy drunken stupor to stumble forward and fumbling for the frame of the door, grab hold of what is left of *my identity*.

I guess I see it in your eyes. Not in me, or my, or mine.

There is only all of this, and at times an urge to cry at its imperfect beauty.

That is how, I guess, the outside gets inside, through beauty, life, the ugly side is of the same coin. There can be no distinction. To master something is to let go of mastery. To possess is to be free.

Obsession, then, is me.

to an end

everything is rust,
 the eaves, even the leaves;
 sleeves of unwitting care
 ravel up our woollen night.
 we – or some – are
 dumb to this letting loose,
 red brick and bluestone noose,
 our private albatross,
 the rock on which Paul
 built for Peter, or Peter, Paul?

Prometheus' pleasure
 is a god's lavish gift to Man;
 no fire burns, nor rage
 can quell the coming rust;
 no dying's light is such
 that rust can ever keep.
 we, it is, who sleep.

everything rusts,
 it is borne – it must,
 like the russet cast in iron
 is the fine powdery white
 the pipe will gather to itself;
 wooden bridge pylons find
 their own – more personal –
 moss grey cloak, its mantel
 the mould green
 chewing of the ant.

to the worm our bodies turn
 in solace at the end
 we too are born, so we lust
 we, we are dust where we come to,
 we must.
 everything is rust.

Cages

Confining movement
 Limbs sore
 Bent
 Sobering songs
 Sickness
 Darkness
 Cold steel
 Helpless struggle
 Peace, gone
 Culture has led us here
 Strangling our own kind
 Oppressive and blind
 Blind to uniqueness
 Talent
 Blind to their greed
 Blind to boldness
 Beauty
 Blind to their stupidity
 Must we work with such intensity
 Never coming up for air
 Must we watch our lives decompose
 Never knowing joy
 There is only one key to freedom
 It's in the depth of your soul
 Here lies freedom
 Relaxation
 Sweet meaningful song
 Health unmeasured
 Light beyond comprehension
 Soft cushioning
 Hopeful release
 Peace, presence
 Culture does not know of this
 Only the wild and free
 The ones who choose to follow soul unquestioned
 Deep wisdom and truth
 Daring to breathe deep
 Fresh and alive
 Embracing misunderstood action
 Watching life bloom.

Role model

Gandhi once said, "If we could change ourselves,
The tendencies in the world would also change."
Yet in this era the concept remains foreign and strange.
People are so out of touch with reality, they've lost their humanity.
Over fleeting moments that have been staged.

Looking inwards because all we care about is self-validation.
Am I right? Seeking that instant gratification!
Don't believe what I write?
When was the last time you held a kind conversation?
With a stranger or someone who could not offer a benefit to your situation.

Seeking that quick fix that goes straight to the brain.
Hit with a killer combo of you're so vain with a smidge of entitled,
Which slowly seeps into your veins,
And your ego sustains.

Because who cares about compassion and kindness.
Last I checked the socials said we're all gods and goddesses.
Although not ill intended a dangerous misconception that gets passed on like a virus.
Downloaded and embedded into our stream of consciousness.

Ever heard about being altruistic? No, I'm not being unrealistic,
Not even in the slightest idealistic.
I just like to believe that there are people out here that move heroic.
My heroes from the comics ain't got nothing on individuals that are stoic.

All it takes is for one person to set the example,
Of what it's like to be a real life, role model,
To inspire and give rise to a new ensemble,
Of beautiful people, a bite-sized sample of a tangible model

However, what do we do instead?
Continue to allow ourselves to be misled,
Playing a game of "who can I impress?"
So empty and shallow, someone should address,
How superficial and hollow is today's definition of success?

Read a couple books so now you think you know better.
 Couldn't care less about the wellbeing of other members.
 If you weren't desperate for attention, with a need to be in the centre.
 You'd notice that this is deeper, (I should say wider) than you and would reconsider.

How you carry yourself in every room that you enter.

I yearn for the day that we realise,
 That our strength lies, outside of the confines,
 Of the apps that we've installed in our mobiles.
 Socially hostile, a breeding ground for souls that are fragile.

I yearn for the day we acknowledge that this is much larger than ourselves.
 That together we form a beautiful combination of endless tales.
 That any of the physical treasures or riches we obtain in this realm,
 When next to unselfishness and kindness can't compare or excel.

I do not wish to argue, nor do I wish to change your view.
 I just hope you'll be willing to take a look inside you.
 Ask yourself if you're part of the issue.
 Is there anything you can do,
 To drive change and add value?

Without the expectation of public recognition.
 Just purely out of warmth and with a predisposition,
 To doing right and being a light when outside it's less bright.

No longer willing to remain dormant followers,
 Of a self-absorbed culture, prey to a bunch of uncaring vultures,
 Slaves of unmindful desires.
 Cause time is invaluable and of it we're all borrowers.
 Let's instead tap into a frequency that sits much higher.

Cause happiness is evident once we learn to be benevolent.

Feast with my demons

“Conquer your doubts!” they said to me;
 Their instructions so cavalier.
 Words so simple for so heavy a task;
 “Get over what scares you, dear!”

So I pulled my fears out of my pocket;
 And wore them on my sleeves.
 I pinned them on like shiny brooches
 Just how many, I couldn’t believe.

Silver, and gold, and copper with rust;
 Bejeweled with emeralds of dismay.
 Rubies of angst I pinned on myself;
 And donned the revolting bouquets.

Then I rifled through my closet;
 And pulled my skeletons off the shelf.
 I’d lost count of how very many;
 Even the ones I had sewn myself.

I’d hemmed and worn each one in vogue;
 Had tucked them away with care
 Embroidered some with lust and deceit;
 Others with remorse and despair.

Next, I called on my demons;
 Politely inquired their names.
 I dined with them; they feasted,
 Never did they show any shame.

I asked for their motives: “Why do you haunt?”
 Alas! No answer, no consolation.
 They simply smirked with mocking eyes;
 Pupils to show eternal damnation.

Beginning to conquer,
 I had done what they said.
 Gathered the black roses
 In my rotting flower bed.

I'd befriended my darkness,
And spoken to my sins.
Uncovered my scars;
Even those much deeper than skin.

As easily as they had said
to "get over" it all;
They weren't ready for the
Grisly sight to befall.

They judged and condemned;
Turned gazes away.
And silently sneered
What they wanted to say

So I learned the world's ways
As I quietly wept
They could easily suggest,
But couldn't accept.

Thus, I hid it all away;
The jewels and the threads
The dinner guests left
I had put them to bed.

So I'll keep my doubts and fears concealed
Behind a smiling screen.
To be felt and yielded only in dreams;
But never to be heard or be seen.

Man in rubble

At first, I could not see you
beneath your broken dreams,
as I sipped my morning coffee
in my kitchen oh so clean.

So I peered into the photo
and you were staring back at me,
your keffiyeh shone so brightly
against the concrete grey debris.

You were standing on your home
There your blessed children born,
to the sound of joyous singing
where laughter filled the morn.

Where the children danced so wild
and kites flew far and free,
you almost touched the heavens
with that tranquillity.

But the children have now vanished
and the only sound you hear,
is the cry for their lost future
as drones circle through the air.

And how my heart does see you,
so dignified you are.

Man standing on his country
Man standing on his home
Man standing in the rubble
Life stolen, so alone.

The blessing

Oxford, 2003

When the Holy Spirit comes
 from Toronto to this parochial megachurch
 in a unit on Osney Mead Industrial Estate
 I'm behind a keyboard on stage
 glad I've something to hold on to.
 I'm scared I'll be *slain*
in the Spirit or worse
 that I'll be *moved* and confess – to perfect strangers
 on the “prayer team” – how each day
 I prime and compline with a wank
 and have done for quite some time. Such
 are my meditations
 in the silent hours.

I wait
 until my wife's gone to bed and stay up
 getting off to music videos turned low and
 in the morning after she's left for work
 to presenters on breakfast television.
 No internet in these first years of marriage
 though I remain in shame
 of earlier evenings still
 on dial-up in my rented bachelor bedroom
 with curtains drawn, plugged in

 to the socket under the window, tugging
 at the modem cable afterwards trying to break it
 so it wouldn't happen again and again and again and. . .
 panic once when the screen froze
 on a close-up full-screen headshot facial. A turn off
 and turn on to clear the memory.

But it hasn't cleared.

Frosted half-parted lips return with panic
 at each altar call and conjure
 of a holy moment, where I replay it over
 and more besides. And it's all I can do to hold
 this chord in my right hand while my left reaches,
 shapes for someone other.

Breathe

for Aziza

air like perfume saturated
 in the sweetened odours
 of food cooked with love
 wine served with blessings
 become blood of the sacrificial lamb
 enough to save the world

breathe

where air is not enough to
 ease the yearning for well's
 water to wash away the taint
 of burning memories and
 the choking dust like hanging
 dirty veils in motionless air

breathe

air in dirt-floor spaces
 shared dreams shifting
 shadows moving in darkness
 like moths towards the light
 that may be man-made
 hoping it is the moon

Saturday morning, Main St apothecary

O. Shen (Digestive Strain)

He gnaws at his hand,
 complains food tastes like wet sand-
 wiches, half-eaten, gone rotten,
 even fish
 and chips, which have always been
 his favourite. He smells
 like salt. His skin is clammy. Each month
 his belly distends and contracts
 with the moon.

D. de Lion (Ageing Mind)

He says things changed at middle age.
 The flesh
 fell from his thoughts. Now
 his mind is a grave-
 yard scattered with ghosts and the unburied
 bones of ideas. When he picks one up
 it disappears.

A. Creek (Cannot Sleep)

He is desperately tired. The room
 repeats
 before his eyes. He says he drifts
 day to night in his
 unmade bed
 listening to recordings of rain
 and streams. Water does not border
 the land where he dreams.

W. Wagtail (Unable to Sit Still)

He flits from the red chair
 in the sun
 to the low lounge,
where he stretches himself out,
to the water cooler, the wicker chair
in the corner, the round table
with its magazines –
 and finally the window,
which he opens. Then he sings.

Epilogue

[sung in B flat minor, rubato e a capella]

[staccato e mezzo forte]

This surname is not my given name.
As in, not gifted to me. Rather, imposed.

[piano] Inflicted.

[staccato e subito e forte]

King. Queen. Ebony court.
Crowned me. . . *[fermata]*

[pianissimo] . . . I can't recall my name.

[sforzando] Sovereignty seized. Personhood purloined.

[staccato e accento]

[subito e forte piano e legato] And my angel of agency reigned for an instant –

[accento] a lilt, a whisper –

[decrescendo] Then offered herself to the sea so as not to bear witness to my dethroning.

[adagio]

I was a glorious birth; a profound loss.
Nativity scene – an unsound libra scale
Manipulated to ensure unequivocal midnight.
De facto and de jure – this surname is the slave master's.

The weight of it is mine. *[fermata]*

[adagio]

Ink dried. She. He. We. I. Cried.

Wrested from my mother's bosom.

Stolen from my father's safeguard.

[legato] As had been the babies before me and those before them and those before them.

This surname should only ever be pronounced as an enunciated gasp – *[fermata]*

[pianissimo] An inaudible scream.

[legato] A child born in an era that her ancestors could not envision and. . .

Her birthright?

[staccato] To be property.

[legato] What's in a name? All things and no things. Enduring history. Unending abyss of

[accento] Trespass

[accento] Pillage

[accento] Conquest

[accento] Erasure

[accento e fermata] Violence

[pianissimo e subito] SILENCE.

This surname
[sforzando] Is
[sforzando] Not
[sforzando] Mine.

[legato e accelerando]
 It belongs to him as I did. As I do. This immortal kiss from a branding iron. This tumour
 that will not perish but shall have everlasting life. This flesh and ... *[fermata]*
[pianissimo] Soul wound.

[accelerando] I sustain his name and Her. Our. My
[sforzando] back
[sforzando] breaks under the weight.
 He and he before him and he before him. They walk upright. I am their inheritance. *[fermata]*

[adagio] My inheritance? A life – a lineage – of compulsory dishonesty.

<i>[allegretto]</i>	
I sign a cheque. . .	I endorse a white lie.
I address an envelope. . .	I perpetuate a white lie.
I am introduced. . .	I surrender to a white lie.
I introduce myself. . .	I deliver rescue breaths to a white lie.

This surname
[sforzando] Is
[sforzando] Not
[sforzando] Mine.

[mezzo forte] I will not tell lies. I will not tell lies. I will not tell lies. *[fermata]*

[legato] This dishonesty; this deceit. Death by a thousand paper white lies.

He has stolen my ancestors' thunder for generations – for centuries.

[legato e mezzo forte] The falsetto notes of my grief-song harmonise with Gil's: Who will pay reparations on my soul? And hers before me and hers before her and hers before her.

[forte] What's in a name? Translation: What did the thunder say?

[pianissimo] . . . I can't recall my name.

[adagio] That which we call slavery by any other name would smell as rancid.

[staccato e accelerando]

Rose.	Rose.	Rose.	Rose.	Rose.	Rose.
Cotton.	Cotton.	Cotton.	Cotton.	Cotton.	Cotton.
Cane.	Cane.	Cane.	Cane.	Cane.	Cane.

[adagio] It is of no consequence for there are no consequences. He is passively glorified for that which I actively am. As she endured before me and she before her and she before her.

[crescendo]

Who am I? And who is my sister? And who is my mother? And who was my grandmother?

[rubato] We. Can't recall. Our name.

[crescendo e staccato]

So I weep. Then I pray. Then I stand. Then I shout.

[forte e decrescendo] I WILL NOT TELL LIES.

[mezzo forte] I WILL NOT TELL LIES.

[piano e fermata] I will not tell lies.

[rubato]

Then – I reintroduce myself.

MUSICAL DYNAMICS DEFINED

A capella: Without instrumental accompaniment

Accelerando: Gradual increase in tempo

Accento: Sung with extra emphasis

Adagio: Sung slowly

Allegretto: At accelerated tempo

Crescendo: Gradually increasing volume

Decrescendo: Gradually decreasing volume

Fermata: An intentional pause

Forte: Sung loudly

Legato: Sung in a connected manner

Mezzo forte: Sung at moderate volume

Pianissimo: Sung extra quietly

Piano: Sung quietly

Rubato: Take liberal approach to phrasing

Sforzando: Accented abruptly

Staccato: Sung in a curtailed and emphatic manner

Subito: Sung suddenly

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

KIMBERLEY ABRAHAM is a passionate poet with a love for spiritual exploration. Her poetry is a deep dive into human emotions and the impacts of cultural conditioning on the soul. As a Sagittarian truth seeker and freedom lover, she can always be found with a book in hand or in her happy place watching the waves roll in. Kimberley lives in the Gold Coast, Australia.

MARA ADAMITZ SCRUPÉ is a visual artist, writer and documentary filmmaker and the author of seven prizewinning poetry collections. She is the recipient of many creative grants and fellowships, and she has won or been shortlisted for prestigious international writing prizes. Her poems and essays evoke and explicate ideas and palpable experiences of “place-ness” in extended ruminations on migration and mobility, displacement and dynamism, voyaging and settling in. <https://scrupe.com>

SHERNITE ARNOLD is an Atlanta-born native, mother of two, domestic violence survivor, women’s advocate and Georgia State University senior majoring in Law & Society. She has placed first in Clark Atlanta’s 21st Annual Writing Expo both in poetry and essay, and “Live United Atlanta Hawks Poetry Slam”, and has been recognized by VOX Atlanta, The Trumpet Awards, and “Make a Difference Foundation” for her written works and scholarship. Shernite uses her raw voice to deliver poetry through the eyes of a Black woman experiencing the back-pedals of an unjust life tampered by racism and economic disparity.

DAVID ATKINSON is a Sydney poet; his poems have been published widely in Australia, the USA and the UK. David’s awards include first prizes in the Ros Spencer Poetry Prize, the FAW Jean Stone Poetry Award and the Whitsunday Poetry Prize. David has published two collections, *The Ablation of Time* (Ginninderra Press, 2018) and *Strands and Ripples* (Ginninderra Press, 2021); a third will be published shortly. David convenes a poetry workshop group in Sydney.

MICHAEL AUTY: Teacher, parent, writer, environmentalist, conservationist, conversationalist and circular economy farmer; a well-travelled citizen of the planet who loves nothing more than the solace of his “little slice of paradise” in regional Victoria – our Kelpie, chickens, cows, sheep and the prettiest babbling brook in the secretest valley sum up a fortunate life; truly, fulfilling the role of “jack of many trades, master of none”.

ROXANNE BODSWORTH is a writer and farmer living on Bpangerang country. She achieved her PhD at Victoria University (2020) with a feminist reconstruction of Irish mythology in prosimetric form. She works at the Country Universities Centre and is an adjunct researcher with Charles Sturt University. Using the pen names of “Therese” and “RTB”, she has two verse novels, one collection commemorating the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquake, and several poems in literary journals.

MICHELLE BORZI is a critical reviewer and essayist, and her writings on Australian poetry over the last two decades are widely published. Based in Melbourne, Michelle works as a freelance researcher, editor of poetry manuscripts, and sessional teacher of poetry and poetics. Her most recent collaboration was with Alan Wearne, writing the introduction and editing his book, *Near Believing: Selected Monologues and Narratives 1967-2021* (2022). Michelle was the Australian judge for the 2024 University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor’s International Poetry Prize.

LACHLAN BROWN is a Senior Lecturer in English at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. He has been shortlisted and commended for various poetry prizes including the Newcastle Poetry Prize, the Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize, and the Peter Porter Poetry Prize. Lachlan has published two volumes of poetry with Giramondo and has worked on poetry commissions with groups including the Powerhouse Museum and ABC Everyday.

ELLEN CAMPBELL is an emerging writer who lives with her family and Australian terrier, Tashi, in Sydney's inner-west, near the Cooks River on Gadigal and Wangal land. Ellen took leave of her former career in education to fulfil a lifelong ambition to write. Ellen is undertaking a paid mentorship with Mark Tredinnick after completing his course, *What the Light Tells*. She has performed her poetry at Bravewords in Gosford.

MICHAEL CHANG (they/them) is the author of many volumes of poetry, including *Toy Soldiers* (Action, Spectacle, 2024), *Things A Bright Boy Can Do* (Coach House Books, 2025) and *Heroes* (845 Press, 2025).

JAMES E CHERRY is the author of seven books, the latest a volume of poetry titled *Between Chance and Mercy* (Aquarius Press/Willow Books, 2024). He has been nominated for an NAACP Image Award, a Lillian Smith Book Award and was a finalist for the Next Generation Indie Book Award for Fiction. He has an MFA in creative writing from the University of Texas at El Paso. President of The Griot Collective and founder of The Jazz Foundation, he lives in Tennessee. James was the international judge for the 2024 University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize. <http://www.jamesecherry.com>

RHONDA COLLIS is a writer based on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. She has her Masters in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia. Her poetry and short fiction have won awards and appeared in literary magazines and anthologies in Canada, the US and the UK. She has just finished a collection of stories ready for publication.

BRIAN DALY has worked in the creative industries for over 30 years, as a writer, editor, songwriter, musician, director, creative director and composer, receiving national and international awards for his work. He studied creative writing under Ron Pretty, Rodney Hall, Kirpal Singh and Dianne Bates while completing his Creative Arts degree at the University of Wollongong. He lives and works in Newcastle, Australia.

PAUL DAWSON is the author of five books, including two collections of poetry: *Lines of Desire* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2024) and *Imagining Winter* (IP, 2006), which won the national IP Picks Best Poetry Prize. Paul teaches in the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales.

JOE DOLCE: Composer and poet. 2021 City of Melbourne Poet Laureate. Winner of 2017 University of Canberra Health Poetry Prize. Longlist 2024 University of Canberra Health Poetry Prize. Longlist 2019, 2018, 2017 & 2014 University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's Poetry Prize. Highly Commended 2020 ACU Poetry Prize. Shortlist 2023, 2020 & 2014 Newcastle Poetry Prize. *Best Australian Poems* 2015 & 2014. Winner of 25th Launceston Poetry Cup. Recipient of Advance Australia Award.

“TUG DUMBLY” is also GEOFF FORRESTER, a poet/performer who has lived in Sydney for decades. He has worked much in radio, venues and schools. He has performed his work as resident-poet on ABC radio (Triple J, ABC702) and released two spoken-word CDs through the ABC. His awards include the Banjo Paterson Prize for Comic Verse (twice), and Nimbin Performance Poetry World Cup (thrice). In 2020 he won the Borranga Poetry Prize, in 2022 he won the Woorilla Poetry Prize, and in 2023 he won the Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize. His first poetry book, *Son Songs*, came out in 2018.

BEN EGERTON lives in Aotearoa New Zealand, where he teaches at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington. He has held the Claude McCarthy Fellowship, and has recently been poet-in-residence at the Rivendell Institute at Yale University. Ben is the author of two poetry collections, the most recent of which is *The Seed Drill* (Kelsay, 2023).

SJ FINN’s poems have appeared in *Cordite*, *Snorkel*, *The Green Fuse*, *Rabbit*, *The Age* and *The Best Australian Poems*. Her poems have been longlisted for the International University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor’s Prize, and the Peter Porter Poetry Prize, and shortlisted for the Newcastle Poetry Prize twice. She was awarded the Older Poets’ Prize by QP (Queensland Poetry) and came runner up in the Val Vallis Award (QP). She can be found at sjfinn.com

JO GARDINER lives in the Blue Mountains. Her debut poetry collection, *The Impossible Shore*, is published by Vagabond Press (2024). Her novel, *The Concerto Inn*, was published by UWA Press in 2006. Most recently she won third prize in the 2024 ACU Poetry Prize and the 2023 Newcastle Poetry Prize. She was also a finalist in the 2022 Montreal International Poetry Prize. She holds a PhD in Communication and Media.

STACEY GARRETT is a 30+ writer who works in marketing for the sports industry. Originally from Panama with American roots, grew up in a multicultural household where books were abundant and fell in love with the power behind words, human dynamics and relationships at very young age. Today she lives in Germany with her family and when not writing she indulges in music, dancing, cosplay, travelling and learning new cultures.

CLAIRE GASKIN’s first full-length poetry collection, *a bud* (John Leonard Press, 2006), was completed in the receipt of an Australia Council grant and shortlisted in the SA Festival Awards. Her subsequent collections are *Paperweight* (John Hunter Publishers, 2014), *Eurydice Speaks* (Hunter Publishers, 2021), *Ismene’s Survivable Resistance* (Puncher & Wattman, 2021) and *Weather Event* (Life Before Man, 2023). She is currently working on a collection of prose poems supported by a Creative Australia grant. Claire facilitates poetry courses and is available for private mentoring. clairegaskinpoetry.com

JOSEPH GOSPER is a Wiradjuri Australian man living in Parkes, NSW.

KIM GRAVES lives on Bundjalung Country in Northern NSW. Kim works as a social worker and is deeply committed to social justice and human rights. Kim has written poems throughout her life and holds a deep appreciation for the ability of poetry to connect people across language, culture, and time. This is Kim’s first submission to a poetry prize.

BRIAN PATRICK HESTON grew up in a lower working-class section of Philadelphia. His full-length collection of poetry, *If You Find Yourself* (Main Street Rag, 2014), won the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Prize. His chapbook, *Sing, Dark Times*, won the Keystone Chapbook Series and is due out from Seven Kitchens Press in 2025. His poems have appeared in such publications as the *Southern Review*, *Aesthetica*, *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Hotel Amerika*. Currently, he teaches literature and creative writing classes at Truman State University in Missouri.

ADRIAN HOOKWAY was born in New Zealand in 1954 and was brought up on his parents' rose nursery. Adrian migrated to Australia in 1975 and lived in Alice Springs for two years before moving to Adelaide. Living in Adelaide, Adrian has been a primary school teacher and is now a piano teacher, teaching in schools and at his home studio.

GRACE KELLEY is a newcomer to poetry and an undergraduate student at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). She explores themes of connection and grief, capturing honesty and reflection in a new creative path.

LEE KNOWLES has written four poetry books. One of three books published by Fremantle Press, *Dial Marina* (1986) won a WA Premier's Award for Poetry. *Invaders of the Heart* (Interactive Publications, 2008), is her most recent book. *Lucretia and Other Poems* (Picaro Press, 2007) was a Wagtail selection. Lee also has had a residency at the BR Whiting Library in Rome. She lives in Victoria in a green valley town.

Passionate – or perhaps obsessed – with nature, poetry, and the intersection of science and art, REWAND KUNIK, a molecular biologist based in Gainesville, Florida, explores the granularities of life through both the microscope and the lens of language. Free time is spent driving spontaneously to the jungles of South Florida, photographing fungal species yet to be known to science.

JAMES LAIDLER is a poet from Victoria, Australia. James has published two verse novels in Australia including, *Pulling Down the Stars* (Hybrid Publishers, 2018) and *The Taste of Apple* (Interactive Publications, 2010). *The Taste of Apple* won the IP Picks Award for Best First Book in 2010. James currently works as a gardener and poet; dividing his time between writing poetry and working as the lead designer and presenter on the YouTube poetry channel, Litpoetry.

ANTHONY LAWRENCE has published nineteen collections of poems and a novel. His books and individual poems have won a number of awards, including the Prime Ministers Literary Award for Poetry, the Philip Hodgins Medal and the VC International Poetry Prize. He teaches Creative Writing at Griffith university and lives on Moreton Bay.

Always under the impression that poetry is best left to the interpreter, AARON LEYSHON writes with an eye to capturing the sharp feelings in a situation. He cares deeply for all humanity, sentient animals, and the trees and scallops too. We live on a vibrant and beautiful planet overfull to the brim with colourful characters, and if poetry can help us in any way, it's to make this beauty apparent.

KP MCCARTHY's essays and poetry have been published or commended by Bridport, The Poetry Society (UK), *NEAT*, *Southwestern American Literature*, and many others. "Porterhouse Jive" won a Vonnegut parody contest in 2007. *Spirit Rocks* won a Silver REMI Award for dramatic screenplay at the 2008 Houston International Film Festival. *Mortal Weather*, a poetic novel, placed in the 2020 University of New Orleans Press Lab contest and was published in 2023.

GLENN MCPHERSON is a Sydney-based poet. He has been widely published in leading journals and anthologies. In 2023, he was a finalist in the Gwen Harwood Poetry Competition and shortlisted for the South Coast Writers Poetry Prize. In 2024 his poetry was longlisted in the Bournemouth Writing Festival Poetry Prize, shortlisted for both the Newcastle and the ACU Poetry Prize, and commended in the Ros Spencer Poetry Prize.

SARAH MEEHAN lives and writes among the creeks and mountains of Jinibara land (Sunshine Coast). Her work has appeared in *The Weekend Australian* (forthcoming), *Mslexia*, *Crannóg*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Live Encounters* and *Skylight 47*. Her chapbook, *Women's Work*, was recently published as part of the Queensland Writers Centre's QPoetry! series.

HARPER OTAWKA is a writer and lawyer from San Diego, California. She writes poetry and prose about her life in the Mojave desert and along the US/Mexico border. A graduate of Purdue University and the University of San Diego School of Law, Harper practices immigration, health care, and civil rights law. She received a Fulbright scholarship to pursue her research in Mexico, examining the role of women in migration and social development.

IAN REID grew up in New Zealand but now lives in Western Australia. He is the author of 20 books, most recently a fourth collection of poems, *Breaking the Surface* (Ginninderra Press, 2023). International recognition of his work includes the *Antipodes* poetry prize. He is an Adjunct Professor in English and Literary Studies at the University of WA. His website 'Reid on Writing' is at <http://ianreid-author.com>

MADISYN LYNN SIMINGTON (she/they) graduated in 2022 from Penn State University Altoona College with a Bachelor of Arts in Visual Art Studies, and in 2024 from Penn State University Park with a Master of Fine Arts in Art. Simington explores grief, death, and the accompanying rituals through performance, installation, sculpture, photography, and written word. Simington's work explores and reflects on the matriline of their family and the aftermath of losing such influential women. Other subtle threads of interest throughout their work include PTSD, LGBTQ+ identity, and the intersectionality of existence.

DEVIKA SINGH is a storyteller. An American Indian based in Houston, she began writing when she was a child and has poetry has since evolved into using writing as meditation, stress relief, and a way to display her personality. From the night sky to her mind's troubles, she continues to let her experiences inspire her and transport readers into her story. Her poetry is essentially a deeper look into her mind.

HARVEY SOSS abandoned his law practice in 2016 to write full-time. He won Writer's Digest First, Second and Fourth Prize awards in 2024, and a First Prize in Poetry in 2019, with three WD Honorable Mentions in 2022 and two poems chosen in 2023 as Finalists for the Montreal International Poetry Prize, sometimes employing his nom-de-guerre Redd Ryder. In 2017 he founded the internationally recognised monthly Artful Dodgers Poetry Series.

JAMES SUTHERLAND-SMITH was born in Scotland in 1948, but has lived in Slovakia since 1989. He has published eight collections of his own poetry, the latest being *Small Scale Observations* from Shearsman (2022). He has translated a number of Slovak and Serbian poets into English, with a selection from Eva Luka's poetry due out from Seagull Books in 2025. His website is <http://www.jamessutherland-smith.co.uk>

MARK SVENVOLD, author of two books of poems – *Soul Data* (U North Texas Press, 1998) and *Empire Burlesque* (Ohio State UP, 2008) – and two of nonfiction – *Big Weather: Chasing Tornadoes in America's Heartland* (Henry Holt Co, 2005), and *Elmer McCurdy: The Life and Strange After-Life of an American Outlaw* (Basic Books, 2002) – is writing and adapting *You, Me, and the Algorithmic Sea*, a narrative trilogy in poetry, into a stage performance with music, sound-scaping, and scary bits about intelligence, artificial and otherwise, in New York City.

PATRICIA SYKES is a poet and librettist. Her poetry has received various awards and has featured on the ABC's *Poetica* and *The Spirit of Things*. Her collaborations with composer Liza Lim have been performed in Australia, Paris, Germany, Russia, New York and the UK. She was Asialink Writer in Residence Malaysia, 2006. A song cycle by Andrew Aronowicz, based on her poetry collection, *The Abbotsford Mysteries* (Spinifex Press, 2011), is available as podcast.

LYNETTE THORSTENSEN is an Australian poet and visual artist living in the Auvergne region of France. She has been published widely in leading literary journals including *Southerly* in Australia, *Landfall* in New Zealand, *PN Review* in the United Kingdom, and *The Adelaide Review* in the United States. Her first collection, *Red Suitcase*, will be released in French and English in early 2025.

JULIE ELIZABETH VELDE is an emerging writer and visual artist from Hobart, Tasmania. She has a Bachelor in Fine Arts from the University of Tasmania, and Fine Art (Honours) from the University of Newcastle. Her writing and artworks are often centred around themes of memory, dreams and the surreal, grief and loss, finding beauty in the everyday, and the passage of time.

LOUISE WAKELING is a part-time teacher who lives in Dharug/Gundungurra country in the Blue Mountains. She has been widely published in journals such as *Cordite*, *Burrow* and *Live Encounters*, and in anthologies including *The Best Australian Poems*, *Antipodes*, *Contemporary Poetry*, *Caring for Country*, and *The Best Australian Science Writing. Off Limits* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2021) is her fourth collection of poetry, ranging across ecopoetics, sewer-surfing and the tragi-comedy of relationships.

JEANNIE WALLACE MCKEOWN is a South African poet, writer and editor and has published widely in journals and anthologies. Her first collection, *Fall Awake*, was published in 2020 and her upcoming collection is due in 2024. Now enrolled for a PhD in English (Creative Writing) at the University of Pretoria, she is fascinated by the intersections of colonialism and capitalism which have created the Anthropocene, and its impacts on human and nonhuman kith and kin both generally and on a more personal level.

JEN WEBB is Distinguished Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Canberra. Recent poetry collections include *Flight Mode* (with Shé Hawke; RWP, 2020), and *The Daily News* (RWP, 2024). She is co-editor of the literary journal *Meniscus*, the scholarly journal *Axon: Creative Explorations*, and Bloomsbury Academic's Research in Creative Writing series. Jen was chair of the 2024 University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize.

RACHELSIMONE WYLEY – vocalist-essayist-poet-songwriter – deliberately disrupts the power dynamic that exists between artist and audience, requiring all present to offer their own emotional collateral as part of the creation process. She knows creativity to be the solution to inequity, not simply its mirror and megaphone, and she leverages it alongside ancestral wisdom to connect individuals in spontaneous community. RachelSimone's art and music are earnestly and unapologetically anti-performance.

