

PETER BOYLE

b 1951 Melbourne; moved to Sydney aged twelve. He has taught English in high schools and TAFE colleges, and is a translator of Spanish and French poetry. The Blue Cloud of Crying.

Group Portrait, Delft, late sixteenth century

They opened the dikes five times that year to flood the land.
 Cities were torched, the inhabitants bound and gagged,
 then forced at lancepoint into the frozen canals.
 I was executing yet another portrait of the public trustees of an orphanage
 that their bald correctly-laced presences might shine
 in remote museums a thousand years hence.
 I enjoy the delicate way their hands rest on the title deeds
 for these most Christian places
 even as the order 'No prisoners' passed along both sides
 or another cannonade ripped through the munitions factory
 burying in rubble the girls' school for genteel department.
 Each year the orphanages increased.
 The portraits grew heavier and heavier.
 The regents must have thought they would lug the weight of them
 into the other world.
 Nice money if you can get the work
 and no one questioned motives:
 fidelity to realistic details
 right up to the end of the earth.

These stone embankments that look like Venice but they're not Venice,
 here where the dark river finds its terminus,
 where the ship's prow seeks a tomb among the currents.
 Every day, as I paint,
 winter water shivers under the footbridge.
 The gaunt trees shelter their starved layer of birds:
 at each level they define a new habitation.
 I once captured the local birds in biblical triptych:
 those rounded brutal mouths shaped by the one cry of begging,
 stuffing everything visible into their darkening crevasse.
 I wanted to paint as bluntly
 as words spoken during an avalanche
 yet all's this inevitable smooth,
 these muted blues that are the fashion of the age
 recording everything precisely as it is:
 each official, each battle, the newborn child,
 the fruits on the table, the windmill on the hillside to the left
 at every change of season –
 that's what they wanted and I could do it,
 making present to the touch
 each thing as it passes into amnesia.

From Numbers

2

What is the sound
of one digit, counting?
A name, singular.
Rub its stick against another
and they make a noise
like crunching numbers.
Their flame is life,
or looked like it
when I was younger.
I knew that one and not
makes one. I thought
that little Lego-bricks
like if and then, or or
and and could build
the world again.
That where there's fire
there's smoke,
and one and one
at times makes three
took time to see.

STEPHEN EDGAR

b 1951 Sydney, where he grew up. After three years in London he moved in 1974 to Hobart. He has worked in libraries and as a freelance editor. *Where the Trees Were*.

Scent

Rolling across the bed still half asleep
In the morning, I pick up,
Where the top sheet's folded over, a faint waft
Of scent that you were wearing,
And see with swift
And punning appreciation the worth of its name:
Je reviens. You have come back. The cotton's
Weave is storing
A set of subtle instructions
For assembling here a person and a time.

Pardon me, Proust. I think of dogs, or more,
Of possums whose entire
Language, whole *Weltanschauung*, hang in shifting
Alphabets of scent
Beyond our drafting,

A realm of discourse we are lost at the edge of,
Like tots with twenty-word vocabularies
To tell what's meant.
The term is 'channel'. There is
No topic, surely, we could not receive

If we could find the channel through which it's sent –
And lock, say, like the point
Where two convergent railway gauges meet,
Feste's songs to the sonic
Wave of a bat.
We scan the skies to strain some alien message.
Ours hurtle nowhere, the mute shouts of a mime,
A frogman's panic.
Who knows but the ones for whom
We search are here? Perhaps they've made the passage,

Combed out like microbes from a comet's hair,
Settling as we stare,
Coded like crystals in the mud we step
On, drifting like pollen or
Strands of cobweb;
Each *déjà vu*, awe, spinechill, urge to rant,
Is their brushed presence, their slogan being unfurled
Like a sheer banner
Through all the senseless world,
Or memory caught in cotton, like your French scent.

Faisal's Portrait

Those high thin clouds are smeared across the blue
Like streaks on a window poorly cleaned.
The sky, a comprehensive desolation,
Seems merely papered over; you
Wait for a corner to lift, curl back
On what may lie behind;
Some such painter's trick
Of subverted expectation and convention.

And the river too contributes
To the act, with a showgirl-cheek of glitter.
Sunlight inhabits
That surface like a galaxy,
As if two mere dimensions had exhausted
Light's ingenuity.
A plunging swimmer, like the water spider
In its glove of air,
Might spin down, sleeved in rags of sky

And dazzle, a bubble trail
Of daylight purling from his hair.
Two inches from his surface-blistered
Eyes, nothing at all.

When Lawrence showed some Arabs a sketch of Faisal –
Gaunt head, the blade of nose, black eyes –
With no tradition of figurative art
To guide their laughable appraisal,
How could they interpret the mess
Of page-flat lines and shadows?
Puzzled and dubious,
One hazarded at last the head of a goat.

In this focus, flat
And shallow as a goat's satanic eye,
Stretches out
The same temptation, that this world
Subverts all its interpreters. As close
As windows, far as the marled
And paper-thin design of clouds and sky,
The forms condense and melt
Abstractedly, as on the skin's curled
Surface these thin lives flutter
And crawl, like shapes in a car beam spilt
Across a ceiling, light across
The surface of the water.

Dark Matter

The light in which the apple trees are drowned
Undoes them till they almost float away,
Though spilled around like lead, shadows delay
And weigh them to the ground.

How apposite that light has double meaning –
Weightless, illumination, hand in hand.
Across my sunlit arm a shadow band
Leans on me where I'm leaning.

One theory of new physics holds that all
The matter we can see in the universe
Is counterweighed by what, science infers,
Exists invisible:

Dark matter we can't find and can't retrieve.
One of the explanations postulates
A shadow universe that replicates
Our own (hard to conceive) –

With shadow worlds that shadow lives inhabit?
And all forever lost to sense and sight,
Except for gravity. Our own Earth might
Be dragged from its true orbit

By Shadow Earth. But shadow house or tree,
Person or apple – surely they'd be beyond
Detection, could not visibly respond
To the call of gravity?

Yet after all it's not so strange. We know
That more than we can know exerts between
These entities, unrecognized, unseen,
Its influence. And so,

The shadow matter of this world is ranged:
Things not yet come to terms with; breaking bread
Across the shadow table with the dead;
The name of the estranged;

The house deserted or not yet arrived at;
The weight of meanings left under the tongue
Like shadows of the words they lie among;
The silences connived at;

The shadow in your dream with whom you grapple:
Their force enough to push things to one side,
Yet leave no bruise for the bare arm to hide,
No blemish on the apple.

Π0

b 1951 Katerini, Greece; arrived in Australia in 1954. A long-time dweller in inner urban Melbourne, he is a noted protagonist of performance poetry. 24 Hours.

From 24 hours

He:Her

He:

We were
all at this Disco (one
night) – all fuking around, an' Frank
comes up behind me
an' goes: Benny! – Benny! –
Grab 'Roz' so i can grab 'Ang'.
Yer. Right.

Eye woz liv-i mai Maatha (hewws).
 Mai Dotta . . . shi
 worrkin (noww) layk det.

If yoo 'hev to'
 yoo hev to, one of the women sez.

Shizzzz 'nayc'!, the other sez.

Yoo 'nayc' — shi sai

Yoo nayc too!, she sez

. . . and
 all 3 of them
 'laugh'.

PHILIP SALOM

b 1950 Perth; grew up in south-west WA and worked in farming and cattle research. He taught creative writing in Perth universities and, since 1999, in Melbourne. New and Selected Poems.

The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat

The mind is the biggest city of all
 and every suburb: hope, ambition, greed,
 and a dozen others, the grim
 or the rich localities – are hung each night
 on memory. Imagine losing all of them,
 imagine them coming to haunt you
 inside rooms, making you the alien
 between events, the awful drop in pressure
 as the names lose all their meaning.
 And a thing you find most pleasure in,
 like lust, say, which makes
 foreigners of us all, but only just
 and always is attempting to possess
 phantoms, or obliterate them – imagine:
 a lover's body, browner than expected,
 turns out to be a sock. And sometimes
 is gone at the crucial moment
 as orgasm throws you down alone
 as bungee jumping, especially with a condom
 (which you hold in your hand, wondering . . .)
 Every object has a function, every function
 is a kind of love, giving the body meaning
 but you're left bouncing there . . .

And maybe you forget that you've forgotten,
 the weightlessness as you bounce up
 from the woman-world, the air, the wife,
 and man-world, harder, the name of self,
 all gone for moments and you're in peace
 or ecstasy and there's no name for that.
 Then return to us, to words like wife,
 hat, sanity. Only singing works for you
 somewhere in the brain where joining is.
 Singing for your supper, quite literally
 brings you back to us. Perhaps you cough up
 something like laughter, but it's serious.
 It makes you strong like laughter but
 incoherent; everything's led to a question
 and made to drink. Or else, a fool
 is left behind who has no song,
 staring at the hat-stand, hearing smoke.

Seeing the Ordinary

The film's so badly grained its spots
 recall Seurat's pointillism
 and it's pointed all right,
 Adam and Eve and Eden perhaps

but it's Adolf and Eva and the garden's
 guarded by dogs, masterly Aryan thoroughbreds
 which seem for all their panting tongues
 to think the man with the hirsute lip

is quite a hit. It's so utterly ordinary.
 Even our tyrants have home movies,
 even our hatred can be corrupted.
 It's chat and chuckles over wine.

Sunlight hits through the side of a glass
 like a pistol shot, the cumulonimbus
 bang up from the Tyrol like they do
 above the Darling Ranges. Home movies!

Think of all the gems we've missed.
 Genghis Khan hurt by his mother-in-law's tongue
 (that other kind of war zone)
 Idi Amin getting all his sums wrong.

Of course a chuckle is not the same
 as a sense of humour – I wonder
 if Pol Pot saw the funny side of
 having suddenly the highest IQ

in Kampuchea?
 And no one smart enough alive
 left to operate the camera?
 No archive film for him.

In archive film of the Russian revolution
 there's a moment when anger rages
 like floodwaters in streets of Petersburg,
 a procession of priests beginning to be drowned . . .

one man in a calm, as if upon a bank,
 withdraws from his pocket a cigarette
 and, dopey from habit, lights it.
 From the habit, I mean, of the ordinary.

Shedding Life: Reading Holub's Essay

for Miroslav Holub

After his neighbour shotgunned the muskrat:
*There was blood all over the sides
 and bottom of the pool.*

We lay in bed.
 I was reading Holub's essay
 when you rolled to me and touched
 your breasts against my back,
 and your hand
 slipped between the sentences
 like a sleek animal.

Even with a nose for animal attraction
 and lines light as negligee on nude mice,
 Holub, it's true, is not a sexy poet.
 Prague had Kundera for that,
 until they pushed him into exile,
 the state like lymphocytes. Lymphocytes
 read everything, remember everything.
 But they're provincial: you're one of us
 or you're against us.

The muskrat's dead,
 heavy as a handful of shot,
 but all its border guards are hunting
 on the wall, in the waters of the wintering pool.
 And slowly the Soviets began to fall.

And though it was your period
 we made love. The words
 I love you melt away

immunity: there is no Other.
 All the metaphors can be reversed.
 The present beats in us like blood
 or lines of poetry, their rhythms rising
 like the colour in your throat.

You fling the sheets and pillows back
 and my sperm rush as if their heads
 were filled with patronyms!
 When we met the hair rose on my neck.
 You were shaken by my words
 but took me on my scent.

Desire pushes every sentence
 but some of it is dangerous.
 Holub's name is like a heartbeat.
 I think of all the *samizdat*
 and every reader recognising
 words, discerning scent.

You wipe us down with tissues: they
 are six red butterflies beside
 the little wounded mouse under the bed.
 Later, when I begin to realise,
 I take the book and read you
 the opening sentences of Holub.

JOHN FORBES

1950–98. Born in Melbourne, he grew up in New Guinea, Malaya and Sydney. He did various manual and literary work in Sydney and, latterly, in Melbourne. Collected Poems.

Ode to Karl Marx

Old father of the horrible bride whose
 wedding cake has finally collapsed, you
 spoke the truth that doesn't set us free –
 it's like a lever made of words no one's
 learnt to operate. So the machine it once
 connected to just accelerates & each new
 rap dance video's a perfect image of this,
 bodies going faster and faster, still dancing
 on the spot. At the moment tho' this set up
 works for me, being paid to sit and write &

smoke, thumbing through Adorno like New Idea
on a cold working day in Ballarat, where

adult unemployment is 22% & all your grand
schemata of intricate cause and effect

work out like this: take a muscle car &
wire its accelerator to the floor, take out

the brakes, the gears the steering wheel
& let it rip. The dumbest tattooed hoon

– mortal diamond hanging round the Mall –
knows what happens next. It's fun unless

you're strapped inside the car. I'm not,
but the dummies they use for testing are.

Admonition

Be still, my beating heart, & you, body
Don't go banging into that tree –
The one the girl turned into, back
When the gods were like they are
In the Collected Poems of A.D. Hope.
& arms stop waving and legs don't dance
As if an invisible band was playing
A Fitzroy version of 'Picture This'.
Consider instead this cool Melbourne
Morning & the iconic self it suggests;
The laundromat, the review you haven't
Written yet, or choosing 5 dead certs
For an all-up bet (& when they win
You blow the lot on bills & rent!)
That's Grace enough this mild autumn day, so
Like I say, Oh palpitations, go away!

Europe, Endless

fair hair
& driving for hours
along a freezing highway
 'it's true' she said
'our rock music's shit
but we invented sexual attraction
didn't you know? in the 12th Century –

I mean they had it before
but not
as a central, defining principle
in the Subject's relation to the Other'
I looked across at her –

her fine boned face
& deep, serious eye –
Thanks, I said

Thanks a lot.

Anzac Day

A certain cast to their features marked
the English going into battle, & then, that

glint in the Frenchman's eye meant 'Folks,
clear the room!' The Turks knew death

would take them to a paradise of sex
Islam reserves for its warrior dead

& the Scots had their music. The Germans
worshipped the State & Death, so for them

the Maximschlacht was almost a sacrament.
Recruiting posters made the Irish soldier

look like a saint on a holy card, soppy & pious,
the way the Yanks go on about their dead.

Not so the Australians, unamused, unimpressed
they went over the top like men clocking on,

in this first full-scale industrial war.
Which is why Anzac Day continues to move us,

& grow, despite attempts to make it
a media event (left to them we'd attend

'The Foxtel Dawn Service'). But The March is
proof we got at least one thing right, informal,

straggling & more cheerful than not, it's
like a huge works or 8 Hour Day picnic –

if we still had works, or unions, that is.

Sydney*i.m. Robert Harris*

1

Now trees smudge youth's red
I-hate-the-suburbs vista green,

you're reconciled to breathing
gunk you can't escape, don't

want to, defined by decisions
you took for granted years ago,

like shiny flecks of mica in the
footpath tar, reflecting now

your own pattern of stars, free
to sparkle, not (fake free-willed

human particle – as if being
shiny was to choose) to refuse.

2

Each 20 miles the suburbs
parody the CBD, Parramatta

for example, with sandstone
Greenway dignity plus trees –

elsewhere each malled street
or tizzed up Heritage site

attracts a Cultural Studies
PhD, the way pre-butch short

back and sides like fibro
becomes chic. But even tho'

ads map the Good Life to 30
years ago, now up to date

means out of reach, why not
promote a Doonside Pride Week?

Why not forget everything
Patrick White ever wrote?

3 (song)

*My days of azure
have forgotten me.*

Christopher Brennan

Blazing a pattern
over the odds, white

as a Bex under
Moreton Bay figs,

stunned you wonder
what hit you (teeth

on fire, cerulean music
coming out of your head)

you faint & the city's
there like a pillow

you wake in the morning
each street is a beach –

others have armchairs
& opinions about things

but you sing a song like
the clinking of schooners

the city's still hearing
when they're dead & gone

IRA Dreaming

black plastic under
a lone fluorescent traffic cone
you salute by switching
an acoustic sensor on –
a pointer flips & royal brits
learn anatomy up close & quick
the way a stripped fuse once
slipped under horses' hooves
hung bits of bloody meat
on trees post-bang crows
collect to feed on . . .
but you're long gone. Your
note reads

'Like me you have
your fife & drum song, I used
its tune to trigger my bomb
I filled Pall Mall
with flying glass
like some Dyak pirate's dying curse
come true at last
I'm everything Kipling
said I was, only worse –
& here's your red Empire,
neatly in reverse.'

ALAN GOULD

b 1949 London, to British and Icelandic parents; lived in Ireland, Iceland, Germany and Singapore before coming to Australia in 1966. A novelist as well as a poet, he lives in Canberra. Mermaid.

Pliers

Fist to grip the slippery, twist-easing
the recalcitrant, little mastiff nosing
into the crannies of blind manipulations.
The clench we reach for in tight situations.
As once, did Miss Tarbuck, a hard-nosed, roughly
middle-aged science teacher who took us briefly.

It was the period before lunch; *muscle forms
in earthworms*. Earthworms led to tapeworms,
and one of Miss T's field trips, bottling species
in a jungle hut (Dahomey or one of the Guineas).
Times were late colonial when tapeworms could
grow long as garden hoses. She had one, she said.

It grew, and grew snug in her intestinal miles,
shared her meals. *Uncompanionably*, she smiled.
*Prospect of starving. No medicines. But pliers,
I had pliers. Also meat, a pair of mirrors,
and I like to think, my nerves. For a week I fasted
let the meat grow foul, O very foul indeed,*

*then, on a day, arranged my mirrors, the view
not, ahem! flattering (a snigger or two
though most of us were too agog), I squatted,
cheeks distended, pliers in hand, waited,
O not long, for whatever might come out.
Sure enough. A head! No, more a puckered snout!*

*Unpretty! I chose my moment. Then . . . Snap! I bagged it
(unsqueamish fellows jumped in their seats). I tugged it.
Quite a tussle. (Blokes who played in the scrum
were turning green as they imaged this grim
alimentary pull-through. Tarbuck, unfazed
stuck with the facts, if anything surprised*

*by our pallor.) Useful gadgets, pliers. Of course
I bottled it. Ha ha, no, not the pliers, MacInnes,
. . . and here . . . (rummaging under her trestle)
. . . it is. She flourished briefly a large vessel
above her head, placed it with a bang.
Inspect it as you leave. Then the school bell rang*

for a lunch now suddenly more complex. We filed
past the pale, well-nourished horror, coiled
in its urinous solution, this worm, flattened
like white pantyhose loosely filled with sand;
it crammed the entire jar. And in the pocket
of her white coat we noted the pliers. Useful gadget,

we agreed, an opposable thumb with uncommon nip
for the use of anyone not wishing to lose their grip.

An Interrogator's Opening Remarks

We have no wish to lead you anywhere.
If anything we'd like to do you good.
The facts, of course, will shine like silverware,
but you must feel secure; that's understood.

A good rapport is what we're really after.
By all means keep the things you know concealed.
We know you know, behind the tea and laughter,
your secrets are a gravitational field.

We're falling in toward them very fast.
This happens by your simply being here
subtracted from the household of your past,
naked with what we think you think is dear.

So now let's chat, old son. You're not alone.
Your time is ours. Your choices are your own.

High Board Acrobat

As a brown
 leaf against a
 pure sky might
 slow-fall over and
 over, all its adept
 surfaces so
 aerofoil in
 the sudden small
 freedom between
 a twig's release
 and earth's old
 immobilising
 hold, leisurely
 within time's
 urgent limit
 somersaulting along
 gravity's invisible
 tightrope, I tumble
 with my long body
 in trust behind my
 head downwards,
 my eyebrows scribing
 air, my edged hands
 parting air's fibres,
 for I am a drill-
 bit flash-falling, I
 am a nib trailing
 its filigree of
 momentary notation,
 unbreakable code, this
 in the deluding seconds
 the child's dream of
look I'm flying
 aspires to, space –
 gambolling without
 apparatus toward
 that upside down
 sky, the pool's immediate
 blue-gel trembling and
 my little splash.

Intently

From the darkness and audience foot-shuffle
 I'm watching this man of instinctive kindness.
 He is busy in the wings, arranging props,

intently dabbing lollipops of make-up
 on small cheeks. Later, he will glimmer
 with hilarity, will guffaw louder than any dad
 as the kids come on and do their cute routines.

He's thickset, weathered like an upland farmer,
 I can imagine him dressing a lamb carcass,
 or present at the birth of a calf. Sometimes with parents
 I've watched him listen askance, like one patient
 with a foreigner's attempts to be understood.
 Yes, here's goodwill, as ever in the wings,
 but no less a form of imperial rule for that.

And when the corridors seethe, he deals
 not with children, but with mass and flux,
 yet his eye is there for the one child
 enclosed in grief's absolute. It's this astounds,
 this overflow of self-possession. It is
 charity deep as the gene pool. I note how it dances
 across the tenets of dogma, evasive as Puck.

For you have it or you don't, they say,
 this knack of living like light at the shifting point
 of others' need. Lacking that gift, I watch,
 and my envy is disarmed by this,
 this intent, thickset man busy with paints
 among small faces upturned toward him,
 that sway and vie, unconscious as sunflowers.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

b 1949 Penrith, where she lives. She left school at thirteen and worked at various jobs. After doing an arts degree in her twenties, she turned to full-time writing. Mines.

'Spin Control'

(– Bryant Gumble using a standard phrase for media slanting of news items, at the time of the Basra Road bombing.)

There's a zesty youngness in the phrase
 implying skill and contact,
 that the ball
 will land where you want it
 to, at last, and that
 the audience will put down its
 bread and its beercans to applaud you.
 And they do. They follow.
 The people people poll are almost all

happier when some sportsmanlike
direction is given by the hero.

He should show
grace and a light voice and not
always score a home run, just allow
his eyes to shine, or mist. And he should know
when to pitch for relief and when for shock,
at replays of the coast road to tomorrow.

For Its Own Sake

Instead of plundering a 'true
oyster', we buy her a soft small necklace
of glass pearls. I photograph and photograph
Katharine in front of Katharine Wheels,
having contorted myself into
positions stranger than sex, to take
pictures of the Fireworks at
this Sydney Show. I have run out
of film when Katharine and David go
on the Space Shuttle and so
I just watch them, inadvertently
incarnate.

I know his sharing the ride is not
an attempt at parental cuteness, that
he has a fixed affinity with spaceships.
We all do this for its own sake.
At first, they are awkwardly self-
conscious. Then I know
why I've been wet-mouthed at the thought
all week of crystal glasses cut
in the old-fashioned French Court
mistress's bosom shape,
which won't as the long flutes do
retain many bubbles and so you
quaff the champagne fast – for
its own sake.

Her firework eyes have swerved in fact
to her father with that glow
she had in her first months, crisp
as champagne's brim, that laugh
swirls up like pearls to the light.
Pearl, like crystal's locked-in shadow,
but uncaptured, her whole face
tilts up: the world's round glass
now luminous and brittle as a breast.

Trick Ending

(after the French style)

This poem has a trick ending, as
it is more about style than centre.
At K Mart last month I bought
a packet of stamps for my daughter.
Half of them were beautiful and big:
Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Renoir
(the peaches blush like women,
very big, very tender).
All the rest show cobbled old
European streets ('150^e Anniversaire,
de la Belgique') crowded with
grocers, artisans, butchers, farmers.

Guess?

Yes . . . quite right.

The stamps were from Rwanda . . .

In fact,

I thought they said almost
all about Rwanda: and our heavier
donations to it than to hunger, since
this time we understand the plot.

Indeed,

if that masterpiece lacks hunger's great
eyes so black and beautiful, it
proves something more central: there
is art in breeding meat.

BROOK EMERY

b 1949 Sydney, where he lives. He taught history and English through much of 1972–95, and has
been a swimming instructor, beach inspector and removalist. And Dug My Fingers in the Sand.

Approaching the Edge

Life lies always at some frontier, making sorties into the unknown.
M.C. Richards

1
What did they suppose, those Age of Discovery mariners,
as they sailed towards the known world's rim?
Were there any atheists on those European ships?
Some knew Pliny had reported tribes whose one leg
doubled as a parasol, men whose nostrils
functioned as a mouth and that the Garamantes
were promiscuous, like sailors. Some heard Iambulus had visited
a 'happy isle' where the inhabitants clicked divided tongues
and spoke two ways at once. Some believed Raphael Nonsenso

sailed to Utopia with Vespucci, unaware the Greek meant 'no place'. Most, I suspect, had glimpsed cow-hide and vellum maps, the plated backs of serpents eating their own tails, the script 'terra incognita' and ink coastlines that started as approximations and trailed away into the sea. They may have fancied dragons, giants, men with horns and wings, women with barking heads, the wondrous beasts that travellers sighted but never managed to bring home. There would have been a moment that they couldn't see, a moment when they could have drawn back, before their ship felt the tug, the current above a waterfall, and they were swept towards the edge. Where did this water go? Where was I about to fall?

2

It's only from the air that the western desert paintings make sense to the European eye – dunes in a dry creek bed, passages between waterholes, the return of Halley's Comet. Maps and Dreaming. Is it all known and passed on, a negotiation and representation of the world telling the lies that get to truth? To what did they aspire? Does anyone remember Icarus now, or Daedalus, the greatest inventor of his age? Who made the axe, the wedge, the wimble, sails for ships and built the labyrinth. And the son . . . such primitive technology, paper and wax, and ninety-three million miles to the sun. From Stanwell Tops we float beneath nylon sails, hang from carbon fibre rods, all the physics calculated to defy gravity for a while. But there's only one direction so we must land and carry our contraptions back up the cliff if we're to fly again. Aldrin, Armstrong, Collins knew where they were going better than Magellan whose circumnavigation took twelve days short of three long years. Their maps were clear, complete, we watched them all the way, a small step, two hundred and thirty thousand miles and just four days away. The footprints they left on the moon will last at least ten million years. Which is more frightening, to know exactly where you're going or think you'll never know?

3

Anaximander thought the earth a cylinder suspended from the vault of heaven and it's been round, rectangular and oval since. The Mappaemundi depicted earth as flat, Jerusalem its centre, sea around the clustered land. There was order in the heavens, astrology unified terrestrial and celestial realms and even thunderstorms were humours of the gods. A lawful universe: sailors set their course by the stars, spirits lived in water

and in fire, were placated by rites and sacrifice. Without auguries, entrails, Newton could predict the future; on a piece of paper, calculate the past: a lawful universe, though his rigid laws of motion were another myth. Matter roams more or less at random, and we are atoms caught between too many worlds, undecided where to go, energy created and destroyed. The further Hubble sees the more we shrink, yet I blink and Jupiter's moons respond. The universe may be expanding, might be infinite, might not, could be curved into a hypersphere without a boundary, nowhere a centre or an edge. Could be doughnut shaped, a labyrinth, wormholes where we live other lives in a different time and place, or a Mobius strip so we go round and come back mirror images of ourselves. There are singularities from which no traveller has returned. God may not play dice, but the world's a game of chance and we're high rollers, shaking our fists, blowing into cupped hands, murmuring 'seven, seven', shooting snake's eyes.

4

How very different we are and how alike. On the edge of Pulpit Rock I lie on my back, look to the sky locked above me like the hatch of a bathysphere and descend, the pressure equal and increasing on either side of its tight skin. Theoretically, travelling near the speed of light, we could circumnavigate the galaxy in about four years and return four hundred thousand years after we set out. Time does not move but we chase our future into the past and can't hold on to now. You sit with your legs hanging into the cold air trapped between banks of cliff. Below you each tree is clear and distinct; across the valley they run in waves and intermingle until the canopy is a plum-blue sea. Mist drifts towards the south-west falls. Magellan took thirty-seven days to cross the straits that bear his name, a narrow, twisting passage through mountains clamped in snow; had already executed one ship's captain – mutiny – and lost one ship to storm. Another doubting captain took the *San Antonio* back to Spain. Magellan passed from Atlantic to Pacific seas but how to separate one drop of water from another undifferentiated drop? We're sailing different seas and similar, you and I, looking up or down, seeing monsters.

5

My sails are wanting for the wind. Between their slack canvas and the water sun repeats and I shade my eyes to look to the rudder and a rope hanging from the stern.

I look for your figure on the shore, the creaking fixity
of the pier, the sandstone blocks that make the promenade,
the way the grass grows up towards the rotunda balanced
like a fo'c'sle in drydock for repairs. One Empire Day
we built a bonfire in the park, let off Roman Candles, rockets,
Catherine Wheels and threw bungers between each other's legs.
A match fell into one boy's stash and it blew up,
a revelation that left him shocked to tears: in seconds
the merging of a black hole and a neutron star
expels the energy the sun lets go in ten billion years.
When white light strikes the upper atmosphere
it scatters to create blue sky; at the horizon, the pressure
and greater depth of air deplete the shorter frequencies
and we see red though each colour has its shade of grey.
Low tide grounds a fleet of bluebottles, sails swelling
in the sun. Boys burst them with their feet or pick them up
on sticks and chase their sisters up the beach.
After Magellan had been killed, Juan Sebastian del Cano
assumed command. Shipworm forced him to abandon
the *Concepcion*, and the leaky *Trinidad* was left behind.
I look towards the far edge of the sea, the straight line
between a double shade of blue, the tinfoil glints
that spark like uncertainty on a radar screen.
My charts are waterproof, I have a radio, dry food,
spare batteries for the beacon should the boat capsize.
I can find no more words to give you, my lips
the hatchway to a locked sentence, my eyes shut tight.
Still the wind does not come and I make no move.

6
Where do I end and you begin? What marks the border between us?
We walked from India to Nepal without knowing,
threw away the dope when we turned to see a watchtower
with a flag. Even this was unmanned so, unwilling to go back,
we went on to find the river was up and there was no way
to get to Kathmandu. Indo-Chinese countries wrap around
each other like sleeping bodies, Vietnam folds both Laos
and Cambodia in its embrace. The Berlin Wall
split the world between east and west. Magellan sailed
to see on which side the Spice Isles lay, in Portugal's domain
or Spain's, but there's no fixed point, just directions
and relationships. He left Seville with five ships, two hundred
and seventy men or thereabouts. Del Cano returned
with just one ship and barely twenty men. When I lie by you,
am I touching another or myself, can we be considered separate
when we interact? Did we choose this small bed
or is our existence here some unlikely chance? There's a tendency

to follow a pre-determined path but deviations do occur
and are significant on a sub-atomic scale. The Greeks,
the church, Newton, all were wrong but the world worked for them –
even for Einstein belief's as powerful as truth.
In the beginning was the bang and the end may be one too –
between the first and last frontiers we walk no-man's-land,
look for cow-hide, vellum, the spoor of unicorns, ask for water,
abandon hope, and wake to hope and fail again. On the border
silence stands guard, its edge suspicious as a customs officer's eye,
each word a possible transgression, a clue to a smuggled heart.

KEVIN BROPHY

b 1949 Melbourne. He studied psychology, worked for many years with intellectually disabled people, and now teaches creative writing at the university of Melbourne. Seeing Things.

13 Ways of Looking at a Beer Bottle

1
After 18 months of drinking
we were inside, drinking
when our back yard pyramid
of beer bottles rolled downhill
making us duck, automatically, for cover.

2
I have a friend who hides
one or two bottles in the front garden
before going in to a party.
Insurance, or ritual?
Time capsule, he says.

3
In the street
I was hit over the head with a beer bottle.
At the same time the woman I was with
had her long magnificent hair tied round a pole
and I kept shouting at our attackers,
Why? Why? Why? Why?

4
A used beer bottle inspector
will check for cigarette ash in the bottom,
butts, nail clippings, false eyelashes, syringe needles,
Tatts tickets, matches, tears,
and old stories with inarticulate endings.

5

I leave empty beer bottles at the flats next door
 – under the stairs –
 where they'll be collected by the old bottle-oh
 who pushes a trolley through the streets.
 As each bottle is emptied
 I know I work for the last of the bottle shepherds.

6

The aluminium beer can resurrects the beer bottle
 as a romantic object, reminder of the days
 when life was softer on the lips,
 when afternoons glowed tan, clinked gently
 and rolled to the dipping corner of the room.

7

The beer bottle's assumptions:
 either you're drinking with two or three others
 or you have your own large thirst
 or you don't mind finding your third beer flat –
 while the can:
 the can knows you're in the car, alone, guzzling,
 and you'll need to toss it away before you get home.

8

On the bottle.

9

I was of no mind
 like a row of forty
 emptied beer bottles.

10

A man and a woman
 A man and a woman and a dozen beer bottles
 Twelve labels and two navels and another night pouring
 its darkness out

11

Somewhere in Australia I know
 there is a giant beer bottle
 constructed out of beer bottles
 and inside this giant beer bottle sits a man
 whose mind holds an image of a beer bottle
 made out of thousands of smaller beer bottles,
 with each beer bottle reflecting on its surface
 images of other beer bottles until,
 one day, that man will be the only soul
 in Australia who truly understands
 the meaning of eternity.

12

What a bottler.
 Bottle it.
 No, can it.

13

Oh pot-bellied men of Australia
 why do you imagine golden bottles?
 Do you not see how the bottles' shards,
 barbarous and glamorous,
 are smashed at the feet
 of the women about you?

ALEX SKOVRON

b 1948 Poland; arrived in Sydney in 1958, via fifteen months in Israel. He moved in 1979 to Melbourne, where he works as a freelance book editor. Infinite City.

The Note

Savaged at the skirts by a terrier toddler
 yelping a tongue of rage she alone
 translates, she alone, she the one mad lunge
 away from public loss, she the one
 arbitrary breath from private break,
 savaged, cracked, is astonished to detect

a drawn-out half-inhuman howl
 filling out like dye the supermarket aisle,
 a wail into whose pedalpoint she very slowly
 tunes, to claim it as her own.

Pure Thought

Then there's the kind of maze (he motioned
 for me to sit) where each new turning, every door,
 no matter how cunningly the path is proportioned,
 regardless how inviting its corridor,
 how neat the enticement, will inevitably come
 to nothing . . . Each new turn but one.

One way to enter, one way to leave;
 in between (he waved away my objection)
 just the one correct pattern of intersections
 and no going back . . . Now do you start to believe?

The Supplicants

For we have been sucked into the new Millennium
 At the kick of a toggle, at the twist of a Parameter,
 Our Supplications trailing from our trousers
 Our Halos manifest at last in cathode prayer,
 And when the Word is engraved upon the graven image
 For the Duration of a micromillisecond
 Within a Universe inflating and unfurling
 And contracting into its Binary constituents
 And the blinding screen shivers along its Orgasm,
 We will lock upon one another and Praise it.

Credo

And I really do believe in such a thing
 As purity of heart, or degrees of it,
 And in some Presence calibrating it,
 And the scales being Music. I want to sing
 The simultaneous truth of truth and illusion,
 The city's endlessness, the soul's profusion.

A paper bookmark quietly considered
 From the edge of a book seems lodged in its home
 Of flimsy borderlines as if it
 Belonged there, like a sword in stone.

Some Precepts of Postmodern Mourning

There must be a body, but there needn't be.
 The body must be remembered with some fondness:
 there must be at least two eulogists, and a third
 must have been detained by traffic or a death
 and the service must proceed. Sex
 must be mentioned, but preferably not, except at the wake
 or the seance when most words are permissible again.
 On second thought, this precept needn't apply.
 But at least one text must be read from,
 preferably composed by the body and significant; it
 must include expletives, but needn't do so.
 Everyone must look dignified and important, or at least
 significant; move deliberately but not heavily; smile
 but laugh once only. Black must be avoided,
 except in socks and sunglasses, which must be worn
 during the service as well as outside afterwards.
 There must at least be a reference to Celtic poetry
 or Jewish ancestry, and both Testaments must be drawn upon.

Someone must remark 'I still can't believe it'
 then 'Yes I can', and someone must respond
 with a philosophical but solicitous lift of an eyebrow.
 One of the mourners must be overheard to whisper,
 'I'm surprised she didn't come, though it doesn't
 surprise me.' It must be noted that the body
 could never suffer fools gladly, and someone
 must observe how much he or she is only now learning
 about the body. Someone must say at least one Italian thing
 either to the mourners or to the body, but a French
 or German or Latin or Spanish or Sanskrit thing
 will do, or a thing in any other accredited language,
 provided the expression is significant. There must be
 no public mysticism, though there may be, and coffee
 or white wine must be served afterwards. Someone
 needs to be squinting tears, preferably a large man
 in a double-breasted suit with a crimson kerchief
 protruding rudely, coupled with a pallid pusillanimous
 niece with a weak chin and beatific smile
 nodding with significance. Reincarnation must be accepted
 by at least half the mourners, but not mentioned,
 though strange omens and premonitions over recent weeks
 must be seen as significant in retrospect.
 The body must be understood to be pleased with the service,
 the simple dignity and grace of the occasion,
 the Baroque cantata, the words, the weather. Everything
 must be just so. Everything must be significant.
 Though in the end it needn't be. Later, this in itself
 must be acknowledged as most significant of all,
 or at least put down to the quintessential irony of death.

The Centuries

It is necessary to remind oneself
 that the nineteenth century never really left us:
 it has been here all along, biding its time –
 like the fussy old colonel exhumed one graveyard night
 who, barely have the encrusted nails been wrenched free,
 pushes the lid up and bellows,
 'About bloody time – thought you'd *never* get here!'

It's there, back of the musty wardrobe,
 concealed behind a loose brick, in a mouldy pouch;
 between the bones of a wall, on yellow newsprint
 lining the floorboards to preserve the names of the dead
 in the South African War; under the house
 in a blackened strongbox packed with Victorian cards;
 next to the ruby cufflinks in a crevice behind the chimney;

or in the attic – the mahogany dresser, the doll's house decades empty, the chest of drawers with the huge metal key misplaced since memory, jammed with maps and titles.

It is necessary to remember, too,
that the twenty-first century has been amongst us forever:
it squats alone, or winks from the electric arcade,
yells at the top of its voice from the wall of a tram,
gazes all night into its binary navel,
and of course (remembrance being what it is)
continues to mutter to itself
from railway cars, burnt books, smoky cathedrals,
gutters with stains ancient and black as blood.

ALAN WEARNE

b 1948 Melbourne; lived there until moving recently to Wollongong, where he teaches creative writing at the university. He has written several long novels in verse. The Nightmarkets.

From The Lovemakers

Legend: Jack, the barman, talks to Kim. Saturday June 6 1970 1.15 am

Kim, I know what's happening; you better know what's happening. The manager's suspicious and, since he thinks I know these things, trust me, I say, Kim's mighty clean. Doesn't he look it? The manager, of course, knows this but what's, he asks, what's that boy *do*?

Can I keep you
out of trouble? What do you think!

Instead,
I'll circle to my point. In Melbourne
I've this mate, this silly mate. A few weeks back,
whilst I'm down there, Bernie,
who for his sins is something of a poof at times,
Bernie thinks he's met this kid, your age,
who's horny for him. And he is not.
And I was ringside to it: all the set up,
all the follow through and final mess, the blubbering threats,
the being mad enough to phone this boy at home,
start to abuse his dad.

It's okay, this tale hardly fits
my kind of line (and even if it did
I'd never turn on diamond-eyes for you, young Lacy)
but I like what I'm seeing and my point is:
we have to get to know each other better
(isn't that what Bernie's tiny tragedy is
telling us?) much better.

Yes I know a few Americans:
stand back though, look at your actions, look at them again:
we aren't repeat we aren't in Gangland USA.
And even if we were you're no Al Capone.
Courtesy of Dad you're the local semi-rich kid,
thanks to your few plantations (small, discreet)
trying to make the extra quid, liking the idea
of breaking out.

But the Americans?
Kim cobber, mate, pal, son, old son,
imagine *them* as a more, much more, ridiculous *us*,
and then imagine *us* trying to play at *them*;
ask: where can, when will, such parodies
cease?

What the Americans are bringing in
they sure aren't bringing out.

They're certain to like
what you have and,
though the deal's to swap it for something that,
on occasions, kills (I need to tell you, Kim, kills)
the kids love it.

I won't even look at it:
me who did my stretch ten/ eleven/ twelve
years back, who coped, but hardly needs to do
much of that again.

Could I keep you out of trouble?
Well there's trouble-trouble and there's
getting-caught trouble. What do you think!
All I can advise is Kim, ask yourself:
how far do I wish to travel; and then take your pick.
Have I killed anyone? Have I *killed* anyone? Have I killed *anyone*?
We should know each other better.

I find it near impossible to reply:
but there may've been this person, so I'll try.
No, I didn't hate this person, probably loved
this person, but one day I returned from where
I'd been to find out what my trust was worth,
what this person truly, quite and simple,
was, had done. Who never knew how caught
they were. Just once I took this person
behind some building (I was being trusted now) and . . .
left them for dead? Let's say
I haven't seen them since.

I've killed?
I doubt it.

Doubts, though, are never enough.
I hope not.
You better know what's happening, Kim.

Carrie, Wal

Part ingenue/part flapper, Carrie could sing *Do do do*
what you done done done before baby
 high steppin' in with top hat and tails, kisses,
 trilling a quite passable do re mi;
 in this, Wal's other world, with all its democracy of hugs,
 she could ignore that malicious sneer *Getta Life!*

For it was envy which fueled the getta life
 syndrome: if her men were where and when required . . . whacky doo

There is a certain premium in hugs:
 Carrie had often craved them like a baby.
 But no use blubbering *Why me?*
 Why the woman in the moon!

Then though came the kisses.

You could loose your brain with kisses.
 And, once they'd evaporated, 'When will I really getta life?'
 you asked. 'What went before was hardly *Me*:
 all that strangers in the night dooby dooby doo
 taa ciao see ya round baby.'

Wal always greeted his friends with hugs,

there was no other way, hugs
 were a necessity.

'But Carrie,' he confessed, 'the kisses!'

Ooooooh baby!
 And Wal, OIC Operation Gettalife,
 let forth a Flintstonian *Yabba dabba doo!*
 What? Embarrassed? Who? Me?

Wal's friends enjoyed Carrie. 'They know me,'
 she felt proud to say, 'know me as safe.' (Though attempting anything
 but hugs

would find her up past the neck in deep doo-doo.)
 And if you had to double-take men giving each other kisses
 in today's world, well getta life,
 get two!

And if Wal sometimes was one big baby

thanks for the practice, one day she might produce a baby.
 (Since there must be some dimension beyond *Me*,
myself and I name her a better way to getta life.)

But would that be the final outcome of the hugs,
 the total destination of the kisses?
 For they could chill her, all the intricate do

s 'n' don'ts of hugs 'n' kisses,
 and the smug resignation of *It'll do me*
 was never Carrie's way.

'Getta life?' she asked no-one but herself.
 ' . . . getta baby?'

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

b 1947 Brisbane; moved to Adelaide in 1971. He has taught creative writing at tertiary and TAFE levels, and is a longtime reviewer and editor to poets. Selected Poems.

John

You're a gentleman, he said
 as we stood & drank & stood
 around the burning drum
 in the crowded back yard.
 He was standing around
 better than I was but I knew
 he knew I was listening.
 He was a pisspot, he said &
 two of his sons were pisspots too &
 his daughter was all screwed up.
 He said his two sons said
 he was a hard man on any man
 who wasn't a pisspot too
 but it wasn't true, he said
 he loved his screwed up daughter
 & he loved his pisspot sons
 & he loved the son
 who wasn't a pisspot.
 He loved them all, he said.

The Gulf Program

Maudie, I wish you could still see the TV.
 Pardon? Yes, you've got your transistor
 but it's not the same. Seeing is believing.
 First I thought the TV was on the blink.
 Then I thought it was the ABC. Auntie, eh?
 During the golf I saw this gulf program.
 Strike me lucky. It was over in a flash.
 Spencer or St Vincent or even Carpentaria
 I'm blown if I could fathom it out
 but about an hour later it came on again,
 another episode, the same but kind of different:

these cross-hairs. Pardon? No, Maudie, sights –
 sights not quite crossing a circle in the centre
 this bomb with a laser so accurate it bombed
 through the front doors, a smart bomb, no,
 clever, you know, like the clever country.
 Another one went down a building like a lift.
 The last one I saw was this bridge, Maudie.
 Pow! into one end. Pow! into the other end.
 What? Yes, I thought it might be war too
 but war without any people anywhere, Maud?
 Then it hit me like a bolt from the blue.
 The ABC was running commercials, government ads.
 They're blowing up *old* bridges & buildings
 so they can build *new* bridges & buildings.
 Didn't think we'd live to see it, eh Maud?
 They've finally done away with the dole.

RHYLL McMASTER

b 1947 Brisbane, and grew up there. She has worked as a secretary, a nurse and a sheep farmer, and lives in southern NSW. Chemical Bodies.

Final Notice

Just when I think senile dementia
 atherosclerosis (haemorrhoids)
 osteoporosis
 an enlarged heart,
 not to forget the results
 of three strokes forging
 their brain passage,
 have done for her

that it would be better
 if she fell under a bus (I'd push)

she looks at me
 out of her soul's open cupboard.
 I see a small light
 winking its message.

'I'm not ready yet.
 I'm still ticking.
 I can't let go.'

Sea Creatures

I am terrified
 out in the lime juice sea
 bobbing next to my father beyond the sand bar
 in open ocean.

He grins down at me
 his teeth strong and yellow
 with brown nicotined edges.
 Out of my depth,
 waves cracking like broken glass,
 I paddle doggedly.

I am afraid of what I can't see,
 of jellyfish and drowning,
 of being dumped by punches of water.
 I can't measure up.
 My father vaults serene.

I am underneath green, deserted, round-edged water
 in a whirl of curtained sand.
 I reach the beach – the world is still
 staggeringly the same.
 There's my mother sitting like a capped sponge.

She smiles slightly in her black togs.
 She is round in sections
 like hard dough buns.
 Her metal zipper is the green of verdigris.
 She looks astonished at her contained capacity.

My mother enters the water ceremoniously.
 She corks perpendicularly beneath her bathing cap.
 Her round head sits on her round bosoms
 which balance on her round stomach
 like a black and rotund peach.
 She glistens like a sea cow, she wallows.
 She allows the water to wash over her.

Emerging, she dries consideringly
 in a juddering towel huddle.
 Off with her chin-strapped cap, herself again
 and her perm springs free.

I dash back into the water.
 It is a torture.

It fights me with a slap.
I have sand in my teeth.
Something brushes my leg.
Sea lice bite.
My eyes, red-rimmed, sting.
In the will of the moment I believe
I am having dreadful fun.

GRANT CALDWELL

b 1947 Melbourne. He taught economics in Benalla, spent three years in Europe and Morocco from the mid-1970s, then lived in Sydney until returning to Melbourne in 1995. You Know What I Mean.

Yes

o.k.
sure
quite right
yes
absolutely
couldn't agree more
I concur
indubitably
my mother was too affectionate with me
irrefutably
I know
point taken
fair enough
I had an older brother I hero worshipped
granted
no sweat
right on
sure thing
guilty
there's no doubt about it
I always was over ambitious
and I can't handle people who complain all the time
but I'm trying to change
I can see the error of my ways
though I know knowing is one thing
and doing is another –
sometimes I think it's better not to say anything
not see anyone
not go anywhere –
do nothing!
my mother always fed us well
no matter how things were

and isn't it true
we know each other by our faults?
I gave up trying to be normal ages ago
it only makes you stick out in a crowd
but
I know I know
that's not what you're saying
and I'm glad you spoke your mind
it brought a lot of things home to me
I imagine it couldn't have been easy
and I've probably caused you a lot of anguish and anger
and I can see that saying this might make you angry too
I'd like to say I'm sorry
but
I always reckon
apologies
are just an excuse
to do it all over again
and explanations too
they're just another alibi
so
thanks a lot
from the bottom of my heart
and
fuck
you
too

MICHAEL SHARKEY

b 1946 Sydney. After five years postgraduate study in Auckland, he taught literature at a succession of Australian universities from 1977. Based at Armidale since 1992, he is an inveterate reviewer. Park.

The Triumph of the Takeaway: A Threnody for John Forbes

1
Whatever you think of,
you're it. Like Andrea,
who saw a niche and filled it.
Till she turned into John Laws,
who's Eric Baume, who's Frank Clune hiding
in Joanna Southcott's box
that Dr Rumble flew to Dream World
where the Pope lives, putting hexes on

the New Guard, RSL, and Orange Order,
Phar Lap, Skippy, Humphrey Bear

and Dani's sister just to spite the PM who,
as you all know,

stepped in a tardis
and emerged as Pauline Hanson in a Mercier cartoon.

Subtract the gravy, and the dream's a coddled egg
that's full of backyards just like yours in 1950

where the chokos hide the grot.
An old man stands on one leg, plastered,

painted in the garden, with a spear
beside the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Another, moving, wears
an empty Lackersteen's can tied around his head.

Australia is a recipe for upside-down cake.
Here is yours. Now eat it.

2

Straight from the toothpaste and into the bar
and the 10 a.m. kickoff.

You know the score: a traineeship for the years that wait
to fall like a ton of bricks. And they do.

You've seen it before, in Belmore Park;
in the Senior Lecturer out to grass

in the Members' Stand where they con the texts
of the daily's Race Guide and *Best Bets*;

in your Dreadful Uncle's party tricks,
the Disgraceful Aunt's 'I think it's time'

at 11 a.m. as the glasses clink;
in the rouged old sailors and dolled up tarts

who you never thought were our generation,
in the taxi to our destination.

3

Plundering emotions comes so easy:
padded bones collide with earth,

the hero grins, inspects the barrel;
cut to sex, a random coupling of fine features

and the whispers.
Cut to mouths of other creatures

trying bon-mots: 'Kill them all':
the ventriloquial puppets of the past

that keeps the best lines.
Buds,

in their inestimable patience
with the frost, attend the sun.

The spires jut, oblivious as drinkers in the park
to Toorak tractors, auctioneers.

Silence, after all, is best to let the words fall in.
The neighbour, pruning roses,

thoughts that never bother air,
but lie in wait, and are just there.

4

Melbourne drinks money,
the country eats crow,

and Sydney, like the comic Jewish mother
eats your heart out.

Did you know that everything you think of
is Australia?

When you least expect it, in the middle of a binge
of Robert Duncan's *Roots and Branches*, say,

Nel Mezzo del Cammin di Nostra Vita,
you start up and see the spire on the church across the park

from where the old ship's cannon booms each time
a virgin passes by,

the fairy citadel appears in *Gregory's Street Directory*,
and you're in the USA, beside the Anzac War Memorial pool

reflecting on the time it takes to see the cracks appear.
You have five minutes to stroll back from feeding pigeons

from a lunchbag by the Archibald Memorial,
to where another tower's going up and you're the dogman

swung like God across the sky,
composing worlds to hold the view.

5
Toll-calls to the past? Why?
Nothing happened.

Those who never knew you,
never read you, never knew.

You did not happen.
All at once, you're off the map.

There is a lot of it about.
Up here in the skull of postmodernity

the light's out and the blinds are all pulled down.
Memory is a shadow-puppet theatre;

Plato's cave was never in it,
and reality's a queue at Hungry Jack's.

A Cuba Libre's waiting on the bar.
Your shout is missed.

JOHN MUK MUK BURKE

b 1946. A Wirradjuri man from Narrandera, southern NSW, he teaches indigenous studies at Northern Territory university. *Nightsong and Other Poems*.

The Headmaster

my headmaster sat in (wood)
his painted office (lead/fired earth)
in his knife sharp trousers (wool)
covering no doubt the whitest legs. (red blood)
and he always wore a white shirt. (cotton)
he looked so neat and tidy like

the desk with its white blotter (wood/wood)
and the rows of white page books (wood)
all covered with white words (ink)
curriculum from sydney (Euroa)
white history (blood stained)
captain cook (red blood)
arthur phillip (red blood)
blaxland wentworth and lawson
etc etc etc etc etc etc etc etc. (blood)

he had smooth white hands (red blood)
to wield his whetted cane (cane)
in that room with walls of white (fired earth/lead)
like me. (red blood)

Us

A lamb's leg is broken.
And at the door of eternity
The bony crack breaks the back of chaos
And tracks through time and space
To the fiery start
At the secret heart of all things –
Yours and mine.

And the crack is the first little sound.

Flung across all time it drifts different –
Falls into some little certainties
Speaks our own realities
In churches and great caves
Breaks into our unities
In great churches, caves.

Cloud serpent
Spawned of darkness and chaos
He breathes.
He breathes different tunes,
Weaves different runes
Than the cry of fiat lux.

I kneel in your cathedral
Reading your Reality.
Is your book mine?
It overflows with truth.
(You say).
My name is Ruth.
I eat your Bread
You're in my head.

You inspect my cave.
 Reading my reality.
 Recording my reality.
 Writing my reality.
 But see
 How all your Bread dries up
 In the shadow of the Serpent.
 And see, the Serpent cloud dissolves
 In the shadow of your Bread.

Taste the echo of my Rainbow
 Feel His flesh fade into the Nothing
 Like a Wafer on your tongue.

Come, we feast Silently together.

A Poem for Gran

Flatwalk field of Suffolk –
 Your insular chalk walls are crumbling.
 The last of summer's apples
 Are tumbling from your trees;
 Your larders are fully laden
 With earth-grown food –
 A goodly preparation
 For the cold and coming winter.

For your winter winds do whistle
 Over flat fields, squat villages
 And important towns.
 And everywhere, sensible people are preparing.

The hay is gathered in
 For the sheep's hard winter
 And the hay is gathered in
 For the street's hard sound
 And the hay is gathered in
 For the apples in the attic.

All over drifts the first smoke
 Of winter's falling.
 From a soft room of lavender
 A little girl is calling.
 Born at the ingathering
 Of the good things of the earth.

And from overhead we see the red house
 On the high street, the river turgid,
 The tower Norman. Solid trees and lonely lanes.
 And overhead the sky is grey and all around
 Is England.

DIANE FAHEY

b 1945 Melbourne, and grew up there. A full-time poet, she has lived in England and in South Australia, and lives now on the southern coast of Victoria. Listening to a Far Sea.

Thirteen

I was practising being a saint.
 My brown lace-ups were clamped
 to the dusty floor, and I was in them.
 The mirror, an oval drop
 of flat untrembling water, showed
 a pale girl inside a yellow raincoat.
 I hated it. 'This one,' I said.
 My mother passed the silky beige one,
 the dearer one, back to the woman,
 and softly they agreed: 'Too young
 to know its value.'

'Some of us even
 wear yellow raincoats to school!'
 The nun stood on a bench –
 wasp-waisted, her cheeks covered
 with tributaries of red lightning.
 Her eyes glittered as two hundred girls
 marched with military precision
 round the playground. In tune
 with a deeper instinct, I dragged
 my feet into the asphalt,
 waiting to be detected, punished . . .
 She was the one who ground me down
 the way she ground her yellow teeth,
 and almost triumphed –
 until the day when, kindled with rage,
 she struck me across the arm:
 'Get out, then!' And I had won,
 my eyes drops of flat untrembling water,
 giving her back her hatred,
 polishing it with the fresh shine of youth.

Day of the Funeral

Much essential knowledge comes later.

Today I learn camellias were your favourite flower,
you'd had a gift for cultivating them.

Here in your garden, a slight wind
makes its unobtrusive claim on us.

Far above, vast gatherings of birds
dissolve and resurrect their bodies' density,

shape patterns out of separateness,
infolded by a universe of air.

They cannot shadow us, or eclipse the mild sun.
In this cavern of roots and branches,

we are drawn into Memory
which codes itself inside heartbeat,

dwells in the spaces between us.

Astyanax Remembered

Calchas settled the boy's fate by prophesying that, if allowed to survive, he would avenge his parents and his city. Though all other princes shrank from infanticide, Odysseus willingly hurled Astyanax from the battlements. But some say that Neoptolemus, to whom Hector's widow Andromache had fallen as a prize in the division of spoil, snatched Astyanax from her, in anticipation of the Council's decree, whirled him around his head by one foot and flung him upon the rocks far below.

Robert Graves

1
Was it Odysseus, or Neoptolemus,
who stood on the ramparts of Troy
and, without ritual or thought –
as if performing some final act
of freedom – flung his child-self
onto already blood-stained earth,
setting a seal on the war, the future.

Astyanax, the victim of this metaphor,
falls in a soundless arc towards
a chaos of pulped flesh.

2
Tell me what you seek, intones the shaman
they meet on their way to Troy –

waiting by roadsides, walking towards them
through sea mists.

Not ever mentioned

in the texts, he is the one who murmurs
over and over, *This does not need to happen.*

3
The aim of war is the extinction of hope.
He walks through gutted Troy.

Now a city of illusion, it will be
rebuilt in myth, lost there, found again.

The shaman sits by a small body
in the dust: hallucinating, remembering.

Perseus: The Movie

Andromeda was ordered by the oracle to be exposed to the monster, and she was accordingly tied naked to a rock; but Perseus delivered her, changed the monster into a rock, by the exhibition of the Medusa's head, and married her. This marriage was opposed by Phineus, to whom she had been betrothed; but he, after a bloody battle, was changed into stone by Perseus.

J. Lemprière

Females. He doesn't like them.
Some need to be searched out and destroyed.
Like Medusa. Others exist to aid him in his quest –
mindless nymphs who outfit him with winged sandals,
'dome of darkness', and head-sized wallet. So now, take-off!

First thing, the Graeae (those dim
caricatures), are blackmailed for information
then have their one eye thrown into the lake. Plop!
Perseus feels terrific. Onward to where he turns invisible
in the Gorgons' cave, creeping by stone animals and men,

watching it all on his shield
like portable TV. One swipe of his sickle and
he too is a stone-maker, later to create museums,
mausoleums, with a gesture. Next the age-old drama
of dragon, naked lady, and iron-clad man with huge lance

i.e. the Andromeda scene . . .
It's long-distance love-at-first-sight for Perseus
who ties up the marriage contract before saving her.
Afterwards he's so hungry he has to stop himself from
eating her: lucky she's worth a million or he might have!

Also (don't forget!) he loves her.
 'You're so *vulnerable*,' he croons adoringly.
 But what she is, is half-dead by now and aware
 worse is to come. Andromeda gets dressed, puts on
 her make-up and crown. Having been promised to another

(is only *she* good at arithmetic?)
 she knows there'll be trouble, hopes they'll
 kill each other. In fact, at the wedding, Perseus
 petrifies his rival by raising Medusa's head. But here,
 let's stop the reel so Andromeda can question Medusa.

She peers at her curved image in a silver casserole lid.

'First, who are you?'
 'I'm the Serpent Goddess of the Amazons –
 among other things. That will do for now.'
 'What does he want?'
 'To turn men into stone. To turn women into jelly.'
 'Is there any way out of this?'
 'Change the script. Start deciding what will happen.'

The icon fades. Andromeda turns to find, in another mirror,
 the face of a woman who is thinking hard: as, to be frank,
 she must, to get out of that plot, this poem. She weaves
 her way past human chess pieces, leaves Perseus
 staring with blank eyes at his frozen world.

Then, sunlight.

LYN HATHERLY

b 1945 Melbourne, where she grew up. A classical scholar and a teacher of literature and writing, she moved to Cairns in 1995, and in 2000 to Brisbane.

Love Burns

Pedalling his blue trike to every letterbox in Eden Street
 he piled the day's papers in the tray,
 my three year old son, with his milky teeth,
 and pumped the booty home, intent
 on a bonfire. At seven he wagered the right
 to smoke, puffed a cigar
 long and brown as his hand. I can still
 see him - he didn't
 cough. Thirteen
 and I looked up, then ran
 he rolled over, over, on the summer grass.

He was dancing, ripping off the jeans
 that drew the flames,
 and smoke rising on terrible wings.

His skin peeled off with the cloth,
 great chunks of thin leg on the black earth.
 Air invaded the gaps in his flesh, in his fat.
 I never knew air could hurt so much.

I couldn't even hold him.
 In shock we drove too fast
 stopping only when pain
 exploded and he leapt about like someone
 circling a fire built to spook animals
 or demons.

Morphine doused the rage in his veins
 and I stopped shivering.
 He remembers he saw his future
 flashing in lit frames. Twenty years on
 he still dreams, and he still burns.
 For the flames flare like blood
 and he stretches his arms out for me,
 then runs to fuel the fire again.

I Breathe You

Archaic Greeks located the centre of being midpoint
 in the human frame, calling it
phrenes or *psyche*. This beating, thinking, feeling core
 was composed of finer atoms.
 When I wake I enter the warm prevailing stream of
 your breathing. When aroused, you exhale
 rough concerts of voice, air and pleasure; my lungs engorge
 with air, my diaphragm grows like a
 womb thick with the fluids of life-making. Sometimes our
 breathing quietens, slowly, we inhale
 each other's breath. I sip the sweetness of your mouth, move
 with your body's rise and fall. Donne
 mingled the blood of lovers in a flea, but we are
 merged in a breath, you fill my lungs,
 my *psyche*, I swell in yours.

Properties of Air

Once amid the swirl and drift of centuries
Epicurus, atomist and philosopher,
formed the view that matter is illusory,
he exhaled an 'all' of atoms and void.

Sitting in his garden, he spun the finer particles
into gods, who gleamed like waterfalls
in a state of perpetual fission.
They feast, they laugh, never touching humankind.

Light as pollen also, the dusts of the *psyche*,
at death they gasp out, and drift, seeking a like soul.
Think of argon atoms, immutable travellers
shared by all breathers. We inhale Epicurus's words.

We dream, you and I, on a lap of long grass
rinsed and combed into spikes
by milky streams that fall over grainy sepia
rocks rippling with old bubbles.

From air thick with nuclei,
from a nub of curled bodies
I pluck the words:
I love you.

ALISON CLARK

b 1945 Sydney, where she lives; grew up in Bundanoon. She taught Italian at the university of Sydney, worked as a dictionary editor and for SBS, and now practises as a psychotherapist. About Desire.

'Meanwhile, Back in Genoa . . .'

Wish I were a Real Woman with a big
white bosom in my velvet gown
and chubby tenor to tell me I'm
an angel come down to earth!
We'd celebrate our ponderous love
witnessed by a chorus, who would
not laugh at our large claims.

You'd say: I feel eternity at hand.
And I: My love will overcome
death's chill. (The slightly mistranslated
text a curious blueprint for our life –

our life, my dear, so cluttered, vague,
eccentric and precarious.) But now

I see the morning star like an aeroplane
over Grace Brothers, portending?
– our exile from the grand simplicity
where once upon a time (self-doubt
projected on the twists of plot)
we frolicked like elephants, like gods.

Fairy Tale

A dog barks, evoking the pattern of clouds on a hill
seen from the back of a house in the country.
A weather of change, it seems, as the hill
is shadowed then clear by turns. The wind sends
waves through the silvered underside of grass
up to the sombre crest of trees.

We never get there, though it can't be far away.
Yet it is as far as a late Edwardian
illustration to a fairy tale: ambiguous,
alien to the feel of kitchen lino, fibro and brick,
dog fur, fleas under the house –
but kin to dreams, where fire and the wolf reign.

A dog barks, a young dog testing its voice.
It has the sound of distance in it.
A horse raises its head. We are still
in animal time: anything and nothing happens.
To see men we know mending a fence,
moving cattle on this hill, is unbelievable.

Like seeing old Miss Z in black, her whiskered cheeks –
my pale little brother grabs my hand and shrieks!
And was it an old bus up there painted green,
someone living unseen by us for twenty years?
One day we shall leave this timeless field
and enter our century, once upon a time . . .

To Schubert

I play your music knowing
which gods I invoke: first Eros
the awakener, who strikes
the spark which fires dull minds
to grasp the mermaid;

then Necessity, who strives to wed
bright semblance with cold speckled tail
and make a nest of what's available.
(So you gave voice to loss
whose bitter-sweet survives you.)

Last, Hades (the roses shiver)
in whose long view our life
seems the rehearsal of a fantasy
which leaves an aftermath,
as if it wasn't real till past. Like youth.

JOANNE BURNS

b 1945 Sydney, where she lives. A poet whose other writing includes monologues for radio, she often works as a teacher. Aerial Photography.

conviction: a transcript

i want to share with you a fabulous new range of saucepans: each individual pan is of course marvellous but this one is simply the most marvellous because of its wonderful glass lid: see the gorgeous little spatchcocks cooking away: it's so exciting to see the things watching: that is i mean anyway: this pan will cook right through the creatures: they're very strong and handsome: there's a lifetime guarantee and you don't have to buy the whole range all at once: you can build them up and up: we'll be talking about your immune system followed by the ageing of the neck after these messages from our sponsors: stay tuned: and tomorrow in the studio we'll have one of our most popular graphic designers speaking of the fresh boost of inspiration he got from a recent tour of famine torn pockets of africa: while leading fashion consultants will give advice on your investment wardrobe: colour, cut, coordinates: how to get that optimum yield

tourism

carp swarm the television's
rivers and lakes like late
night ads for cheap fertility
drugs, they arrived on
round the world cruises and
now they don't want to leave
the water's thick and sluggish
you'd run a thousand miles
to avoid just getting splashed
their pvc thick plastic mouths

suck great necrotic holes in
the river's banks they've
turned the piped bathwater
black as illiterate ink
you check the program
and turn to another channel
but they come spilling leaping
out across the carpet
they knock your tea to the
ground, smacking thwacking
their lips to usurp your
spot on the lounge, they
crawl and slide up
the river banks move out
as far as the highways
travel in towards towns
like rusted sports cars on
two stinking wheels this
is no horror movie it's
dead set reel to real

ROBERT GRAY

b 1945 Coffs Harbour, and grew up there. He worked for a country newspaper before going to Sydney, where he has been a part-time bookshop assistant for many years. Selected Poems.

The Dying Light

My mother all of ninety has to be tied up
in her wheelchair, but still she leans far out of it sideways;
she juts there brokenly,
able to cut
with the sight of her someone who is close. She is hung
like her hanging mouth
in the dignity
of her blariness, and says that she is
perfectly all right. It's impossible to get her to complain
or to register anything
for longer than a moment. She has made Stephen Hawking look healthy.
It's as though
she is being sucked out of existence sideways through a porthole
and we've got hold of her feet.
She's very calm.
If you live long enough it isn't death you fear
but what life can still do. And she appears to know this
somewhere,
even if there's no hope she could formulate it.

Yet she is so calm you think of an immortal – a Tithonus withering
 forever at the edge
 of life,
 though never a moment's grievance. Taken out to air
 my mother seems in a motorcycle race, she
 the sidecar passenger
 who keeps the machine on the road, trying to lie far over
 beyond the wheel.
 Seriously, concentrated, she gazes ahead
 towards the line,
 as we go creeping around and around, through the thick syrups
 of a garden, behind the nursing home.
 Her mouth is full of chaos.
 My mother revolves her loose dentures like marbles ground upon each
 other,
 or idly clatters them,
 broken and chipped. Since they won't stay on her gums
 she spits them free
 with a sudden blurting cough, that seems to have stamped out of her
 an ultimate breath.
 Her teeth fly into her lap or onto the grass,
 breaking the hawsers of spittle.
 What we see in such age is for us the premature dissolution of a body
 as it slips off the bones
 and back to protoplasm
 before it can be decently hidden away.
 And it's as though the synapses were almost all of them broken
 between her brain cells
 and now they waver about feebly on the draught of my voice
 and connect
 at random and wrongly
 and she has become a surrealist poet.
 'How is the sun
 on your back?' I ask. 'The sun
 is mechanical,' she tells me, matter of fact. Wait
 a moment, I think, is she
 becoming profound? From nowhere she says, 'The lake gets dusty.' There
 is no lake
 here, or in her past. 'You'll have to dust the lake.'
 It could be
 she is, but then she says, 'The little boy in the star is food,'
 or perhaps 'The little boy is the star in food,'
 and you think, 'More likely
 this appeals to my sort of superstition.' It is all a tangle, and interpretations,
 and hearing amiss,
 all just the slipperiness
 of her descent.

We sit out and listen to the bird-song, that is like wandering lines
 of wet paint or
 like dabs of it,
 that is like an abstract expressionist at work – his flourishes, and
 reflectiveness, and then
 the touches
 barely there –
 and that is going on all over the stretched sky.
 If I read aloud skimmingly from the newspaper, she immediately falls asleep.
 I stroke her face and she wakes
 and looking at me intently she says something like, 'That was
 a nice stick.' In our sitting about
 she has also said, relevant of nothing, 'The desert is a tongue.'
 'A red tongue?'
 'That's right, it's a
 it's a sort of
 you know – it's a – it's a long
 motor car.'
 When I told her I might go to Cambridge for a time, she said to me,
 'Cambridge
 is a very old seat of learning. Be sure –'
 but it became too much –
 'be sure
 of the short Christmas flowers.' I get dizzy,
 nauseous,
 when I try to think about what is happening inside her head. I keep her
 out there for hours, propping her
 straight, as
 she dozes, and drifts into waking; away from the stench and
 the screams of the ward. The worst
 of all this, for me, is that despite such talk, now is the most peace
 I've known her to have. She reminisces,
 momentarily, thinking I am one of her long-dead
 brothers. 'Didn't we have some fun
 on those horses, when we were kids?' she'll say, giving
 her thigh a little slap. Alzheimer's
 is nirvana, in her case. She never mentions
 anything of what troubled her adult years – God, the evil passages
 of the Bible, her own mother's
 long, hard dying, my father. Nothing
 at all of my father,
 and nothing
 of her obsession with religion, that he drove her to. She says the magpie's
 song,
 that goes on and on, like an Irishman
 wheedling to himself,
 which I have turned her chair towards,

reminds her of
 a cup. A broken cup. I think that the chaos in her mind
 is bearable to her because it is revolving
 so slowly – slowly
 as dust motes in an empty room.
 The soul? The soul has long been defeated, and is all but gone. She's only
 productive now
 of bristles on the chin, of an odour
 like old newspapers on a damp concrete floor, of garbled mutterings, of
 some crackling memories, and of a warmth
 (it was always there,
 the marsupial devotion), of a warmth that is just in the eyes now, particularly
 when I hold her and rock her for a while, as I lift her
 back to bed – a folded
 package, such as,
 I have seen from photographs, was made of the Ice Man. She says, 'I like it
 when you – when
 when
 you . . .'
 I say to her, 'My brown-eyed girl.' Although she doesn't remember
 the record, or me come home
 that time, I sing it
 to her: 'Da
 da-dum, da-dum . . . And
 it's you, it's you,' – she smiles up, into my face – 'it's you, my brown-eyed
 girl.'

My mother will get lost on the roads after death.
 Too lonely a figure
 to bear thinking of. As she did once,
 one time at least, in the new department store
 in our town; discovered
 hesitant among the aisles; turning around and around, becoming
 a still place.
 Looking too kind
 to reject even a wrong direction,
 outrightly. And she caught my eye, watching her,
 and knew I'd laugh
 and grinned. Or else, since many another spirit must be there, whatever
 those are – but all of them clamorous
 as seabirds, along the walls of death – she will be pushed aside
 easily, again. There are hierarchies in Heaven, we remember; and we know
 of its bungled schemes.
 Even if 'the last shall be first', as we have been told, she
 could not be first. It would not be her.
 But why have I become so fearful?
 This is all

of your mother, in your arms. She who now, a moment after your game,
 has gone;
 who is confused
 and would like to ask
 why she is hanging here. No – she will be safe. She will be safe
 in the dry mouth
 of this red earth, in the place
 she has always been. She
 who hasn't survived living, how can we dream that she will survive her
 death?

MARK O'CONNOR

b 1945 Ararat; grew up there and in Melbourne. An environmentalist who travels widely, he is based in Canberra. The Olive Tree: Collected Poems.

From Sites and Seasons

Out of Snows

1
 You cross a long white dune
 with a spring flowing out at the base.

The September snow is white putty.
 You push your skis off the last watery centimetre

step off them, into warm humming pasture
 – like the first turfing of primal earth

past a melt-stream rushing downhill in breakers
 as if from a hundred-mile fetch,
 water to wash the Murray's salt
 or set scrubrollers crushing.

Drive westward two days and you come
 to another brink, understated too:
 a slight rise which the road-cutting shows
 is made of sand. Beyond is the continent of dunes.

2
 In October, upon Mt Loch, begins the continent of turf.
 Florets shudder in torrents of air
 cloud-shadows swoop like falcons.

Here I slept an afternoon sprawled
 among heaths hot as a foal's flank,
 dreaming warm, in a landscape raked by ice.

Nowhere such bonsaied forests, anemone buttercups,
mountain gentian, espaliered plum-pine.

The spring swifts, like thrown knives cutting past.

3

Sturt on that first boat-trip saw
the giant cod suspended in clear water; mile by mile
each held its place like a solid fisherman's dream,
so many kilos of fighting flesh
just beyond spear's throw, a cloud in clear water,
its tethered shadow rippling underneath.

The Murray flows the familiar Yangtse brown,
uniform of the Man river, worldwide.

It's a hundred years now,
nature and the cod have had mud in their eyes.

In Cooleman Gorge

Cliffs grey as a battleship's sides,
their steep tub softened in places
to slopes grazable by possums. At fifty degrees
rock wallabies treat them as plains.

Water spurts from an old sea-bed,
crushed bones of malodorous corals
of the pre-aerobic pre-Cambrian, its gas half breathable
over a stenching sea that sparkled, spitting
pearls of lethal oxygen.

Now it's trenched by a rill of sweet water,
skipping down to a blue pool, home
of that cosmopolitan troupe of green characters:
milfoil, naias, nitella, chara, and curly pondweed,
all waving and twirling, bowing flat.

Such a place and source in Europe
would have nymphs, gods, spires, saints, rites,
four thousand years of history.
Here it has forty thousand, lost.

The Side-Waterfall at Cooleman

Shell-murmur of a stream-side cave.

Dictaeon Zeus had such a one;
these ear-caves, birth-openings,
are gods' cradles everywhere.

It starts with a high mouse-tail of fault
where the water got in, broadens below to the shape
of a teardrop removed from stone
– a deep ear-crevice,
where the straw-coloured cave-cricket lives
blind by the ever-changing lip of the stream,
a nook ringing with the tinnitus of bats,
pipistrellian tinglings, directional pips-and-squeaks.

The cave-floor has opened a detour:
slipping its waters sideways
from today's Quaternary whirlpool, dropping them
clean through Silurian strata, plopping and drumming
for entry on Ordovician bedrock.

The endless soft violence of water
rushing its troubles against the heart

And the waterfall's soft ferocity,
indignant softness battering,
nagging, dissolving lover,
like a soft drop-hammer that never
quite changes target.

Nameless

Stream so quietly, privately
collecting your tributaries
along the perched valley
down to the abnegating heights
where you make in your going
a great white flourish

so small and swift
the caddis never fears the trout
so clear and shallow one would swear
the rock's not wet but polished

till you expand your waters,
ripplets slap-jostling to the edge,
more shaped by the grain of rock behind
than all the drop below:

when was this place last sung,
by what clan or owner,
in lyrics of what local speech
its brisk pools and brisker back-eddies caught?

– One of these busy babbling streams
of Bandusia, Bogong, anywhere, that mean
so hugely to their local tribes
so nothing to the stock exchange,
draining country so delicate a brumby stampede
can be traced six years later.

Geology, near Bryce's Gorge

Each layer of alpine ash
stands on its stratum,
brushing the next one's roots.

Chunks fall out of cliffs, eyebrow hollows;
hilltops from hillsides,
centuries from epochs.

A rivulet pressed out of granite
by this season's snow-melt
tastes of history. Fossil water a-swirl
in our billy, smelling
of ages of heat and fire,

and streams that did their work
in ripple patterns familiar as trout circles,
shaping sandstone to just the niches
a frog or a purple flatworm might treasure
before there was anything living
with more than three cells to rub together.

The Magpies at Illawong Lodge

Two magpies have the concession round the lodge.
Feathers fluffed from a night of minus ten,
both foot-webs firmly planted on the snow,
they squawk for porridge, and jauntily barter
a spring warble of sheer mating joy:
'Illawong! Illawong!'
It vibrates them as though the land sang
through their fierce fragile pipes.

Snowy Mountains

CAROLINE CADDY

b 1944 Western Australia; spent part of her childhood in the USA. She now lives on the south coast of WA, where she has farmed for many years. Editing the Moon.

The Wind

Level out of blue sky
level out of black and stars
thirty-six
forty-eight seventy-two hours
the house tensed on its stilts
unclouded blizzard
that keeps me inside thin walls
looking down working
looking up listening
honing the corners
sawing the trees.
I have to consciously not mind not wait
for change
or surcease.
It may have come from mountains
suggests no mystery.
It may have passed through cities
suggests no sadness –
a steadiness a brunt that is completely
without us
completely within.
I go on working
as if there must be questions
because of all this
answer.

Night Moves

The night is an animal's mouth
quelled humid –
drop he says
velvet skin velvet voice
drop he says and the dogs sit
anatomical illustrations
not an ounce of fat –
drop he says
and they snuggle their powerful haunches
closer to his feet
pig dogs bred into their skin
not a lip not a dewlap
to be grasped ripped.

from the spat-fields to their shucking,
words, oysters plump with life. On Mooney Creek
the men stalk the tides for corruption.

They spend nights in tin shacks
that open at dawn onto our great brown river.
On the right tide they ride out

into the light. In their punts, battered slabs
of aluminium with hundred-horse Yamahas on the stern
hammering tightly away, padded by hi-tech.

Sucking mud into the cooling systems
the motors leave a jet of hot piss in their wakes.
These power-heads indicate

the quality of the morning's hum.
The new boys don't wake from dreams
where clinkers crack, where mud sucks them under,

their grandfather's hands fumbling
accurately, loosening the knots. Back
at the bunker the hessian sacks are packed ready

and the shells grow into sliding white foothills.
A freezing mist clenches your fingers,
the brown stream now cold as fire:

plunge in and wash away last night's grog.
In the middle morning, stinging and you wanting
the week to fold away till payday.

On the bank spur-winged plovers stroll in pairs,
their beak-wattle chipped by frost,
each day they ping at the crack of sun.

Stalking for corruption? Signs.
Blue algae drifts through your brother's dream
of Gold Coasts, golf courses. The first settlement.

JOHN TRANTER

b 1943 Cooma. He has worked as an editor, as a radio producer, and as a publisher of poetry in both print and electronic media. He lives in Sydney. Late Night Radio.

Con's Café

My rage becomes an uproar, but
only in its home, the chest, where
the heart grows jealous of the storms
unfolding there – rage to live, that is,
like a Hollywood painter in a fit
in front of a canvas that won't give up
its treasury of liquid assets, but
finding there a querulous middle age
and a brave array of symptoms
that the street insists on celebrating –
those kids on skateboards and a raft of sun
skidding into Con's Café where the coffee
tells us of its long journey from the mountains
and the hydroelectric schemes our fathers
sweated for – what comic's that you're reading?
Archaeology – the milk-bar mirror's baubled
with cloudy bubbles and scoops of light –
and the first-year girls in cardigans
are almost 'sophomores', but only in the light
reflected from a distant movie screen –

outside, the twilight, and a College Ball, boys grooming themselves like a
rank of violinists, and soon with their partners making up a pack of matched
doubles practising their roles – to govern us, the dance insists – join, then
divide – outside in the private College garden it's a harvest moon, you can
hear the limousines purring on the gravel drive, the mothers are grinning
over the hedge in fur coats, sorrowing for the loss of their daughters, but
then, a gain of assets falling into place under the dim portraits, the features
the painter struggles to get just right – true, but not too true, kind, but interesting;
interesting, that is, in the investment sense of the term.

Cable Chimp

The old man needs a whisky at the academic
roadblock and they give him coffee powder,
hot water from a tap, and sugar cubes –
is he an old nag, to nuzzle thus? – all this
in a truncated cone of polystyrene.
Here the happy hoop-jumpers rank him
or his good works as a minor flash
in a public socket while behind the curtain

a mechanic uncouples the slot machine funnel;
 then pleasantly postmodern comes the bluff and
 counter-bluff; now the tease, now the feint,
 the boob-tube factor waffling in the rear.
 Now they're all fondling the culture tokens,
 now this discourse bundle is a rapture cult
 among undergrads; I guess it's time for him
 to 'fess up to a secret authorial intention,
 some hanker to rig a covert climax, plotwise,
 and a fleeting desire to flee robot sex –
 text couplings – and go look for the real thing,
 and here's the chief professor, batting her lashes:

I was a harlot, searching for an alien harmony – oh abundant miss, the hack
 responds – inscribe our intertwining as a twinkling spiral, a stealth kiss
 fuck underlined by a nib's tracery, and oh the spirits – here a nook, there a
 cranny, now a jealous shot, then a deadbolt, now a clouded riddle tumbling
 down to the lower heaven – in the wreck ardent passion glue doctoring a
 clique of peppy brilliance, and the hanker that rotates our ages from youth
 to silliness brings us now to stamp out deadlock menace, erase that teen
 shroud of lust and canary silk schooling – we are the lost lookout and the
 forlorn band.

Gravity

Following the track of the small red ball
 down the stone staircase, across the driveway,
 over the traffic humps, half-way onto the street
 and then back again –

there's a warp in the visual field here, like
 a large sleepy ripple in a pool distorting
 the look of tiles under water – the path is
 fixed by gravity,

kinetic energy and friction into a
 predictable pattern that has its point of rest
 beside my left foot, two minutes away, in
 another story

about a girl, a glass of lemonade and a blue
 billiard ball falling from the table, rolling
 silently across the carpet and then –
 noisily, clattering –

down a dark narrow staircase to a lavatory where
 I sit slumped with my forehead against the icy

sweat-covered yellow wall, half asleep until the
 clack! Of the ball

against the base of the toilet bowl.

Lavender Ink

Look, there she is: Miss Bliss, dozing
 in the shade of a Campari umbrella. Beside her
 a book – something brilliant: Callimachus,
 let's say, printed in an elegant Venetian type –
 half-read, with the most alarming

metaphors to come,
 and a glass of gin, a cool dew
 blooming on the crystal, the air
 kissing her skin
 and the neighbour's hi-fi playing
 'I Can't Get Started' in a distant
 corner of the afternoon.

The yachts on the water.

The tinkle of ice.

I'm thinking of you, reinventing Sydney
 a thousand years from now, and not
 getting it quite right: missing the
 delicate hangover, the distant murmur
 of the city, the scent of this ink
 drying on the page.

LEE CATALDI

b 1942 Sydney; grew up there and in Hobart. She studied at Oxford, lectured at Bristol, and since 1983 has worked as a teacher-linguist with the Warlpiri people in NT. Race Against Time.

outdoor mass in Balgo

the jet trails turn
 in the sunset luminous pink

and this young father is
 wired up to heaven his disembodied
 voice projects
 into the vortex of the strengthening wind

on the way here I saw in a ring of trees
 a cemetery of anthills one more
 kingdom of the blessed

the small table the cups recall
 a desert people whose ark
 sat upon sand and through whose
 entreaties as through ours here

the dust blew

and blew

hope

as if one
 leaving a city emptied by plague
 famine, mudslide or
 mindless shelling

came into a great green plain
 and saw in the distance
 another approaching
 who drawing near is seen to be
 a friend old and loved
 familiar as childhood

imagine

the shock of joy and recognition
 that we two

should still be alive

sugar bag

after all that plain
 vegetable food full of fibre the longing for something
 so sweet it makes your mouth ache
 so sweet it makes
 your stomach melt so sweet
 that you suck the honey straight off the wood
 in a madness of hunger stuffing your mouth
 with honey-comb bark sand
 and the vinegar eggs
 at the bottom of the hive

this is the compressed resin of summer
 thick with the oils of plants that grow in dry places
 sinuous and dark it slides out of the wounded tree
 into the open hand

summer

the air is thick with fine white dust

november comes on like dying and going
 to a spare and wiry hell

as the sun sets
 in the playground children waver
 like devils
 appearing and disappearing in smoke
 rising in clouds from the soil
 burning underfoot

we sink into a new circle each time the wind
 swings to the north

trees
 catch fire just from the light

their disembodied essential forms
 flow in the heat that rises in waves
 more and more rapidly

there is something refreshing in this extremity

it obliterates the mean
 which returns as crisis

then disappears altogether

SILVANA GARDNER

b 1942 Zara, Italy (now Zadar, Croatia). Of Italian and Slav background, she grew up in Trieste and, from 1953, Brisbane. She is an artist as well as a poet. The Painter of Icons.

Zadar

The return to my birthplace
is to understand my point of entry
into this world, why I chose a war
as cyclical as the seasons.

Spirits are loving
I must've mistaken my parents' knot
as maestral, lubricated by a kind sea.
How was I to know
they were tying and untying
near the Diocletian well, ominous site
for the wise, the slaughterhouse
when mother was a girl? Ferries loaded
with beetroot from Veneto mingled reds
of skinned beasts from Zadar, the stench
is infernal as carnage washes away to port.
Just as convenient, later, the disposal
of human cadavers, mussels cleaning up the lot.

Was it the cleansing, then,
at the funerary well
my spirit must endure?
Couldn't it avoid the desecration?
Didn't it know gladiators return
in strange guises?

Spirits don't know earthly time,
I must've recalled only Constantine's
summerhouse halcyon in pinewoods . . .
and laughter, without considering
what made him laugh . . .
thus it was ordained.

Wild Broom

as sweeping as oceans away
as savagely overswept
as my own kitchen
but garland day is not today
in Australia, I'm trapped
in a messy season, older latitudes,
a stiffer me rehears a boy pledge

love to nymphs adorned with broom,
wing shimmer after shimmer
with damselfly and I can see
my leftovers on the fjord:
I should never have laughed
at him for calling me naiad;
he became a man who died a stone
I became a woman who quivers
for Sturt's pea, aboriginal
sweetpea, wild broom, all
in the same family continents
apart from where they flourish.

JAN OWEN

b 1940 Adelaide. She has worked as a librarian and as a teacher of creative writing. She now lives in the country outside Adelaide. Night Rainbows.

The Candle

Lake Balaton, Hungary

And then went in to a pine room full of sun.
This was the year of *szabadság, demokrácia*,
and it was late afternoon,
the fir-tree lifting and scraping
bear's claws at the pane
as the Russian units went to it behind the hill,
dull thuds, a failure sound, two a minute to use up their shells.
And this was early in '89 after a winter of little rain,
the units beginning to pull out and the barbed wire coming down.
And we sat in the room by a shelf of poetry, most of it Pound,
the floor swept clean, warm bread, Mozart, Tokay wine.
And Carl, he was a teacher at the school,
had rice and basil chicken hot, just done.
His thesis would be ' "Contrapuntal technique in the Cantos" –
the whole ragbag, *shining and silvery as fresh sardines.*'
His fingers called oboe, cello, first violin,
'then light air, under saplings, the blue banded lake under aether'
coaxing the grace-notes back to thought.
And Pound's cane chair in Venice was curved and deep
with a wide weave like a cage or a poem;
we'd heap the clean clothes up high;
a fresh linen smell escaped all round.
'Love, gone as lightning, enduring 5000 years.'
Through Almádi now, the almond trees would be dim perfume,
a light wind skimming the pewter tang of the lake
and sheering the silver away.

*'Shall the comet cease moving
or the great stars be tied in one place!'*
It was already night. Carl shut the book,
lit the fat yellow candle and put Scarlatti on.
We buttered more rolls and finished the wine.
The soft gold of the flame was an adequate light.

Friend

We'll learn from the eclipse:
I won't notice the fine dark
hairs on the back of your hands,
you'll consider my eyes
a Greek theorem,
our smile
a safe house.
How deftly our tongues turn chaperone,
their civilized conversation
steps off on its own,
left, right, left,
barely needing us now.
Plato would clap.

Did I tell you my dream?
You were drawing a golden mango,
and I, a woman veiled in black.
You look behind towards tomorrow –
a musky silence.
half fruit, half beast,
its breath catching up:
the in silence,
the out silence.
And in between,
the question's shining hook
with us the bait
the green and burning fish
may yet overlook.

The Kashan

for Tina and Paul Kane

I saw it years ago.
Known at a glance,
it was like insight,
a keyhole to heaven:
framed skies of endless fall
brimmed azure and violet and indigo –
contracts from other worlds
whose terms I breathed
like incense trails
or a pattern of thought
to get by heart.
Its two dimensions
turned me drunk with blue –
I was no more
than the kashan's waking site,
just slippage in and out
of length and breadth.
I found myself
and asked the price:
wishful thinking from Persia
at 500 knots to the inch.
So now it's memory – a 10 by 15
target for words
whose pinpricks into 4D
make flatlander stars.
But memory's the bargain of the bazaar.
It's stuck perception – a slick of past
for which you thumbprint then,
both cost, both gain.
The commerce between is quick
as the shimmering sex of light
or how we pulse from particle to wave,
short-changing be with have,
ghostly offspring of chance
and a small star patch.
Faster and faster now,
going nowhere I know,
I've a rug's blue map for the trip
and habit's recurring dream:
hurriedly packing
love and sadness and shame
into the family's one suitcase,
this quantum of time.

Limes

Limau, the Malay word, open as the snarl
of the civet cat Tumby and Daisy caught
by the shed, echoes the taste effect,
its circle of sharp surprise. Limes
themselves, dark green and tough,
seem missiles more than fruit,
neat ammo for a catapult or a children's fight,
with a taste somewhere between
austerity and assault.

Here, eating and drinking is the national sport
and lime juice, over-sweetened and dilute,
comes with rings of ice to swivel on straws;
you spit the pips for a family game
or pitch a fallen lime at the dogs and miss.
Then remember the news report –
but that was in another country,
cancel, delete, forget the sight –
jutting out of the sand, two terrified heads,
their brief, unbearable wait
to be pelted by righteous men
for the sin of touch.

*If your son and daughter ask for bread
will you give them a stone?*

Yes. Time and again.

What's to be done with a handful
of bitter limes? Here, catch.

GEOFF PAGE

b 1940 Grafton; grew up on a cattle station on the Clarence. Since 1964 he has lived in the ACT, where he works as a senior teacher of English in Canberra. The Scarring.

J.B. Gribble, Missionary

How to see John Gribble now?
A man they shot at in the scrub
A man who at Jerilderie
Had stood up to the Kelly gang
And got his fobwatch back
A man who stands beside his flock
As squatters threaten from their horses
A man who sues the *West Australian*
For calling him a 'canting humbug'
For showing how their Gascoyne friends

Would run down natives from a horse
Then rope them back to sign a cross
And keep them stockmen there for life
A man who spoke at times about
'Immoral and degraded heathens'
'Abominations of the tribe'
Exulting in his shining converts
A man who liked to talk of 'happy
Deaths among the young and old'
A man who chased a would-be rapist
In darkness on a horse through bush
And showed him to a magistrate
In town the morning after.
He had the holy wrath of Christ
Among the money changers.

How to see John Gribble now?
A man who learned Waradgeri
And gave some credence to their law
Memorised the kinship ties
While frowning on their myths and legends
A man who thought that Baia-me
Might almost be the God he knew.

J.B. Gribble, missionary
Dog collar there with sleeves rolled up
And working on a mission hut
Or riding four days to a railhead
Up to Sydney for more money
Storming in the corridors
Of men who wished him gone
Or Gribble on the coastal steamer
When squatters' sons tried hard to drown him
Then kept him two days in a cabin
Surviving for another round
A man also with wife and children
Nine in all from the missionary's daughter
They spoke to each other in God's spare moments.

J.B. Gribble, missionary
A man somehow transfixed by faith
And straitened by its logic.
The claims of Christ were very clear
And bore no co-existence:
Hypocrisies on Sunday morning
Ringing in the plate
Or 'tribal darkness' going back
Before the revelation . . .
He found he could not wink at either.

As white men fenced the tribal lands
He offered out eternal life
And thought the two were different.

How to see John Gribble now?
A frame of bones at forty-six
(Malaria and God's exhaustion)
He has a stone in Waverley
Where someone's cut, his wife perhaps,
And not unfairly, this inscription:
J.B. Gribble, Blackfellows' Friend

The Poem That You Haven't Seen

The poem that you haven't seen
and someone should by now have written

concerns the sub K219
holed and damaged off New Jersey

its death chutes locked on Washington
New York and Boston, its power plant sliding

into meltdown. It tells of how
with no remote, two Russians wound

all four reactor rods to safety.
The poem that you haven't seen

revives how Sergei Preminin,
apprentice seaman, just on 20,

and First Lieutenant Belikov
between them with their final air

cranked by hand the death rods down
in 65 degrees of heat

wreathed with gas and radiation.
The poem tells of how first one

and then the other man passed out
and in his turn was dragged aside

and how the last went stumbling back
to fix the rod that saved the cities

and how the exit hatch slammed shut
and how the captain heard a death

gasping on the intercom.
The poem that has not been written

restores for us the morning traffic
in Washington, New York and Boston

and has a flash of Gorbachev
with Reagan stooped at Reykjavik

five days later over papers.
The poem that has not been written

sustains their names a few years more
awkwardly outside their language . . .

likewise the sub K219
corroding on the ocean floor

its missiles undelivered.

J.S. HARRY

b 1939 Adelaide, and grew up there; moved to Sydney in the late 1960s. She has worked and travelled in NSW as an educational bookseller. The Life on Water and the Life Beneath.

Mother with Broom

(From some archival footage found in the year 2044 AD)

On bare (of tree or house)
bleached winter-white grass,
in some post-
Chernobyl-like landscape,
a young mad woman
with a post-natal belly
dances nude
in great slow circles
to an audience of one: a dead child:
whom she is carefully avoiding
touching with her eyes.
She is hopelessly miming
fuck with a broom
scraping its wood
hard
up and down
in her crotch. The child, who is not

the one the woman
 has recently lost
 from her belly,
 is trailing her limbs pliant and lax
 towards the earth
 she will soon be a part of, over the edges of
 the cart on which
 unseen ones
 have borne her to here. Wisps of fine
 childlike hair
 curl
 around her face in a coronal. She has married death.
 In her play clothes.
 She is maybe six.
 The mother
 with a sweet
 distant childlike smile
 of a mind in a private place
 continues her slow
 bland yet
 becoming more urgent
 fuck with the broom. Does she
 re-live
 the dumb
 moment of this child's
death's
 conception? Or foretell the next?

Fifty years ago,
 an invisible technical crew
 set their equipment running
 (hoping, perhaps, by chance
 to catch some tell-tale
 fragment of the unknown
 human's
 guttural or visceral utterance?
 Catching, instead, themselves -)
 The tips
 of their boots and some legs
 left unedited - in the left hand corner
 - for the 'truth value', as are
 their voices -
 'Shoot her!' the cameramen scream.
 She is authentic human
 reaction to disaster.
 They have
 not come for her
 but they
 are happy to have found her.

Outside the time in which
 she was filmed with the broom
 yet temporal as the film
 upon which she is caught
 and with which
 she is contemporaneous
 the mother continues
 implacably trying to fuck.

a green evening

a million miles away from Lorca's
verde que te quiero verde

quietly moving their
 grass coloured backs
 as if a slight
 wind were ruffling
 the feathery lawn -

three metres from the
 bmx track where a few
 late
 keen under-tens
 go round -

two
 red-rumped
 grass parrot
 couples
 celebrate
 the evening
 with what the
 day's sun
 has brought them -
 fresh
 ripe
 seeds of the soft, lime grass -
 lifting from time to time
 young
 green
 juice-stained beaks

wonderingly
 to look around

From HIV to Full-blown . . .

Moths blown away
from their deaths in the high country
die on the coast.

He will go, with his tears & his
typewriter, down below,
& type one more poem out
that he doesn't want to write.
His lover cannot hear it.
He is writing for those
of his friends still alive.

To them, he types, very slowly –
because his arms are shaking
& his skin
has the night-sweat fever:
*All the faces you love
will become ash or dust
if only
you can wait long enough . . .*

He has waited enough.

AILEEN KELLY

b 1939 England; arrived in Melbourne in 1962, where she works as a teacher of poetry at the Council of Adult Education. Coming Up for Light.

Encounters with my mother's ghost

I met her
in the kitchen. She was shouting.
No man or child answered.
The floor was slippery with botched
cooking none of us had eaten which she had
thrown down of her power.
Power we had not noticed
when she walled a war out of her house
where every pastry rose to our clean fingers
and nothing was ever allowed to be broken.

I met her
in the church. She was shouting
her name not her nickname nor
the mouthful her parents gave her but

the name only God ever called her
when she was too given to know herself called.
And I could not hear what syllables
she shouted. Only
the truth of it plucking the strung rafters
to sound the hollow air vaulted in stone.

I met her in the street.
She was revving
the little red sports car she sometimes
joked about but never found the right to buy.
No neighbour frowned or tutted
but the hard desire of her anger shut
out their good-day smiles
and claimed the thundering scandal
her careful quiet was busy to deny
all her careful life.

Simple

It used to be simple, large
self-supporting God with worldfinger on
all the pulses, lifting dozey new Adam
out of the clay under the surprised light. Then
proposition and inquisition untuned
the pulses, squirted back the mud,
crosseyed the saints, racked
sweet fanatic poets between lambchrist
and tigerchrist, candle and stake.

Accounts are rearranged,
the winners win. St Paul's is sideswiped
by the parade of tallest and tech-best towers.
A few church mice unaccountably strong of stomach
come with soup and patience to the dark arcades
where losers piss themselves
off the edge of memory.

This morning the fingerless mist lay
over asphalt and brick, over grass and gravel
spreading yourself thin but everywhere here.
Fetching the paper I thought I heard you sigh
or laugh in the mintbush by my gate
and who was it flipped the petals, hiding under a single
petal, little god? But when I turned a wet leaf
there was only a websoft texture,
an intimate scent
that troubled my fingers till someone ground the coffee.

The lads

When she says 'our lads'
it's the boys she hoisted out of sleep
packed with breakfast
and bunted off to learn for their long good.
Not only. It's the boys
her sons father and cosset.

Not only. It's the vanished great-uncles
three stringy brothers that her grandmother
saw lost to English work or war and prayed
in Mass and manners they might still be Irish.
The how-many-greats grand-cousins
who sailed surly from Cork or Carrickfergus.
The shot, the hanged. The crop-haired crop-eared
scrappers, the brains turned curdle
that should have been scholar or priest.
The quick-eyed old-faced youths hauled out
from skin-shed hulks to pick the rock
and starve in Botany Bay.

And no, with a pause with a headshake
but yes, most lost of someone's sons
crunched out of shape by noise
how could they ever grow human?
those blunt young heads baptized in old black bile
that only know the strength of bomb and kneecap,
bewildered by a new silence, stupid from it:
every friend gone soft, the doors shut hard,
cold in the street that leads to hell through Omagh.

When she says 'our lads'
it's a blade to cut through boggy fibre,
tangled layers of generation
heavy for stacking. To build or burn.

Back of Byzantium

*Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing*
W.B. Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium'

Laying yourself out straight on the ledge of long discipline
you draw out your Om and drag a last blade of cold air
into acid lungs and throat grabbed hard
by oxygen-short muscles.

The third eye
removes itself to watch: up your still sides begin
the eager moulds and fungi, action stations

for family reunion with their cousins
who've lurked your life in scalp and eyelashes.
Lapsed, unbreathing, your meat no longer knows
it's a friendly takeover: a crochet of green over the rock
walks fernwise up the ladder of your limbs
feeling for your quiet cells to flesh its cells, puffing
generations of spores into your gaped pores.
And where the blowflies gather, there will the spiders be.

The watching lens tracks endless time-laps round the vault
chittering softly among the bats, recording
a bodily form being recomposed
entirely of Nature.

PETER STEELE

b 1939 Perth, and grew up there; since 1957 he has been based mainly in Melbourne. A Jesuit priest, he teaches literature at the university of Melbourne. Invisible Riders.

The Less Rare

A white night for me is as rare as a fat postman
Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*

Someone's been working on the postman question:
They are not as they were. In the old days,
Each had a bicycle called Rosinante,
And was made by Giacometti. Lean as a myth,
He made his way down mean or splendid streets,
Daydreaming Gary Cooper, thinking Cassius
The best thing Shakespeare and Gielgud ever did.
Tempora mutantur: now you see them shambling,
Each like Sancho the Belly, after the ghost
Of his dead, desiccate self. Bar-and-grills
Call to them like Sirens, jumbo-burgers
Tilt like so many missiles, hot fudge sundaes
Bubble inside their brains. And however it's done –
Cloning, mitosis, the Demiurge at play –
They're everywhere these days. Look down a lane,
And there's a phalanx of Falstaffian men,
Pawing at parcels; across an intersection,
Fats Wallers pad with big-foot jubilation,
Snowing out envelopes. And down on the bridge,
Remembering to break step as they go,
They're Lou Costello in a hall of mirrors,
A platoon on a paper-chase. With nothing against you,
Each unfolds his missive, showing your name.
It is big enough for a tent, and you step inside,
Wide-eyed in whiteness, night after night after night.

Dolphin

Arcing clear of the water's gleaming labyrinth,
 a shock as he goes and a shock on return,
 he wields his body's pulsing figure, the dyed
 hourglass about his flank contracting
 as he furls the flesh, expanding when he flings
 the javelin of himself towards
 the deadline of a green horizon, and plunges
 back to the realm of torn ships.

He has been doing this for longer than
 any blood-bolstered or immortal boy
 has dreamed of being his rider, any lover
 of Ocean's benedictions offered
 bread to the nuzzling lips or a gaze entranced
 by the swell of waves caught in his body.
 Falling away from sunflash or moon's dousing,
 he figures Earth's bewildered waifs.

Given our needs, he finds himself displayed
 about the shank of an anchor, stamped
 as colophon for long-dead princes, cut
 clean through fumes at Delphi, where
 a priestess sounds the arcane world. All this
 is flotsam to him. Shark-killer,
 tide-scanner, Bedouin of the green,
 he mounts and falls, rejoicing and dying.

Hats

'Hats off in the Mess!' was the cry of the drill-
 instructor, when he'd brought our bunch
 of air-cadets to a ragged halt. And where
 are you, now, Sergeant Retallack –
 eighty-something or out of time? For years
 I've tried to keep on taking my hat
 off in the mess, less from deference than
 in a kind of defiant celebration;
 the hats wear out, the mess goes on, my arm's
 less dexterous in salute. We never
 knew what brought your tanned and seamy face,
 your chopped form and chesty bellow
 to put the fear of God and the Air Force into
 our balky ways. Perhaps you were born
 where we found you daily, stamping the red dirt
 of the Bullring out at Pearce Station,
 profiled against the black Neptune bombers,

their million-candlepower spotlights
 hooded, their radar pods dozing. I thought
 of you this morning, Sergeant, seeing
 in *The New York Times* a shot of a man in a field
 in Sarajevo. He was bowed
 in a way you probably wouldn't approve, the spine
 gone out of him as he prayed by the grave
 of one of his bunch dug in at the stadium.

His hat alas is still on, with
 a bulked jacket, castoff snow, dozens
 of plank markers, and as you
 would say, Sergeant, from force of habit, the mess.

Libelli

for Helen and Tony Hecht

If, as the Frenchman said, their enemies are
 the same as ours – fire, dampness,
 beasts, time, and their own contents – this
 is chiefly because they are our offspring.
 Cradled in monkish hands or passed by Francesca
 to wide-eyed Paolo, toggled like bambini
 in goffered calf or golden slicker, or
 sent out without a shirt on their backs
 to court attention, not a one but wears
 its maker's mark, the human gape.

Getting St Cuthbert up from his drawn-out doze,
 they found his pillow, a gospel book –
 an order-of-day for *homo viator* set off
 on the longest, darkest path: and in
 Fontevrault Abbey, Aquitaine's Eleanor holds
 something to read for as long as eternity's
 lucid season goes on. No more than it was
 at the first apple-blossom time
 is it good for us to be alone, and these,
 the tramp and the queen, remember that.

Granted, the pages in their archaic silence
 wait for a polytropic reader:
 but how their gull-wings lift for the voyage, how
 even the mackled sails belly,
 the creaking boards are salted with expectation!
 Perhaps the biblioklept who guts,
 harbour by harbour, the moored fleets, knows
 more than his crazed prayers, and senses
 a folded lightning among the tautened sheets,
 power sleeping atop the masts.

No wonder, then, if the ones who watch the crash
of trees and princes with much calm,
seeing in both the makings of a future,
should turn to preening, as once the quill
was sleeked by its first airy owner. The gods,
deranging as usual the doomed,
beset their scribes with imagined compliments –
the howler monkey as patron, the *Prix*
de Purgatoire with crown of thorns, the embrace
of Gioconda da Fortuna.

In saner intervals, as when rebuked
by the white night of the untouched page,
we're back with Champollion, tracing glyph and cartouche,
trying to put the world to our lips.
The *Diamond Sutra* is done, Montaigne goes on
essaying a life with the look of truth,
the kerned letters from Stratford hook us all:
but they say at dockside that berths open,
come sun or sleet, for those already given
to handling darkness in light's fall.

LES MURRAY

*b 1938 Nabad, NSW north central coast; grew up on a small dairy farm at Bunyah, where he lives.
He is well known both as a poet and as an essayist on poetry and culture. Conscious and Verbal.*

It Allows a Portrait in Line-Scan at Fifteen

He retains a slight 'Martian' accent, from the years of single phrases.
He no longer hugs to disarm. It is gradually allowing him affection.
It does not allow proportion. Distress is absolute, shrieking, and runs him
at frantic speed through crashing doors.
He likes cyborgs. Their taciturn power, with his intonation.
It still runs him around the house, alone in the dark, cooing and laughing.
He can read about soils, populations and New Zealand. On neutral topics
he's illiterate.
Arnie Schwarzenegger is an actor. He isn't a cyborg really, is he, Dad?
He lives on forty acres, with animals and trees, and used to draw it
continually.
He knows the map of Earth's fertile soils, and can draw it freehand.
He can only lie in a panicked shout *SorrySorryIdidn'tdoit!* warding off
conflict with others and himself.
When he ran away constantly it was to the greengrocers to worship
stacked fruit.
His favourite country was the Ukraine: it is nearly all deep fertile soil.
Giggling, he climbed all over the dim Freudian psychiatrist who told us
how autism resulted from 'refrigerator' parents.

When asked to smile, he photographs a rictus-smile on his face.
It long forbade all naturalistic films. They were Adult movies.
If they (that is, he) are bad the police will put them in hospital.
He sometimes drew the farm amid Chinese or Balinese rice terraces.
When a runaway, he made uproar in the police station, playing at three
times adult speed.
Only animated films were proper. Who Framed Roger Rabbit then
authorised the rest.
Phrases spoken to him he would take as teaching, and repeat.
When he worshipped fruit, he screamed as if poisoned when it was fed to
him.
A one-word first conversation: *Blane – Yes! Plane, that's right, baby! – Blane.*
He has forgotten nothing, and remembers the precise quality of
experiences.
It requires rulings: *Is stealing very playing up, as bad as murder?*
He counts at a glance, not looking. And he has never been lost.
When he ate only nuts and dried fruit, words were for dire emergencies.
He knows all the breeds of fowls, and the counties of Ireland.
He'd begun to talk, then returned to babble, then silence. It withdrew
speech for years.

Is that very autistic, to play video games in the day?
He is anger's mirror, and magnifies any near him, raging it down.
It still won't allow him fresh fruit, or orange juice with bits in it.
He swam in the midwinter dam at night. It had no rules about cold.
He was terrified of thunder and finally cried as if in explanation *It – angry!*
He grilled an egg he'd broken into bread. Exchanges of soil-knowledge are
called landtalking.
He lives in objectivity. I was sure Bell's palsy would leave my face only
when he said it had begun to.
Don't say word! when he was eight forbade the word 'autistic' in his
presence.
Bantering questions about girlfriends cause a terrified look and blocked
ears.
He sometimes centred the farm in a furrowed American Midwest.
Eye contact, Mum! means he truly wants attention. It dislikes I contact.
He is equitable and kind, and only ever a little jealous. It was a relief when
that little arrived.
He surfs, bowls, walks for miles. For many years he hasn't trailed his left
arm while running.
I gotta get smart! looking terrified into the years. *I gotta get smart!*

Corniche

I work all day and hardly drink at all.
I can reach down and feel if I'm depressed.
I adore the Creator because I made myself
and a few times a week a wire jags in my chest.

The first time, I'd been coming apart all year,
weeping, incoherent; cigars had given me up;
any road round a cliff edge I'd whimper along in low gear
then: cardiac horror. Masking my pulse's calm lub-dub.

It was the victim-sickness. Adrenalin howling in my head,
the black dog was my brain. Come to drown me in my breath
was energy's black hole, compere of the predawn show
when, returned from a pee, you stew and welter in your death.

The rogue space rock is on course to snuff your world,
sure. But go acute, and its oncoming fills your day.
The brave die but once? I could go a hundred times a week,
clinging to my pulse with the world's edge inches away.

Laugh, who never shrank around wizened genitals there
or killed themselves to stop dying. The blow that never falls
batters you stupid. Only gradually do
you notice a slight scorn in you for what appals.

A self inside self, cool as conscience, one to be erased
in your final night, or faxed, still knows beneath
all the mute grand opera and uncaused effect –
that death which can be imagined is not true death.

The crunch is not illusion. There's still no outside world
but you start to see. You're like one enthralled by bad art –
yet for a real onset, what cover! You gibber to Casualty,
are checked, scorned, calmed. There's nothing wrong with your heart.

The terror of death is not afraid of death.
Fear, pure, is intransitive. A Hindenburg of vast rage
rots, though, above your life. See it, and you feel flogged
but like an addict you sniffle aboard, to your cage,

because you will cling to this beast as it gnaws you,
for the crystal in its kidneys, the elixir in its wings,
till your darlings are the police of an immense fatigue.
I came to the world unrehearsed but I've learned some things.

When you curl, stuffed, in the pot at rainbow's end
it is life roaring and racing and nothing you can do.
Were you really God you could have lived all the lives
that now decay into misery and cripple you.

A for adrenalin, the original A-bomb, fuel
and punishment of aspiration, the Enlightenment's air-burst.
Back when God made me, I had no script. It was better.
For all the death, we also die unrehearsed.

The Rollover

Some of us primary producers, us farmers and authors
are going round to watch them evict a banker.
It'll be sad. I hate it when the toddlers and wives
are out beside the fence, crying, and the big kids
wear that thousand-yard stare common in all refugees.
Seeing home desecrated as you lose it can do that to you.

There's the ute piled high with clothes and old debentures.
There's the faithful VDU, shot dead, still on its lead.
This fellow's dad and grandad were bankers before him, they sweated
through the old hard inspections, had years of brimming foreclosure,
but here it all ends. He'd lent three quarters and only
asked for a short extension. Six months. But you have to

line the drawer somewhere. You have to be kind to be cruel.
It's Sydney or the cash these times. Who buys the Legend of the Bank
any more? The laconic teller, the salt-of-the-earth branch accountant
it's all an Owned Boys story. Now they reckon he's grabbed a gun
and an old coin sieve and holed up in the vault, screaming
about his years of work, his identity. Queer talk from a bank-johnny!

We're catching flak, too, from a small mob of his mates,
inbred under-manager types, here to back him up. Troublemakers,
land-despoiling white trash. It'll do them no good. Their turn
is coming. They'll be rationalised themselves, made adapt
to a multinational society. There's no room in that for privileged
traditional ways of life. No land rights for bankers.

The Early Dark

As the woman leaves the nursery, driving into early dark,
potholes in the lane make plants nudge and the wire-caged

fowls cluck like crockery, in the back of the station wagon.
A symphony is ending, too, over the brilliant city-plan

of the dashboard, and clapping pours like heavy rain
for minutes, outdoing the hoarse intake of asphalt

till her son giggles *I like that best, the applause part.*
He's getting older; now he has to win odd exchanges.

She's still partly back in the huge wind-wrangled steel shed
with its pastels and parterres of seedlings, level by table

and the shy nurseryman, his eyes like a gatecrasher's fork
at a smorgasbord, spiking and circling. Now each object

in the headlights is unique, except the constant supplying
of trees, apparitional along verges, in near pastures. An owl

wrenches sideways off the road's hobnail; a refrigerator, shot
for children to breathe in it, guards someone's parcels; a boot.

A turn past this rollicking prewar bridge marks an end to tar.
Now for the hills, balancing on the tyres' running-shoes.

These road-ripples, Mum, they're sound-waves, did you know?
is also a surrender, to soothe. She recalls a suitor she told

about beauty's hardships, and her lovers, married and not,
whom he'd know. It felt kinder, confiding in an unattractive man.

The Good Plates

On the day of babyhood
the Christmas guest would come,
a soldier back from the war,
someone single, or far from home.

After new toys and ice cream,
midmorning those hot Decembers,
the family would turn ideal,
polite even to its members.

Still home, but genial, drought-free,
as the good plates came out;
angry topics winked as if forgiven
over cordials and Sheaf stout.

When all the Good Luck toasts failed
we in turn played guest
to old people in dark parlours
serving up their calm best,

then photos often show this person
among family, and loyal,
but chatting with some visible stranger
to mitigate the festival.

Passover night, Jews set a place
for Elijah the prophet.
If more than a twosome, perhaps,
no human circle is complete,

and one more's a way out of too many.
Come spirit, come witness:
family love's the point, or childhood,
but the guest is Christmas.

MUDROOROO

b 1938 Narrogin, south-west WA. Active in Aboriginal cultural affairs and a pioneer of Aboriginal studies at several universities, he lives in country NSW. Pacific Highway Boo-Blooz.

From Pacific Highway Boo-Blooz

English Lit.

Somehow I ain't interested
In white meat
Saddened over with
A palimpsest of poetry
Palimpsest – yeah, that's the word
Dissolving in this humidity
Ain't no snow
Ain't no Lake Country
No loves of dewy-eyed
Boys and girls to be squabbled
Over by critics mazy with
Thoughts of Keats and Shelley
And were they, or weren't they
Feeling the strains of their times
Gone awry on little wire feet
Barbed with the promise of the New Jerusalem
I'm scornful of Blakean platitudes
Striving for an up-beat in fulsome
Debates of fleshy spirits in bottled souls
Give me, a highway stretching beneath my wheels
A cartridge between my knees
And somewhere a woman who says 'Fuck you.'
Yeah, who says 'Fuck you'
As she goes off in my old Toyota

Byron Bay

It was the prof, Bob Hodge, who squared the sign
Into culture and nature cooked according to the French
Who saw the Oz-beach as analysable
First the culture cemented, then an intermediate strip
Nature tamed and mowed into lawn

For happy Oz families to escape the sand –
 Kicking machos beyond on that unruly strip
 Now, it too is combed and filtered with imported cares
 His nature gone to be combined into the scanty
 Strings of that most artificial of constructs: city woman
 Who is becoming paler as the culture strips
 The ozone layer and sprinkles the unruly nature with
 Gym-trained, slick, clothed board riders
 Who suited-up, ride her right back into contested civilisation
 With fancy swoops of speed and cock-hard fancies
 Of bringing each and every wild wave to the video camera
 Nature, has been dismantled, preserved and protected
 Dissolved into signs with all potency relegated
 To a beyond which must be researched, stabilised and signified

My Country Home

The house is an absence of furniture
 The space extrudes from my mattress
 Once it was filled with love
 Objects and perhaps even a soul
 Suffering, naturally, a woman
 Now the roof is loud
 Creaking and crackling under the sun
 Outside the magpies chortle
 As they hop about the male desert
 Finches flutter and chirp
 In the distance a truck
 Moans across the silence
 Past the house which is no longer a home
 And so, it's time to pack a swag
 Take a long last glance around
 Feel the emptiness and sorrow
 This house is filled with spiders and wasps
 Home is the highway with my Roadrunner
 And me barrelling along towards Kingaroy

Images \ Artytypes \ Stereotypes

For the images \artytypes \stereotypes that fashioned me
 Not in the hairdressers, not in the fashionable parades
 The films, the videos, the magazines – I exist not
 Only on the main street of a country town, the dog snarls
 Stretching down into the fatness of a sleeping symbol
 Brown and yellow, dark, a strange mongrel mix
 Growling between the earth and sky

Forming, the stereotype, fashions me as I am
 A hard rock blistering under the sun
 A twisted broken branch wrenched away by flood waters
 Swirling me on, battering me to slick city hoedown
 Sparkling drops of sweat, shining amidst the plastics, I speed on

Imaged \artytyped \stereotyped and transfixed in my cowboy clothes
 A wide-brimmed stockman smelling of days gone, transformed I'm not
 Still of the bush, floodwaters image me in muddiness
 Flatten me out, stretch me from land to city
 Then back again as I smile and grin oozing with the land

Sadness, Sweeping Gladness

Sorrow blocks the day before and after
 Words betrayed and worlds forgotten
 In the sunlight of this my afteryears
 I smile my yellow teeth content
 With less of thoughts and desires futurewards
 If I was young, I could believe in a job some day
 Filled with the grip of all I may desire
 Caught the present begins to blossom
 Into what I think and feel and devour
 In this my afteryears the grass grows on the mudflats
 The kangaroo of my being stops and turns
 Bends, old grey body, a friend of better years
 Feeling at ease in my big old Queenslander

MAL MORGAN

1935–99. Born in England, he arrived in Melbourne in 1948. He worked as a pharmacist, and was a longtime organizer of poetry events in Melbourne. *Beautiful Veins*.

Fax to Washington

I miss you my second cup of pot-strength Lipton's
 too. Two toasts three newspapers two *New York*
Reviews Britannica in this Land of Oz all miss you
 on your encyclopaedic journey to Washington and New York.
 You could paint the White House with my blues. Your hair-
 pin on the pillow slept with me all night. My capricious
 squamous cells tell me life is precious and inestimable.
 When you're away I'm quite removed. I'm that odd Picasso
 cube in that burning Dali landscape in that Andy Warhol
 movie. The one we mused. Let me get my fax straight.
 Some of this is quite untrue. Not the hair-pin not the
 blues. Come back soon girl on my silver screen.

MARGARET SCOTT

b 1934 England; arrived in Australia in 1959. Formerly a teacher of literature at the university of Tasmania, she lives in the state's south-east. Changing Countries.

At the orchardist's house

Digging alone in the dip where the sea
lies licking its paws on the long threshold,
I'm jarred again and again by the strike of spade
on metal, glass and bone, old planks and four-by-twos,
on stones which had some purpose in the past.
Steps? Paths? Foundations?

Someone thinks there might have been a fish pond.
Each spadeful's spiked with bits of things
discarded, lost, or borne down as they stood
by the trickle of roots, the arrogant gush of grasses.
Pill-bottle, earring, nails from a fallen fence –
they signify only presence, the edges of lives,
dust, flung up by a daily stir and rush,
that's settled around the blank print of a hand.
No texture, nothing to show what filled
these people's souls from pole to pole,
only the unregarded grown insolent or things
that have lost their point, like out-dated jokes.
The wind gets up. The wide bay, barred
indigo and slate, is pricked with white as though,
far out, thousands of birds were feeding on
something spilled, and through the waist-high
grass, bounding and gliding, shadowy wolves
come down on this little clearing.

Feast

The smoke of the barbecue drifts up
like sand rising and swaying in a clear pool.
The women with cool arms and light clothes –
sky blue, white, pink and wattle yellow
move round the table, touching forks and plates,
checking the bowls of radishes and lettuce,
tomatoes speckled with basil, avocados sliced in a creamy fan.
One sets down a basket of brown rolls,
another a dish of fruit – oranges, sharp green apples,
bananas and nectarines with cheeks like the petals of lolling crimson roses.
The boughs overhead are all ladders and props
with the sheen of young flesh.
The sun reaches down to stroke them through latticed wells,
through glistening leaves bunched in the long branches like swarming bees.

When the fish are ready, grilled from silver to bronze,
some peeling to show the white flakes under the skin,
they're piled on a blue plate with lemons and parsley.
The men open the wine,
ruby and topaz light dancing every which way,
the children come running, chattering over the grass,
and everyone sits down in the speckled shade,
their hands and laughter weaving a bright net
like sun through water.

FAY ZWICKY

b 1933 Melbourne, and grew up there. She was a concert pianist until 1963. After moving to Perth in 1960, she taught literature at the university of WA from 1961 to 1987. The Gatekeeper's Wife.

Losing Track

Jerusalem in January.
A winter morning and my first time round.
Pink air, dark pines, stone upon stone.

The silent driver smokes: I watch
the climbing spiral of his breath as the van
circles steeply curving bends, the pine-soft hills

rising into timeless lightness:
a cold clear wonder of a day in Zion.
Zion! The very sound sets up a tranquil distance

from the self, an empty rounded space.
The eye yearns outward into history,
light rising on apocalyptic valleys, domes,

aspiring blurry harmonies of old and new.
Too tired to think, I'm watching and forgetting,
wondering how long can human memory stand

an absence trapped in strange geography.
The longing to return the dead to life dies
down at night, surges in early morning.

I'm losing track of your face in sleep, don't
know where you are, can't stop the clamoring flood
of other dead from breaking through.

Last night's dream had me struggling at a truckies' diner
buying food for you in Amsterdam, I think. Total strangers
everywhere; the usual tongueless bind, not knowing

where to take it, where you were. Others pushed and begged but I was firm. For him, I told them. It's for him. He needs it most. *We need it more,*

they shouted, grinning lipless over starving sockets. Somewhere out there is a land, forgotten, promised. No, neither promised nor forgotten but hovering

like a half-remembered voice in eerie stillness between dream and waking. This is the place, this the breaking country, the shattered valleys of Zion,

the place it has to be, knowing all the while it's not the place. My body doesn't know where it now belongs, not knowing where you are.

My memories are refugees who've fled beloved homelands past return, terms never finalized, revolvers belted ready, watchful, imagining annihilation.

Let's call it yet another confrontation with the past in different air – not sacred, not profane, but different. You might say getting close to God without God.

Wiping the Canvas

As if we started like a gasp in the heart of an unseen artist moving supple between oil and pen. No permission asked, none granted. A stroke here, dash there, symptoms surging into being; the long vague wash of indeterminate blue, shouting blasts of red and ochre.

Half asleep, we catch creation's rustle hum and bang, afraid to answer to our likeness. A daily fear, mind and breath out of gear in buzzing air. We gasp before the process of our own creation.

Not allowed to peer too close, some cheat, complain about the haze, the blur, the thickness of the paint, the lack of focus. A quick glance here, a wink, no questions, please. We're entertaining stillness.

Suddenly the canvas has been wiped, the brush strokes stop and start again, we think we've seen ourselves in innocence absolved, obscure.

We try to bolster confirmation from indifferent strollers, learn the meaning of a work in progress from the hints: a casual frivolous dig, the sympathetic twitch, blurt of rage, censorious whine, indulgent purr are all we have to give us definition. How we rate, unseen, unlive, hang on such flimsy stills.

Do, but also seem, say the sages. What's invisible is useless.

Reason's demeaned that doesn't wear a reasonable face. The image that you think you are, the face that's happening right here, stops short of what's projected on that bare wall over and over and over and over

and
O

JENNIFER STRAUSS

b 1933 Melbourne, where she lives. From 1964 until her recent retirement she taught literature at Monash university. Tierra del Fuego: New and Selected Poems.

Tierra del Fuego

Love is the territory of fire.

Sea-travellers,
becalmed by indifference
or driven past
on winds of ambitious trade
or turbulence from the icy south,
have glimpsed through misty clouds
a flicker, a glow,
a lightning flash.

See, says one,
the land where firewalkers go
passion-tranced,
dancing unscathed through flames

until the faltering moment
(mistrust, boredom)
wakes them –
to scream, clutching charred soles.

No, no, says another, those
are the fires of home,
beacons to draw the wayfarer
havenward
to a safe landfall,
a final discovery –
that love is whatever
survives sex.

There was time for all that
when travellers went by ship,
lovers by metaphor.
Leaving you behind,
not certain
whether you'll follow,
when the plane stops
at your continent's most remote tip
I write a postcard:

*Didn't expect to be here:
believe we're only re-fuelling,
but it's cold and dark
when all I'm wanting
is one clear view
of Tierra del Fuego.*

Living in English

Living in English seemed natural as breathing,
even when schooled to languages
where breath

 must move in different ways
to pass the necessary impedimenta
transforming it to speech.

(How safe the Latinate abstraction
Anglo-Saxon *tongue*,
teeth, lips – any of these
might conjure up the phantom of your body
that merely tolerates such names.)

Eighteen years it took
to recognise the English poetry I loved
was an imperfect medium

for the natural air I breathed;
years more of labouring
towards reconciliation.

Knowing this, how could I dream so stubbornly,
so long, there'd be no reckoning,
no day

 when breath that mingled –
 wild or quiet –
 so sweetly in the dark

would summon lovers back
to the waking glare
of separate languages;
when what had joined us would put asunder.

BRUCE DAWE

b 1930 Geelong. He served in the RAAF 1959–68, and from 1972 until recently taught literature in Toowoomba at what is now the university of Southern Queensland. Sometimes Gladness (5th edn).

Till Debt Do Us Part . . .

Firstly, in line with your avowed preference for
a booming economy at all costs,
 you run yourself heavily into debt with someone
 who has megabucks to spare,
then when you are fresh out of real estate
of any sort left to sell
 you start flogging off (as though there were no end of it)
 the very air,
and when your new-found friends
(whom you may have formerly secretly despised)
 have your whole nation
 considerably short of breath,
you won't be surprised if, some sunny day,
you're cordially invited
(albeit at rather short notice)
 to be present at your death,
and whether the ceremony is conducted at
a sub-tropical golf-course
 or at some luxurious five-star
 northern beach-front hotel
or at a board-room or two
 in some other country where they never even
got around to learning to pronounce
 your last name very well

will matter less than bub-kiss because
 (let's face it) you just weren't
 very big potatoes to them
 even to begin with
 – being neither very strong nor very bright
 nor the sort of culturally unified
 group-oriented folk such perceptive people
 would ever seriously contemplate being kin with . . .

A Park in the Balkans

Aerial photographs have revealed newly bulldozed areas believed to be the massacre site of some 6000 Muslim males taken away after the fall of Srebrenica. The question of their fate has not significantly impeded the 'search for peace' in Bosnia.

A policy was walking in a park,
 Three governments went jogging slowly by:
 One turned and made a rather blurred remark,
 The other two said nothing but looked sly.

A speech was feeding pigeons on the lawn,
 Crumbling moral precepts in one hand.
 A speaker (circling patiently since dawn)
 Still sought official clearances to land.

Leaf conferred with leaf on every tree
 – None sought the honour of being first to fall,
 The natural chlorophyll of sophistry
 Worked its chemistry in the veins of all . . .

Park visitors at noon were the usual crowd:
 Some threats, a solemn warning, and a plea.
 History passed over them like a cloud
 (A dream of empire winced rheumatically).

An embargo sat blinking in the sun.
 The sky was beret-blue and impotent.
 Harsh resolutions flew off, one by one,
 And most of them were most sincerely meant.

All through that long, long summer afternoon
 Traumas lay like lovers on the grass.
 A guilty silence deepened; all too soon
 What no one could prevent had come to pass . . .

Intersection

Not those days when some good obvious news
 either lands with a thud on consciousness' front-porch,
 or is to be found later still in its plastic
 wrapper trapped in the branches of the cotoneaster
 – no, not those days surprise, but rather
 the other kind that happen when you're strolling
 in some otherwise eminently forgettable environment
 (like, say, Clifford Gardens or Village Fair,
 where muzak tinkles as improbably as in
 a fairy garden or from an icecream van),

suddenly
 you find yourself for no good reason in the universe
 suffused with an absurd happiness
 as though great gates swung open somewhere
 and let in what could only be
 where there are no limits to possibility
 – so that you could walk right back into that shoe-store
 and get the Comfy-Fitz smile to go with the new shoes
 and the check-out girl at Franklins
 would (along with the groceries
 and the shop-a-docket advertisement
 FOR ONE FREE RINSE WITH EVERY PERM)
 pop into your biodegradable plastic bag
 the intriguing paperback story of her life so far . . .
 And it's like being halfway across an empty street
 with the lights on WALK
 when *whoomfff* you're just struck down
 by this totally silent and immensely *soft* truck
 which leaves you blue with invisible bruises,
 every one a comfort and a joy

You and Sarajevo

for Gloria

Hearing the sound of your breathing as you sleep,
 with the dog at your feet, his head resting
 on a shoe, and the clock's ticking
 like water dripping in a sink
 – I know that, even if reincarnation were a fact,
 given the inherent cruelty of the world
 where beautiful things and people
 are blasted apart all the day long,
 I would never want to come back, knowing
 I could never be this lucky twice . . .

KEN TAYLOR

b 1930 Ballarat. He has worked as a radio producer, and as a maker of television documentaries on Australian natural history. He lives in central Victoria. Africa.

Cinema Point

I

There's drift and force
in affection and
small slides start
in these big
blind
blue gum
corners,
a hundred metres above
shoreline shells, limpets,
anemone rock pools and
old inter-tidal engine blocks
wedged in rock –
relics of cars
once imbalanced,
once centrifugal
as unrequited
love.

II

Mountains slide on a turn
of a star-fractured sea,
an abalone shell of opalescent
purples, pinks and
greens,
a red cusp of waves
beneath a sky from Chile,
Tierra del Fuego,
over-arching love
and tears
from Neruda,
his memory
of that brief time we
walk the world;
without wonder,
without distance.

Epithalamium

All I give you this day
comes apart in my hands
and breaks,
as this wave breaks
on hidden slopes of sand
and stone
and spreads in skeins of foam
to be lost forever.

But I shall be constant
as the waves
and this gift of my heart
will form and form again beside you
and say
as the surf says to the shore:
I make you,
you make me.
It will always be thus.

PETER PORTER

b 1929 Brisbane. Living in London from 1951, he worked in advertising and later as a freelance writer. He has been visiting Australia regularly since a first return trip in 1974. Collected Poems.

A Lament

In valleys where winds meet,
in silences of chambers
untouched by the sun,
in tufa uplands and long strata
of the vanished waters,
we will find them –
our salted ancestors
in households still outflanked
by cat and ibis mummies,
the losing parts of ghostliness
not magicked now by moon or stars –
their eyes would sweep forever
super sydera, but that they have no eyes
nor ears, but only a long nothingness
imagined by the gods.

In dreams they visit us
but it is our lives which are
their prison. They made their tombs
and temples to invigilate our thoughts

and their dementia is our memory.
 Though such messages are fading from us
 a chemical exchange goes on –
 a dynasty of prayers becomes a waterfall,
 a warrior's resting place the chair
 of some sand-flooded tractor.

When all the lives which ever were or ever will be
 are trimmed like stone and share
 stone's magical inertness
 winds will still lament the strangeness
 which was life and silence look to find
 its birthplace in an allegoric music.
 And the winds say
 What did you do in the war, Daddy?
 and the reply, I kept my gas mask on.
 Nothing is straightforward
 and the shortest distance between two points
 may be the way to death,
 and gravity is bounced about the rocks
 by private zephyrs. The only sound now
 is a lift ascending to the floors
 of non-existence. They wait there for us,
 our friends and lovers recognizable
 as we shall be by their perfect missingness.

John Ford Answers T.S. Eliot

You knew I was a lawyer, why be surprised
 by my distinctive style? Overall, my plays
 aren't centred, but what I know of men
 tells me centres will form only when
 storms erupt to make them. My poetry
 is what a lawyer might describe as small
 instances growing great occasionally
 (that is on sporadic and ingenious
 occasions): for this I listened to the manner
 men and women, tiring of the means they use
 to hide their thoughts or to mislead
 their interlocutors, may suddenly,
 as philosophers will do, rush into compact
 forms of language not malleable
 as dialogue – their passions striking them
 without advertisement or strategy,
 they loop around them such forensic toils
 as make pleached gardens out of parkland.
 The paradox is poetry, a sort of
 versified cascade not requiring metaphor

but like a fountain in a blindfold villa
 unmistakably an image of the heart.

Why, three hundred years ahead of me,
 you should commend me for belief in love
 eludes me. What is there else to write of?
 You with the urgings of an impotence
 appropriate to your short-breathed age will put
 your own adopted crinkle-crankle doubt
 into the sort of poetry which won't
 assimilate mankind – instead pathetic
 Nature and the ramblings of a rhetor God
 are called to make your language beautiful.
 You are a Psalmist doing without the smell
 of burning flesh. Good and evil mixed, you say,
 is not the way to justify a knack
 with cadencing, and further, I make occasion
 fill the cast-list. And here you're wrong
 since you resort so often to that arid
 concept 'character'. Brutish husbands, vengeful lovers
 are simply steeds the words can ride – if every
 speaker were the same at each intrusion
 on a sentence, then personae might make character –
 instead, I write the only poetry
 the broken heart has known – not sympathy
 for this or that distracted humanoid
 but palaces and obelisks and tombs
 of diction, and I set before you shapes
 with names and callings, sub-contract them to
 a place of some malignity and then
 I watch. As they come into focus, syntax
 stirs and seeks its opportunity:
 for this the human race was made, to build
 its only lasting Babel, rusticate
 the puffed-up feelings and the blemishes
 of tragic pity. I have the instrument
 to deal with ruined love – to outlast thought
 by being before thought what it would say.

Basta Sanguie

In the National Gallery of Victoria
 Is a nineteenth-century genre painting
 Showing a ewe on guard beside the body
 Of her dead lamb while all around her sin-
 black crows stand silent in the snow. Each time
 I pass the picture I find I shudder twice –
 Once because good taste is now endemic

And I cannot let the sentimental go
 Unsneered at – I have gone to the trouble of
 Acquiring words like 'genre' and will call
 Them to my aid – but secondly I know
 I've been that ewe and soon will be that lamb,
 That there's no way to love mankind but on
 The improvised coordinates of death,
 Death which rules the snow, the crows, the sheep,
 The painter and the drifting connoisseur.

Enough of blood, but Abraham's raised knife
 Is seldom halted and any place for God
 (Even if he didn't give the orders)
 Will be outside the frame. A melody
 Can gong the executioner's axe awake,
 A painting take away our appetite
 For lunch, and mother-love still walk all night
 To lull a baby quiet. Whatever gathers
 Overleaf is murderous: we move
 On through the gallery praising Art which keeps
 The types of horror constant so that we
 May go about our business and forget.

Both Ends Against the Middle

Deep inside the Imperial War Museum
 Where children are surprised by undreamt dreams
 Destruction's most impartial theorem,
 The Rolls-Royce Merlin Aircraft Engine, gleams.

It seems just lowered by Donatello's tackle:
 He would have known why copper pipes entwine
 So murderous a tabernacle
 And where control and fate might share a line.

Would we be right to look for innocence
 Or guess that need to kill has shaped such grace?
 Here uncompanionable Science
 Is linked to everything that is the case.

In similar mode the sculptor's brilliant carving
 Regains in bronze a living massacre.
 Death eats, the vivid world is starving,
 Each holocaust become a shepherd's star.

The Spitfire's engine's once kinetic fury
 And Donatello's layered appetite
 Are Humanism's judge and jury,
 The Alpha and Omega of delight.

R.A. SIMPSON

b 1929 Melbourne, where he lives. He taught art and literature in schools and at tertiary level from 1968 to 1987, and worked as a poetry editor. The Midday Clock.

Revisiting

The gully deep and flush with pebbles:
 a bellbird making metal of the air;
 nearby a ruin, nothing more.

I ride my bike to the door
 and find
 it open: 'home is where the heart is'.

I've kept a cosy image
 of my childhood games here,
 the sunlight and the afternoons.

People I might blame are dead
 and so I leave.
 The foliage disappears in dusk.

While walking my bike over the rock
 I look at slopes
 grown long and obdurate.

From a crest
 a full moon tides me back
 into my world.

Familiars

Idle on the bridge
 while her shadow in the water
 could be anybody's
 she watches
 familiar phantoms
 not far off
 that slide to the surface
 in a long slow current
 rising from her childhood
 till she stares at her mother
 floating like Ophelia

Just a child once more
 she wants an answer
 as her father looks away

BRUCE BEAVER

b 1928 Manly, where he lives. He has worked as a farmer, surveyor's assistant, radio programmer and, eventually, freelance journalist. In 1958–62 he lived in New Zealand. Poets and Others.

A Nest of Nonnets

to Gwen Harwood

In wonderment I think of you and write
about the way you manumit the night
and day of the body-mind into its bright
estate of being, lovely as a long
glissando down the nebulae of song
and the larger music's sense of right and wrong
to that which is beyond them, absolute
as aeons, or the spheres that constitute
the mystery of music fallen mute.

You told me when we met for the first of times
I was your alter ego, how the chimes
of my strange harmonies and your true rhymes
became atonally a take and give
within the concert. How the listeners live
is up to them. All we can do is sieve
our gold and dross and hope for something like
the better, if not quite the best. To strike
a lode, to pan it out, and then to hike.

We met across the festivals. Never enough
for me. I would have liked to have woven stuff
that dreams are made on, subtle, tender/tough,
to make you laugh in company and smile
in secret with me in the makar's style
of writing, the true industry of guile.
Yet guilelessly the wish to give still thrives,
to sympathise still permeates our lives –
and to control always our verbal knives.

All that remains to say is you and I
will reunite and carefully retie
the knot of words. We'll tell the truth and lie
a little in the name of love and then
take brod und wein with Hölderlin, meet men
like Lenz and girls like Freddy once again,
go on together separately between
the sun's blast furnace and the moon's demesne
of frozen dust, this monarch and that queen

of fools, two poets in a later age
when journalistic posturing and the rage
of the crapulous ring the till and turn the page.
What's anger worth when pleasure at the sweetest
of gifts makes every bargaining completest
and finally convinces us the neatest
talent is the truest. Take and keep
this latest celebration of my deep
sense of your most unique worth. At time's neap

come humour me and tell me of your youth,
of how males were inventive if uncouth
and save till last for me the truths in truth.
Our gods were music and philosophy.
Poetry was our real reality.
The rest is silence, physicality –
itself dumb talk enough, the brilliant braille
of our blind seeing, every deaf man's tale,
and a dead woman's hearing through the gale.

Chart for me once again the fugal wills
of J.S. and C.P.E. in lucent spills
of words until my recusant spirit thrills.
I'll toast you and your glowing art once more
then leave you with your loves beside the shore,
about you still the magic of the lore.
There is your place of sanctuary with friends,
the beauty of the harmony that ends
irresolutions, and with silence blends.

From Anima**XIII**

We lived on the Quadrant behind Government House
in what had been a doctor's dispensary,
one room with huge windows looking out
on harbour views and the ubiquitous cranes
over a run-wild garden full of feral
cats who used to climb and fight in trees,
falling shrieking to the earth as some
unused footage in a Tarzan film.
We watched them fascinatedly go about
their awesome lives: kitchens paraded before
a hulking tom reclining on the asphalt
above the garden's rim, grabbing and raping
a hapless infant tabby as a matter of course.

We wondered at its applicability
to the human condition, gave it up and settled
for a wide view of the harbour and the cranes.
Then I was trying to construct a partial
aesthetic based on Stevens' poetry,
his ideas of Ideas of Order,
of how to write a poem not about
poems but the way a building's front
meant so much to the image of the street,
the street to the vaguely ambiguous landscape,
the landscape to the country and the world
just like the motto children put in the front
of school exercise books. I wrote a dozen
poems. You were encouragement personified.
The impulse departed and a lack remained
not big enough to make me unconscious of
the quality of life you'd brought to me.
In our strange room top-heavy with views we celebrated
all we had found and lost and found again.
Then back to the remaining months of the year
and my first, slimmest of volumes, sky-blue covered
with a welcoming acclamation from a Sydney
critic, so long ago 'the sense faints picturing them'.
We came back to Sydney in a blaze of summer
heat one half a life and more ago.

*was it lives or moments had kept us apart
one seemed the other in those well-nigh impossible
times of times it always came together
out of spaces apart in times of unbeing alone
the very memory of each or most
of our meetings spins my head like a
flipped coin fool's gold caught from the air
tossed between strangers always on the verge
of intimacy of really meeting this once at last
I'll bide our times together in dream
of now and here waking again together*

DOROTHY HEWETT

b 1923 Perth; grew up on a farm in WA. A playwright and poet, she lived in Sydney and Perth, taught at the university of WA, and now lives in the Blue Mountains. Halfway up the Mountain.

The Runner

I never ran as fast as I do now
down the white tracks through the scrub
dazzled with cabbage moths
on the way to the sea.

I never ran as fast as I do now
down the long wet beaches
where the tide hardens the sand.

I can run as fast
as a runaway horse
dodging the low branches
the foam from its jaws
splashing its rough breast.

All this running I do
in my bed under the window
while a chained dog howls
on the other side of the cutting.

Am I running to some destination
or just for the memory of it?

I think of my son at 42
(believing he has the body of a 20 year old)
he runs 15 miles down the straight chalk roads
of the island springs a muscle
and lies on the verge for hours.

We are all puzzled by age
how quickly it comes on
until moonstruck under a window
with swollen knees we are running away.

The Big Row

In the garden there was a cubbyhouse made of kisses
but after The Big Row
I sat on the home-made swing
& couldn't put it together again

all because I couldn't subtract 3 from 5
 my grandfather fought my father
 in the kitchen under the gas mantle
 shrivelling up & turning black
 with my mother pulling at their shirtsleeves
 my grandmother screaming twisting
 her tight wedding ring round & round on her finger

you wicked girl! my mother said
now we'll have to leave the farm

& I saw the black snake uncoiling from under the verandah
 searching the garden paths
 its flat head turning from side to side.

The Safe House

I will sit under the peach tree
 reading in the drone of summer
 The peaches will drop bump in the grass
 and the ants will swarm for their sweetness

in the bright light from the kitchen window
 my grandmother sews her thimble flashes
 her little feet crossed as she bites off the thread

my grandfather potters and rakes out in the garden
 rolling his Havelock Ready Rubbed through his fingers
 his moustache ends tickle my cheeks
 he will love me forever.

I will lie in bed stretching my toes
 for the warm brick covered in flannel
 listening to the blind bumping
 in the wind off the river
 smell the old people in their iron bedstead
 at the far end of the sleepout.

I will run out into the moonlit garden
 shivering in my chaste white nightgown
 to metamorphose into a silver wattle
 I will sprout leaves and branches
 the wind will blow through me
 I will be forever as virginal as this.

The Brothers

Those ghostly brothers that I never had
 larger than life stalking the countryside
 their spittle darkening the dust
 ungainly men who never married
 clodhopping through barbed fences
 looping furrows their shorn ewes
 bleating in a ring of crows
 the film of ice cracks on the handbasin
 the dough rises in a drone of flies.

I meet them in the paddocks in the evening
 standing like fence posts in a line of sorrow
 they never speak but weather in the glow
 a band of light edging the earth's curve.

JACOB G. ROSENBERG

b 1922 Lodz, Poland. A Holocaust survivor whose family perished in Auschwitz, he came to Melbourne in 1948. Formerly a writer in Yiddish, he now works only in English. Behind the Moon.

Mother

Mother, your name lives on within my every verse –
 What a shabby substitute for life!
 I didn't have the luck to walk behind your hearse,
 They sent you up to Him on the crematorium smoke.

I still can picture it: immaculate in black,
 His white-gloved hand selecting your very last walk.
 They made good use of everything you had,
 Your pitch-black hair, your teeth, your thin cotton frock,
 And with your ash the local swine were fed –
 While silence watched, complicit as a rock.

At midnight, naked on the frozen concrete floor,
 I cursed their world, their evil gods I cursed;
 And through a crevice in the wooden barrack door,
 I cursed the yellow moon, God's acquiescent whore.

Wedding Anniversary

Winter, where the darkness had outdone dark
 And the snow hid under a brilliant coat of frost,
 Where the empty tables were awash with want
 And we fought for a day of life when all was lost.

Where language died for very fear of words
 And panic stuttered in the hungry mouths of bards,
 Where we knew the sense of a poet's sardonic verse:
 'Death is written into our wedding cards.'

A room, a family still intact, miraculously;
 On the table two candles, a cake baked from chaff,
 And potato peels for dessert – what luxury!
 Is this a dream or another cheap conjuror's bluff?
 Father reads out his writ of love, as he does each year.
 Death interrupts: 'Hurry up. It's cold in here.'

I Remember

The roof on top of our house,
 And the house with no roof at all,
 The song of sparks from our chimney,
 And the chimney without a soul.

The light in my mother's window,
 The window without a light,
 The foreboding sky at daybreak,
 The shimmer of snow in the night.

How strong was hope against hope;
 Our visions of freshly baked bread,
 Our past, and the dream of our future
 Vanquished the fear of death.

The illusion, in a world without choice,
 Of a God, who could hear your voice.

Frumetl

At the outbreak of war he took off
 For the land where living was a breeze,
 Where work was a holiday of brotherhood
 Budding on the proletarian trees.

He left behind an infant child, and a wife
 Who never stopped loving him.
 'Frumetl, your father is a freedom knight,
 She would say. 'Upon his valiant horse
 He carries the torch of human light –
 And for you, an eternal rose.'

In the dark, in her grandmother's arms,
 Frumetl prayed to God in His holy place.
 And as the gas seeped into her nose,
 She saw her father's face.

Melbourne

1948

I didn't have to learn to love that city,
 It was an instantaneous love affair;
 Although I didn't know what men were saying,
 I knew the sound of freedom and didn't care.

I'd never had experience of such freedom:
 A man could go about his business, humble or vain,
 Get up in the morning of his own volition,
 Feel no fear in his heart when boarding a train . . .

One day, in June, I met a friendly jester.
 'Whether it's autumn, winter, summer or spring
 Is hard to say here – and there's no white Sylvester!
 To understand this you must become discreeter:
 Winter you recognize by the rain and wind,
 Summer, when you're allowed to light the heater.'

Vienna

for Phillip Adams

How *gemütlich* flows the life of Vienna,
 Haven to Europe's sharpest academics,
 Brilliant composers, poets, novelists, linguists,
 All embroiled in their *Weltschmerz* polemics.

Freud talks incessantly of our nightmares,
 Wittgenstein of knowledge and the word,
 Zweig dreams of an eternal human spring,
 Searching the sky for a sign of Noah's bird.

Werfel and Koestler, Einstein and Schoenberg –
 So many intellects, so many sages,
 Knights of wisdom at the dusk of dawn
 Immersed in their writings, rustling their pages.
 While Adolf screams, *Just wait – I'll soon delouse,*
Repaint and repaper Europe's brothel-house!

DIMITRIS TSALOUMAS

b 1921 Leros, Greece; arrived in Melbourne in 1952 and became a schoolteacher. A poet in both Greek and English, he divides his time between Melbourne and Leros. New and Selected Poems.

From Rhapsodic Meditation on the Melbourne Suburb of St Kilda*2 The House*

It's after six. Back from the pub
the landlord, tall and gruff
and medal-proud on Anzac Days,
sits in the porch drunk royally.
He nods with sentiment to all
his boarding Dagos as they come in
from work. The times were hard,
the house, decaying in stucco,
was where that tower stands.

They sat in coffee shops, talking
till words grew darker with night.
Many saw women or buildings rising
from their steaming cups. Sometimes
it was the turning belly of a girl,
and they'd steady the wobbly table
and clear the top. Many witnessed
such miracles. On summer nights
they'd sleep-walk, and from the pier
gaze long at the far-lighted ships.

3 The Calabrian

The Esplanade was glistening wet
that night, when the heartless pimp
snatched Franco's fiver
and drove off with his bitch, mocking,
leaving him stunned in the drizzle.

He burst into the sordid kitchen
demanding the jagged knife. He knew
where it was but thought he'd ask.
Da knive, he frothed, I musta cut
dis troat, da fucken puttana.
Rat-like, his face was a blade
of passion. Me Calabrese, he yelled,
naw jawkase. I bin wi' da cousin,
he biic wi' da boys in America.
You Grik. You understand.

Yes, I do. Your path was strewn
with flint and broken bottles
and mine had only thorns, and those
with cousins big with the boys
in America have obligations sterner
than I could carry. You were
complete, old friend, complete,
cut from Calabrian stone
hard to the touch of elegy or song.

The Rain

A wind rose early in the morning
and went level and taut through the pines
till noon. Then it brought livid cloud
and shreds of rushing sky. Towards dusk
the birds were blown about like rags.
The rain began later, sudden with thunder.
The lights went off.

And so it was
that the mains of heaven, by candlelight
and slow turns, opened to their full extent
and poured down on us a cataclysm
for long hours as we lay cowering,
fearing to leave our bed, and made love
more bitter than before. Whine and grunt
mingled with far tumbling noises, vague
lowing of cattle and shrill, torn calls
whipped by the wind against the panes
that bent under the pressure inwards
like liquid glass, screening monstrosities
that seldom leave the pages of books:
octopus-shaped faces, pregnant and serpent-
handed bodies and knots of creatures
streaked with rain and vanishing to come
again reshaped, recoloured in the dimness
of the diminished candle.

Groping for words
in the darkened room we prayed for sleep
when I heard a tattered, far cock's crow
borne on the crest of a squall. I spoke loud
then, I said listen, the day's at hand.
I've had enough of this, I'm moving back
to the harbour. Then I heard her voice,
slow and hoarse. The bird, she said,
must have misjudged its timing.

This rain's for ever. Then she fell silent.
 But after a space her voice came again,
 now stiff with thorns. Please make no plans
 in the dark, she said. Your harbour's not
 on any map. And it was indeed further along
 the night, as I lay pondering her words,
 that the bird's call, sure-footed now,
 came through the dying storm and dawn,
 lead-fingered dawn, crept up the ashen sky.
 We slept.

Till suddenly the sun
 reached the dividing cloud and crashed
 bright cymbals of alarm. Summoned,
 I sprang to the window and there witnessed
 the devastation. The valley rolled
 like a yellow river down to the shore
 where no roof showed, no belfry nor mast
 above the mud that spread out to sea
 like an atlas region shaded for disaster.
 I shall make some coffee, she said, prepare
 the shopping list. But late that evening,
 after the dinner and the wine and through
 the smoke from chewed-on cigars I thought
 I glimpsed the beacon at the Head, the ship
 at its anchorage and the lighted wharves
 under a sky that looked like rain.

ROSEMARY DOBSON

b 1920 Sydney. She worked there as a book editor, and after a period in London moved to Canberra in 1972. She has also written art criticism, Untold Lives & Later Poems.

The Birdcatchers, Norfolk

England

At dawn in a cabin built upon the sands
 We dreamed and woke and pushing back the pane
 Saw only the waste of sand, sand-dunes and grass
 And in the first light, wind, gently and silently
 Blowing the grass one way.

Behind our backs we heard the wild North Sea
 Beat on the shingles, and its sullen cry
 Spoke of the gods, of wrath, and odysseys,
 Of enterprises doomed upon the flood
 And drowned men washed to shore.

The high dunes kept these from us and we looked
 Across the gentler slopes to where the straits
 In grey and silver fended off the world;
 So lightly to the mainland were we moored
 In all that waste of sea.

And then at sunrise going out to dip,
 Like any hermit, water from the well,
 Breathing deep lungfuls of the salty air
 And filling sight with arching empty sky
 We watched the invaders from the other shore.

On the first tide of morning disembarked,
 Crowning the sandhills, monolithic, squat,
 In waders, heavy coats, and anoraks,
 Slung with the weapons for their work, they took
 Dominion of our dunes.

And all that day at coming and going forth
 We saw them stand, each on his separate mound,
 As tense as archers poised before the kill,
 Scanning the sky, the sand, the twists of grass,
 Mute, motionless, alone.

Who knows what sights were added to their score –
 What nestings, shallow flights, and dipping wings
 Bespoke the shorthand language of their joy.
 Their world was bounded in the narrowing glass
 Held fiercely to the eye.

At dusk they vanished. So Saint Somebody
 Praying before his threshold in the gloom
 Might once have watched the mute invaders go –
 Swamp men or mountain men from unknown lands
 Slipping away in darkness on the tide.

A Thought from George Herbert

I journey unencumbered
 Having let fall behind me
 Many golden apples,

These not to delay
 Importunate suitors
 But simply dispensed with.

Like good George Herbert's
My needs are scanty:
Near-at-hand suffices,

A broom, chair, or box –
These meet as truly
In his rhymes as roses.

From several splendours
I move to bareness
A white-washed room

With a window telling
Of starlight, darkness
And pre-dawn pallor

And a white holland blind
To draw half down on
The full blaze of sunlight.

The News and Weather

I smoothed the pelt of the hills with my long looking
And the hills rose up and stretched in the early light.
In the home paddocks, along the river-flats
Black cattle doubled their height with morning shadow.

I heard the currawongs' cry as they swooped above me
The news they told was *You can't change the weather*
And who would want to, walking out very early
With pink and white galahs tumbling for grass-seeds.

I picked a fig from the laden tree in the garden
And heard a voice that spoke in a tongue of flame
From the fiery sun behind the trembling tree-top:
You are lucky to be alive in these terrible times.

I peeled back the green of the fig breaking into its centre
Galah-coloured, pink and grey its thousand flowerlets,
And ate of the fruit of the garden and understood
The voice that seemed to flash in the air above.

The message must be received, taken into one's being
As knowledge is taken, biting on apple or fig –
Terrible times in the world that will not be changed –
And I walking out on such a morning early.

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John Leonard was born in 1940 in Melbourne, where he grew up. He has lived in Ontario, London, Melbourne and, from 1988 to 2000, the rainforest of Far North Queensland. Highly respected as an anthologist, he has edited *Contemporary Australian Poetry* (1990), *Australian Verse: An Oxford Anthology* (1998), and the best-selling *Seven Centuries of Poetry in English* (now in its fourth edition). He taught literature at Monash and James Cook universities, and has been an adviser and editor to many Australian poets.

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