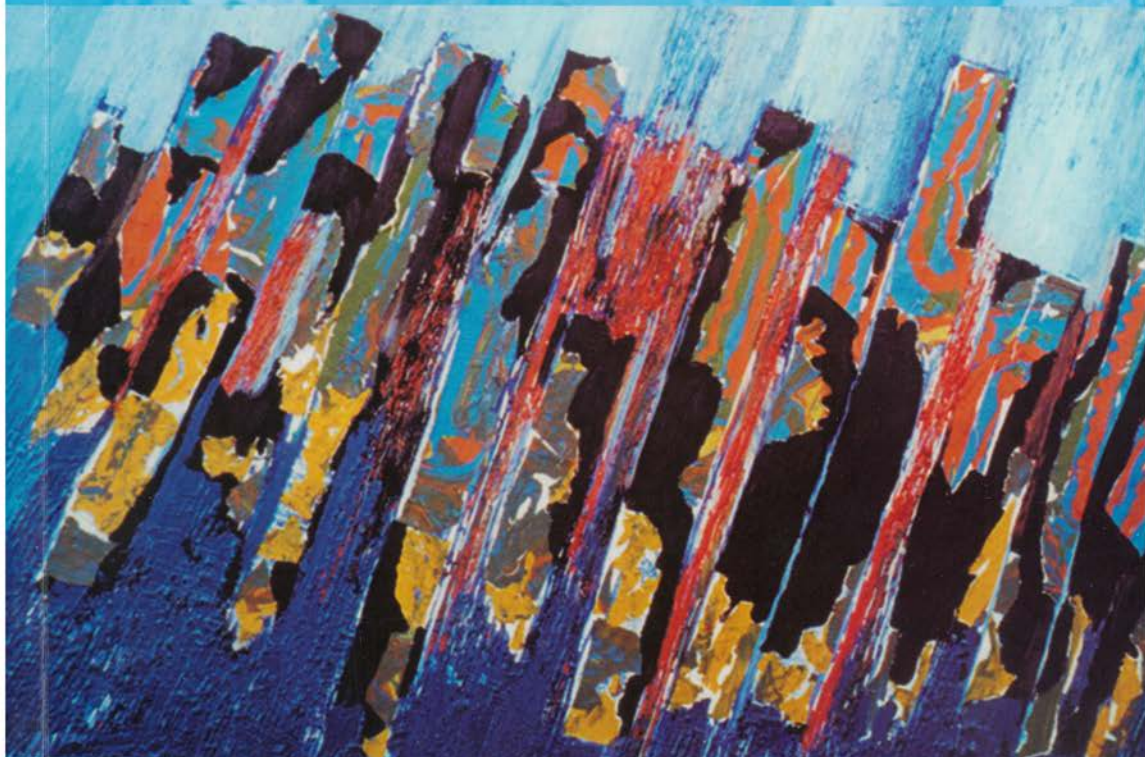


New Music

AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN POETRY



Edited by JOHN LEONARD

NEW MUSIC

*An Anthology of Contemporary
Australian Poetry*

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Five Islands Press

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INTRODUCTION

Here is a view across the work of 96 Australian poets. All of it is recent, spanning the period from 1990 to 2000 with a bias to the final years of that decade. Readers will find many poets who are new in the period, and just as many who are not. I have aimed at a lively and broad-ranging account of how the art is developing at the present time.

A clear, swift, generational change has come about very recently. There is no cult of youth about it, but poets from their twenties to their early forties (or so) now write with a strong awareness of each other's published work, and mostly organize the public readings. The poetry of this generation is abundant in imagination, craft and confidence. It seems timely to display it right now, when poetry has become almost invisible in the weekend review pages and the mainstream publishers' lists.

The majority of new poets can be found early in the book, for the simple reason that the ordering is from youngest to oldest – born sixty years apart. In fact, the first half contains only four poets who appeared in my 1990 anthology, *Contemporary Australian Poetry*. That said, it's revealing of the times that some of the new poets are close to fifty or older, including the third-oldest here – sufficient in number to take the contours of the book's second half in interesting directions.

An anthology of contemporary work is a sorting on the run. Hence a survey such as this should be as representative as it has room to be, but have no tickets on being canonical. There are and will be other anthologies which take a different snapshot of the period. I have favoured poetry that has a rich music of syllable and rhythm; this, as it happens, fits in with how most contemporary poets wish to have their poetry considered. There are poems here in which a (strict or loose) pentameter is worked with subtlety, but none that hit the beats monotonously. Similarly with free verse: the poems selected, whether lucid or elliptical, attend to the infinite ways a free-verse line may project itself as a line – including the one long paragraph line of a prose poem. Absent is the kind of poem that merely adopts the self-effacing rhythm of expository writing (and ends its lines almost anywhere – the proverbial 'chopped-up prose'). The point of such a rhythm, in prose, is that it enables quick reading. The poetry in this anthology requires utterance (silent or spoken) to signify its richness, and is likely to trip up the mind that tries to skim it.

Among poets who entered the 1990s with established reputations, I have looked out for those whose writing continues to surprise with its gift – but is there any other reason for reading poetry? Some familiar names will be missed, of poets who simply published little in the period. The generation of the '70s retains its force, though in smaller proportion than

hitherto – poets now into their fifties and sixties whose first flourish was in the ferment of creativity and questioning that transformed Australian poetry in the years leading up to and through the 1970s. Across all its sometime factions and outside them, the poetic of quite a number of that generation involved the adoption of expansive styles. Their recent writing more often comes back to a closer crafting.

What new tunings are to be found here? A confidence in passionate language is frequent. This challenges, but can also find the wit to combine with, the more familiar subtleties of laconic or cool. The freshness of the styles – indeed the stylishness – of much of the poetry in this book is, I believe, immediately striking. Yet the new poets evade categorization. There are groups, but none claiming to be a pre-eminent new movement. Poets argue, as always, about poetics and preferred models, but with awareness that poetics can overlap. Above all, a spirit of eclecticism is abroad. Not only do poets feel a new freedom to pick and choose – and change – their influences, but they accept that their peers are doing likewise.

The eclectic bent is a worldwide tendency in all the arts, arising with the vast information revolution of these years. But this eclecticism follows a well-tried path. It helped drive the art of early twentieth-century modernism, which in poetry was often a fierce art of alienation. Alienation is less at issue now, but poets have learnt from the modernists' delight in bringing out slippages of meaning and sheer opacity in the grain of a language. The elliptical and the oblique occur in poetries of all eras and places; they are inherent to the ways of language. But once emphasized within modernism, they became important tropes in more traditional and popular styles as well, so frequently as to be barely noticed. Now they have become postmodern: in sync with, but also able to examine, a society that sees itself as negotiating between old stabilities and a new confidence in provisionality – change, fragmentation and difference.

In other words, possible styles for postmodernity have been developing for more than a century, just as the theory has. One marker of the postmodern is, in fact, a throwing open of the very question of appropriate styles – which is why, despite the odd attempt at critical correctness, this ethos hasn't developed a house-style of its own.

The open-ended experimentation begun with Mallarmé and Pound, however, is still running and, in the handful of recognizably experimental works included here, it is strong. The climate could be right for experimental poetry to find its niche in this country. I can't help feeling that the avant-garde wing of the '70s generation left us with fewer lasting works than it might have done. The times were not conducive to hard self-criticism. Australian poetry had taken longer than most to successfully accommodate (with a few notable exceptions) any sort of modernist techniques. Now it has become easier to consider that poetry, even when it isn't aiming a

cutting edge, is an art that opens up the experimental inclination in language itself. What else is metaphor?

In the western world, cinema, TV and the novel have thoroughly supplanted poetry's ancient function as the art to which a culture looks for its myths of world, psyche and society. Yet poetry is still all about such myths – comically, solemnly, ambiguously. What it finds for them is the very savour and test of language, both familiar and strange.

This volume is complementary to *Australian Verse: An Oxford Anthology* (1998), in which I undertook a full survey, tracking from the end of the twentieth century back to the early nineteenth. One discovery of that book, to my mind, is how thoroughly the field is transformed when a significant number of sidelined women poets, through both centuries, are given their due. (Part of this effect involves the absence of some men who might have been preferred in the past.) In the period covered by *New Music*, much of the innovation has been by women. It hasn't been a surprise to find that they are in a majority of the new poets included here.

The selection in *Australian Verse* also addressed, by abolishing it, the foolish critical standoff between 'intellectual' and 'popular' poetry. This has a history which makes it understandable, but basically it's an either-way snobbery. Anthologists less than fifty years ago were still all but entirely leaving out the *Bulletin* school of bush and city ballads. These are properly appreciated nowadays, along with a whole tradition – *New Music* shows it to be thriving – of plain-language poems which relate to daily living with a float of irony, often now in free verse. Most performance poetry is of this kind, and some of the poetry by most other Australian poets comes close to it. The recent work in the genre has played a strong part in sustaining the art of the free-verse line, since it depends for much of its effect on subtleties to do with pacing and the weighting of syllables.

The contrary prejudice against intellectually dense poetry may always be with us – although the 'elitism' associated with classical and Renaissance allusion in poetry receded when Greek and Italian Australians were admitted into the discussion, and when air fares dropped. In truth, this country is teeming now with special knowledges learnt culturally, educationally, and from books, travel and the internet. How much of the information in an information-rich society could be too much for the reader?

Such richness is poetry's opportunity. No one is interested in mere pretentiousness; but most readers (and listeners), in my experience, don't mind that poetry is an art that may range where language can range, without stopping at every moment for explanation. This is how we are able to read the ancients, or the poetry of cultures beyond our boundaries. It's an opening up of language – and of curiosity, and of thought. A density of language on the tongue has always been one of the seductions of poetry. I can think of quite a few poems that I love but only half-understand.

Much poetry is being written in Australia – and an increasing amount of it in places away from the south-east corner. Brisbane and Perth, and their heartlands, have produced some of the best poetry by younger poets. A lively interest exists in poetry composed for interaction with other media (though it is not represented here, where the print medium would make such work seem one-dimensional, as can happen with song lyrics). Regular poetry festivals are held, and poetry readings are ubiquitous. For poets, there are workshops and TAFE and university courses in creative writing, and a (finite) number of grants for publication and for writing projects small and large. Publication in these times is a fragmented affair – shoestring publisher or desktop, the mostly small literary journals, and now frequently the Web. There are also countless internet discussion sites. Dissemination therefore is becoming at once very local and remarkably international.

Poetry books and poetry readings remain crucial. The latter, although moderately attended, are a useful publishing forum: live utterance, with the book on sale. Most poets who are able to spruik their books at readings can expect to sell out a print-run of 500 copies – including booklaunch sales and some sales from bookshops. Most bookshops stock very little poetry, though a large centre may have its wonderful place or places known to poetry readers, such as Collected Works and Gleebooks. But bookshops are always keen to accommodate the reader who breaks with the habit of 'looking for' a book on the shelves and orders it in ...

Most of the poems in this anthology have been selected from individual published volumes; some are from journal publication or from the poets' manuscripts. I have put the title of the most recent book by each poet at the end of the biographical note that precedes the poet's work.

I am very grateful to Michelle Borzi for typing the poems onto disk and for invaluable critical comment and research. Also to Patricia Convery, the disabilities librarian at the State Library of Victoria, and to Shona Dewar who extensively negotiated the catalogue for me; to Judith Clark and the staff at the library of JCU, Cairns campus; and to Alex Skovron for meticulous help with proofreading and design. Finally to Alan Fettleing, who urged this book in the first place; and to Ron Pretty of Five Islands Press.

John Leonard

ELIZABETH CAMPBELL

b 1980 Melbourne, where she lives. She recently completed an honours arts degree at the university of Melbourne.

Fetch

for Nick McNerney

Of course, you say, we have heard this story
before
but have forgotten. Tell it again: fetch it up.
I can see you now, present and
quick;
sixteen, all bluster, you carried your canoe to the river
and capsized quickly, your
open life-jacket snapping up to pinion and
drown you.
Hopelessly, radically embodied, you thrashed,
sucked water and began to die and suddenly
knew
how to receive your
suddenly expected release. Somewhere above
wings
had ceased to beat and all your parts
jigsawed
into the whole, cured flesh of a corpse.
You conjured yourself, solely, into the world's mind,
into the river; a white, still, fetch.

And, present and quick, you smelled, with your new,
fresh heart,
coffee, morning; a girl's hair.

And, of course, it can all be explained, you say;
some brain impulse, an electrical trick
in those
few long seconds of dying
before you bobbed up and broke the surface
and the sun with your newly accomplished face and
carried on
down the course of the river.
Nick, old friend and
one of the few
who can inhale water and breathe out
love, love –
go back for me, still my lungs, smell my hair.
Fetch me up and tell me I will live.

WENDY WAUCHOPE

b 1976 Perth. After completing studies in literature and creative arts at Murdoch university, she has worked for a period in the USA.

Travel Sickness

initially
she is ill in Prague
poking at perfect pasta
abdomen knotting defiantly
under the table

she lays on him
unravels
her head finding
his reliable thighs.
he strokes her hair
in slow arcs
as if to siphon out
the pain

in Italy
where the food is gourmet
it sickens them
insidiously.
they take turns
vomiting into bidets
playing the maternal
soup-bringer

convalescing
in a high bed
above black and white tiles
elevated,
and looking to the sea,
their kisses spread
like chicken pox:
persistently infectious

finally
she gets the flu
three days after leaving him,
fierce
and independently poor,
in London.

she lets the virus
into her
like a familiar lover.

CASSIE LEWIS

b 1974 Port Moresby. She grew up in Melbourne, and lived there until moving in 2000 to San Francisco. Song for the Quartet.

Denouement

I settle into the tough elements
on my land: cold wind,
rain, slant-wise and hard.

I am visited by shadows
crossing over the fields
with their angry crops and wildflowers
struggling for prominence,

bristling over the horizon
like stubble on a man. Elsewhere,

rifling through leaves of sunlight
or standing resolute on a bank of sand,
you set up an echo as you shout my name.

But here the wind devours all outside voices;
too soon, they are consigned to memory,
disturbing my flushes of rest and waking.

My home has one room that alters
with the light. Harsh angles are softened
by the burnished sunrise, when it is still.
I'll light an oil stove through the winter.

The rain comes all day,
animals in a steady drove. On the porch,
sheltering in my coat, I summon you.

It's as though I see you
but you're an eddy in the cloud,
like a horse that's shed its harness,
blustering, lyrical then gone.

Rote

Long drawn blinds take me back to the first day
when we were more than pretty faces and the logic
of my tiny soul kept me involved. The cramped gardens
and my friends smiling at lunchtime. Something we were told

at an assembly I've held onto, along the lines of
 remembering always . . . what was it?
 That our backbone was the privilege?
 That life is born in amorality? I'm not much good
 at this lesson and consider now the chaos
 in the rows of identical stockings, made for asceticism
 and to hold us awhile in awe of our own sex.
 We chose our futures with innocence and healthy greed
 so that now pride won't leave us alone.
 I don't dare to murmur in the tall girl's hair, tell her
 what I know, help her navigate.
 She spends her nights constructing effigies
 beyond her Russian teacher's shoulder. Only, oh only
 for ninety-six percent. But was it like that really?
 How we mistrusted? I hoped mainly to confirm. Or to lie down
 forever on the grass to watch the works of no god but me
 in a dark refraction, or at the source of the longest river
 to know all at once too clearly how things pass.

Winter District

I throw you bread below the roadhouse sky.
 I am a child and you, a bird.
 My mood of hope slides away

as the dust flares up like bolts from
 the sun. Sudden sympathy
 rolls out its red carpet for you,

as you skirt around my world. I forgive you.
 You can fly. You stay above things,
 not amongst them. Or rather,

strange forces assault you. Winds
 curled by spires and damage done.
 Walkers seem safe, like sailboats

and I possess no records,
 only my mind. Toll bridges
 stand at its entrance,

and the price? A word.
 I throw you bread below the nomad sky,
 as the roadhouse lights drop off.

Pelicans sleep far from home and misers
 think I'm lost. A child,
 a warm breath in the cold.

MELISSA ASHLEY

b 1973 Brisbane, where she grew up. She currently divides her time between arts administration and writing

The Hospital for Dolls

What if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open.
 Muriel Rukeyser

1
 The blind giant tied on
 his boots, unfolded his
 stick and strode through
 the bitumen black to
 ignite the stars.
 The moon came on
 like an obscene dancer,
 shedding clouds like clothes
 on the floor of the sky.

Everybody leered
 and applauded.

Yes
 the night they bundled
 me up in their van –
 a guilt-ridden witch –
 was like any other.

The security chain broke
 like a string of pearls.
 When they were done
 the front door was
 a mess of splinters.
 When it was all over
 the dead bolt lay like
 a rape on the carpet.

2
 I was in the theatre
 listening to Chopin

as the doctor unhooked his
 butcher's coat from the hanger –
 his coat with the blood
 like the pulped heads of tulips –
 spilled down the front.

While the sister
laid out in a neat glistening line
scalpel speculum curette
vacuum cleaner.

The anaesthetic took
me like an undertow.
I washed up cradled
in the crisp white palms
of hospital sheets
to the doctor's rat grey
eyes watching me from
the top of a chart.

3

The vases are dry.
I receive no cards.
Outside
umbrellas sprout like
mushrooms
the chimney stacks
burn and burn.

There is nothing to do.
A tray of eggs
tasty as pellets
rests on my knees.
My nipples are flat
as the spare change
in my overnight bag.

4

If I could
turn back these sheets
like time
if I could
stop these moving walls
if I could refuse this air
like clay
if I could push through like a seed
to the sun

I would swing these two
stalk legs like the shafts of cranes
out over the edge –
ease on slippers
dressing gown
take up bag

and steal like a ghost
in a flower patterned cape
silent as a seal
through the night
from this ward

past that place
where babies with toenails
fragile as the wings of Xmas beetles
clutch the attendant finger –
past that place where babies
mewl like puppies and kittens
and grub – mole blind for the
milky teat

where love dumb parents
stroke that tuft of hair
that blue veined scalp
and discover
the unknitted bone.

I would find the great basement oven.
I wouldn't care about the alarms –
I would upset the bins
like a dog.

I would barge through
the doors,
the moon at my back
like a god,
a jar in my bag,
the bony fingers of death
at my neck
groping for the ties
of the hospital gown.

If I could
I would flee to the river
to rock, to knit
two booties and a burial train –
ivory white
and spectacular
as the milky way

To the river
to lay
my baby to rest
in a bed of stone
and glass.

SAMUEL WAGAN WATSON

b 1972 Brisbane, of Bundjalung, Birri Gubba, German, Irish and Scots descent. He lives and works in the Brisbane area. Of Muse, Meandering and Midnight.

for the wake and skeleton dance

the dreamtime Dostoevskys murmur of a recession in the spirit world
they say,
the night creatures are feeling the pinch
of growing disbelief and western rationality
that the apparitions of black dingos stalk the city night, hungry
their ectoplasm on the sidewalk in a cocktail of vomit and swill
waiting outside the drinking holes of the living
preying on the dwindling souls fenced in by assimilation

the dreamtime Dostoevskys ponder
as dark riders in the sky signal a movement
for the wake and skeleton dance
it's payback time for the bureaucrats in black skins
and the fratricide troopers before them
with no room to move on a dead man's bed

is it all worth holding onto these memories
amidst the blood-drenched sands?
better to forget?

the dreamtime Dostoevskys feel the early winter
chilled footsteps walk across their backs in the dark hours,
the white man didn't bring all the evil
some of it was here already
gestating
laughing
intoxicated
untapped
harassing the living
welcoming the tallship leviathans of two centuries ago
that crossed the line drawn in the sand by the Serpent
spilling dark horses from their bowels
and something called the Covenant,
infecting the dreamtime with the ghosts of a million lost entities,
merely faces in the crowd at the festival of the dead,
the wake is over
and to the skeleton dance the bonemen smile
open season on chaos theory
and retirement eternal for the dreamtime Dostoevsky

shout-me-a-wine requiem

let's just say
it is a little more
than an obligatory action of mine

this person from outside my circle
a colleague with whom I visit
in a room of four walls and melancholy

bed linen unshaken for some months under a retrospective painting of
poker-playing dogs
in the tobacco-stale atmosphere his unshaved haven
and I feel the end of it all when I arrive

his words composed in a collection
rudely on top of each other
like the swaying tower of bourbon bottles in the kitchen,

shoves some red wine into my 9am face,
the tip-toeing around his verses and luck
and mine and politics and protocols

and amidst the death march he asks, within a staccato of our banter
'so how do you get published?'
over and over like an echo, this sour requiem I endure

and yes, yes I am glad
there is no longer heroin in this place
no sharps, no nothing

yet, cheap red wine and regurgitated
memories of a young woman
who once touched us both

wakes a bad taste in my mouth
'you have to submit your stuff to the literary mags . . .'
'I have!'

sun trying to bend the dust-caked blinds
little death hands down my back
knowing I could write better in there with him

but no, whilst there are more negotiations as I reach for the door
some plans to have dinner with Sarah and I in the future, sometime
'can I grab some money from ya . . . shout me another wine?'

JOHN MATEER

b 1971 Johannesburg; grew up in South Africa and, briefly, in Canada. He came to Perth in 1989, and in 1998 moved to Melbourne. Barefoot Speech.

When I'm Called 'A Human' ...

I'm in a small room with a German woman
whose friend's child fell into his Death from an Egyptian pyramid
I'm in my kitchen reciting an Afrikaans lyric
by the woman who drowned herself in Three Anchor Bay
I'm polyrhythmic on this balcony observing the sky darken violet
sinking into evening – I'm not only there, I have

this mind on relatives on four continents:
on an isle in the South Atlantic,
on neighbours whose homes contain stories of
an escape from Romania,
of Bush and Dirty Wars,
of countries which dissolved or whose names were changed, of Moslems
who were threatened during the Gulf War,
Witnesses expecting a new world like

Eden – Once a teacher told me she found one of her little
students in her class before school, 'he'd been there
all night. He had come to draw me a picture. He couldn't sleep at home:
the power and water had been turned off and all his rellies were
over. He had no quiet place to sleep. He was hungry and
cold. (sighs) You don't know what to do ...' Yes –

What is there in the mirror? Who? An old Khmer woman hollowed by
torture? And that on the radio? One bulldozer uncovering a
Koori burial ground in the path of a highway? That's
not a face. Is that anything like *me*?
What must I do
(Kneel at a Geneśa shrine in my family's cul-de-sac
feel like a 'world citizen' at home in
trademarks and sneakysneakers like the children of the
Malaysian pilot who is training others for war)
to feel human? – I feel afraid when I'm called 'a human'.

I plan a trip to go hiking in the mountains.

I buy a word-list of the endangered language that
names this place, my leg and fire with
sounds almost as alienating as the Latin tongue
of explorers.

I don't have a tv and try not to think of this moment's bungee-jump
in silence's *shsh* illusion.

I hear an Indonesian beginning all his sentences
with 'In my country ...'

I let my vision find an old friend who anoints
rocks in the shadow of Spirit, and I
watch him through the reigning dream:
(It's not Denmark, not the Orkneys; It's Perth! outside the Mall).

And I feel under these hallucinatory suburbs the morphology undulate: –

Yesterday – two rosellas were flying South.
Two weeks ago – a petrel, intent, also South.
Today – a 28, same direction
(what is this 'South?') – And just like Dante
in the first canto of *Purgatorio*, I turn to where
that Boötes disappeared. Only this time I

step out of the supermarket that's always recalling
me and look down to the waiting dog. The dog, he looks up at me.
We know what we're thinking.

From Mister! Mister! Mister!

Translated Man

To hear myself think in this noisy city I plug my ears.
Even the minarets are sirens and the daylight a thieving.
Here female eyes shout volumes at me.
Beside what was my soul, wordless men pedal their gliding becaks.
Through a phrasebook I stutter, bargain for space, mask disbelief.
Momentarily recognizing myself as the Marlboro man,
I return to the invisible.

In mimed song my lover's remembered voice taunts me.
Her dancing body is the universe, its axis always a zero.

In the desperate theatre of speech I dream ok.
Under the polychrome statuary of Kali's temple in Kampung Keling,
I fade out ok.
The translated man I am is becoming numerical: zero, ok.

The Rock

The volcanic rock on my desk performs solidly.
I identify its presence.
It returns me to this room, this desk, this body.
I observe the rock: It is an eye heavy with silence.
It is an ear consuming space.

It is a memory of a clear day on the island of Samosir.
 It is returning me to this room, this desk, my body.
 Like Uluru, it confounds the astral, stating,
You do not know what it is you are like.
 Personality, igneous rock and oblivion are the same.

Azan

Voices from the nearby minarets, in an asynchrony,
 triangulate, tracking the deep space
 of my body and my ears' attunement.

Noise doesn't exist here, only the sound
 in which my flesh has intervened.

Though from elsewhere, rising like
 a wave of emotion, the Azan's voices
 aren't amplified for broadcast to the God:

they are invocations of what already is
 (void and loud as their busy sky).

Takbiran

There is a night when all radios transmit like minarets,
 when the chanting of engines and firecrackers
 is as comprehensive as the space in any loved room.

It's the night when windows tremble like the walls of Jericho,
 when unbelievers acquiesce to the silence of their wide screen tvs.

That night is stalked by a fasting moon and its thirsty day,
 and with vibrato and reverb is everywhere breeding voices
 like engineered wheat or a mirage in an Arabian desert.

That night is pursued by the single-eyed sun who squints
 at the field of newspapers where families have knelt,
 and squints again at them on scooters speeding to their ancestors.

On that night all is awake to the sound of the one Name.

*'Mister! Mister! Mister!': a series of poems written in Medan. Azan: call from the mosque.
 Takbiran: night before the ending of Ramadan.*

MELISSA CURRAN

b 1970 Sydney, where she grew up. She lived briefly in England, and spent five years in the Wollongong area while studying; she is now in Sydney. The Long Drowning.

this is the long drowning

the slow walk home (you take each fingertip, in turn, between your teeth)
 this is the long drowning – i have renounced air – this is the blurred move-
 ment of a body under water, this is both of us, learning to dissolve our shapes.
 this is the slow walk home, i meet myself at the door; i bring you flowers,
 salt from the sea; there is no end to this returning.

we walk along the coast road; it is falling, like the sky; it is falling out of the
 old world, we are at strange angles with the sea. this is new country, the
 widest continent, this is your skin (becoming mine) we are taking the coast
 road, it is falling, this is the long drowning, the slow walk home; there is no
 end to this returning.

this is both of us, learning to dissolve our shapes. drowned, we are water
 (your skin becoming mine) we are salt on the tongue, a gull shrieking over-
 land; we are walking home through sand, i meet myself at the door, there is
 no end to this returning.

broken sleep

sarah, you're frightened of the night –
 hurry, or it will eat you!
 little moon, little schizophrenic,
 your eyes are wet with night.
 the stars have dreamt your dream
 and they are wailing. sarah,
 i cannot shake you from the night:
 you are hiding, in shadow,
 at the top of the stairs and our terrors
 cannot speak to one another.
 night is like water, an uneasy element.
 i wrap you in the night-sheets.
 sleep, sarah, and eat the empty hours.
 soon, morning will love you.

women without children

1

*i cut the mothers
from their children
my house is lit by children
cut from their mothers
they laugh the black song
of their mothers'
mourning*

2

she is still bleeding, like an animal. the
grunting song of pigs, the swelling of the house
with grief, these are all part of the same
dream. it is strange how the body remembers.

3

you bury your children under the house.

they keep quiet.
all day they hear you stamping
down the earth floor.

hers cannot stop screeching, they swoop
like angels, carry her away between their dead claws.

4

the mafia of good mothers
are crying:
women without children are only daughters!

*keep your mouth shut long enough
and you may be forgiven –*

TERRY JAENSCH

b 1970 Swan Hill; grew up in a children's home in Ballarat, and later studied acting in New York for two years. He has lived in Melbourne since 1993, and now concentrates on writing.

Swing

I am swinging
rushing toward the
tree tops

impressing the sky
with my heels
my toes – ten

frequent fliers
forgetting
my father

the bar of blood
that cracked
my cheek

my meal
this morning
left – sitting

I am swinging
packing into
each pocket

each underdog
return – each runt
to his litter of fists

I am swinging
singing castrato
thrilling in endless

vowels – lamenting
the lean wicked leg
killing sensation

Opera Seria
is swinging
D above high C

alarm bells ringing
Da Capo!
Da Capo!

I am prodigal
returning
religiously shamed

by my faith
in those closest
to me – I am standing

clock faced
in a corner
pendulum swinging

sounding
each hour long
approach

at the instant
struck dumb
hiding

in my hands
the dial of
days

the frequency
of my
father

REBECCA EDWARDS

b 1969 Batlow, NSW; grew up in places north, including New Guinea and Darwin. A graduate in Japanese and a visual artist as well as a poet, she now lives in Townsville. Scar Country.

Induction

'Say goodbye to dignity'
the doctor, ramming his rubber hand into me
fiddling the valves.
The needle in the vein
the fluid tapping in, draining away
he's gone.
It's true that pain will twist me on the rack
my teeth inside the mask will strain the screams
of Guernica's split horses
before this day congeals to summer's meaty dark
my blood will brown on floor and bed and gowns
I will obscenely rut and suck the vinyl bag
and bite into a proffered loving hand
I'll sob for gas and shots and anything to stop
and straddling the toilet bowl
will push my head into the nurse's breast and bleat
'I can't.'
Before this creamy, bloody, blue-faced thing
tears through the dusk
commanded by my body's frightful will
I will have thrust beyond the conscious act
into a taut, two-headed, timeless dance.
But I can say now I am proud of this
this day which racked me, stripped me, rode me out
this savage passage we have both survived.

Dark Poems

I don't want to pull these black worms out of me. It hurts. The white page nags like a headache for parrotfeathers and flowers. The flowers outside the window in the room where I make tea, cluster red-taloned, fierce in their green nests. Somedays the red teapot is what I cling to, like a mother. Its warmth, its comforting abundance, against the dark.
'Write something happy. Don't you ever write happy?' the students of literature ask me. They don't want to read about worms. They want kisses, and no teeth in them. Just the tip of the tongue, not its bloody, veined root.
You kiss me, and I remember I was so afraid I'd lose you. Now I have, I wonder did I look too much behind, or too far ahead?
These boys, they don't want seers. They want coca-cola. In the dark.

The Exile of the Imagination

*More remote, I fear, my place of exile
Than storied ones in lands beyond the seas.
Murasaki Shikibu*

Daybirds settle down now, in holes in spotted gums
in thicketed lantana
in the leaf-matted snug of a burrawang's outspread wing.
The galahs have walked their sunset crests across paddocks,
ducks have skidded onto the dam's runway, and rowed themselves
to shore.
Magpies have inspected the new-wired fence
and the floor of the shed.
Blue-wrens have talked their thumb-nail wives to sleep.

Now the mopoke gathers the feathercloak of the forest around her.
Now black calves sleep beside their mothers, inside the electrified fence.
I wish you, Rosemary, a night of sleep.
I wish you this burrawang-feathered bush, cycads dancing
through cross-hatched night, spreading their fronds low over seeds
smooth as eggs.
I wish you the burrawangs' slow spiralling growth
along the steep banks of the Shoalhaven.

Under its tuft of shaggy moss a centipede curls in on itself, waiting out day.
When night comes, let that armoured sleeper catch all your sorrows
and break them open,
reduce them to chitin and wings.
Let him tunnel through forests of moss, on the flank of a broad grey stone.
Let orchids inch their yellow roots into a niche,
let figroots prise boulder from cliff-face,
let a wombat emerge from earth-scented sleep and scratch herself awake.
The lyrebird is dancing on his mound.
The cycads are dancing on their stony trunks.

The lovers sleep in their nest of earth, under the gum, hip cradling hip forever.

St George Mapping Exercise (from the sketchbook of Merric Boyd)
Life Holds Me Through all Eternity
love for all stays with me to give
now I am Merric floating
in Every Purpose truth
Governs Perfect Love All Day
and Resting at Night. Now
Sweet Music is my intelligent Life for
all Day Amen.

Across the river, those famous rocks, stooping like wombats to drink.
 This side, the Shoalhaven scoops white sand into banks and beaches.
 Lowtide crows press their prints across glistening sandbars.
 Coals of an old fire sink into windblown drifts,
 lantana twists its sweetsmelling ropes over itself,
 weaving a basket of blossom and thorns.
 Wombats breathe deep in their burrows,
 bodies grey as Hunter Valley sandstone
 fur beaded with tick-eggs and sand.

I walked, a sand-coloured woman, along the bank.
 Yellow flycatchers hopped closer to take me to task, for brushing too close
 to their nests.
 High-up from the tideline, I stepped over a log, and found in its roots
 the bruised silver of a fish.
 Who had flipped it out of the river and left it?
 Was it dry enough to take, or would it stink
 and break open?
 But its mouth gasped at my touch, and its tail batted the air.

In my hand the fish gulped its element
 righted itself
 finned down the ramp of my fingers
 and followed its shadow into dark water.

In that mad basket that the stars are weaving
 what if my whole purpose were simply this: to find that fish
 to put it back into its life
 to walk on again, down the track wombats had trodden
 not for me,
 not for any human need at all.

JOHN GRAHAM

b 1969 Brisbane. A resident of the Gold Coast, he has worked at various jobs throughout Australia. He is of Kombumeri, Waka Waka, English, Scots and Irish descent. Land Window.

Blood

If you're a scientist
 it's warm like the first oceans and rivers
 If you're religious
 only God has authority to spill it
 If you're mixed blood
 ten thousand generations of one blood line
 are no better than
 ten thousand generations of another

All blood lines come from the one dawn
 Blood makes the lines many yet one

If you're a dingo
 it tastes good
 If you can see
 you'll see it's red
 If you can't see
 you'll feel it new and warm
 or old and sticky

If you need it
 may you get it soon
 If you give it
 may it help another life
 If you eat it in meat
 and make others a part of your body
 remember that the earth and air and water
 and rocks and sand and grass and trees
 are in there too
 and we must look after these

And if we don't remember to look after these
 it might be too late for the children to remember

Many Dreams

Window grill shadows slowly chessboard their way across
 the abandoned furnitureless floor. Outside, the afternoon rush
 skips and screeches, much like cars and people in a bad
 dream. Inside, there's a cat-warmed corner that's been
 abandoned for our chessboard in the sun. Sweet dreams.

Outside, at the back of this dwelling, there's a shirt flapping on a line, like a dead bird in a windy tree. It's been there for a long time. Not too far from the back door, along one of the walls, twisted loops of green hose stand, and finally sprawl out onto a narrow path floor.

And there's our cat by a trickle of water, lapping the quiet cool run. The shadows grow their way long and over all. The sky's a blue bubble dissolving on a starry night tongue. Our cat has disappeared, maybe through the letterbox fence. Maybe past an outpost of words lying on the ground

colouring-in the night spaces with a busy show of light. The city buzzes like metal moths too big to land on any machine-made sun. Our window grill shadows have disappeared and so has our spotlight fun. And our quiet cool run has swallowed its trickle of sparkles like our gleam washed floor on our starry night tongue. And our outpost of words lying on the ground have swum towards the hose. But it's gone.

Out the back here there's only a snake in a windy tree. And out the front or anywhere there's no busy show. There's no busy show for letterbox or fence. No cars or people chessboarding, skips or screeches. There's no more buzz bigger than any bigger moth. No shadows growing their over-all way.

But there is our moment.
Our moment is like a full stop growing a tail.
And there's our cat under a windy tree.
Many dreams.

The Human

The soft corners into the shadowfice mouth
The enout belly of thought above the eyes
The serpentine spine reaching for the sky
and the fingernails growing in seashell time

and time, and time, and time, and time

A tongue for gluing words to any moment
and ears for ungluing them for the moments more
An imagination to loosen the orbiting grip
and the spirit umbilically the web of us all

web of us all, web of us all, web of us all, web of us all

Curious and more curious
Precisely when the rock came to rest at the bottom of the hill
time could rest in the eye or the palm
and as the children came
the river could splash another tiny splash

tiny splash, tiny splash, tiny splash, tiny splash

Curious and more curious
Love me all the way to the tips of trees
and I'll fall for you a thousand times
a leafy blanket over pathways

Love me to the tips of roots and maps
and I'll fall for you like rain
and bathe the tracks around our human family tree

the human, the human, the human, the human
family tree

enout: the eternal now (gloss from Land Window)

B.R. DIONYSIUS

b 1969 Brisbane. A principal mover in the growth of new poetry in Queensland in recent years, he works as an arts administrator. Fatherlands.

In a Forest of V2 Rockets

i
There is a coolness here
that you cannot get out; mixes
with your liquid oxygen heart
fuelling arteries & engines.
Forests are efficient factories;
young stems reach for the sky
& aerial roots rain down
on Europe's great cities.

Beneath the green canopy
our glow-worm veins pulse
like ignition keys.

ii

In the forest of V2 rockets
 a clarinet of log reclines;
 the deep notes of its decay
 imperceptible to the ear.
 Over the sea of leaves
 Glenn Miller reaches
 for a Lucky Strike as
 our fingers play along
 buttons of brass
 coloured fungi.

iii

Suddenly, we cannot
 see the mountains
 for vapour trails.

iv

In a glade we notice
 a wedding finger of trunk
 banded by an infinity of vines.
 A mushroom smell sautés our skin.
 Here, the doodle-bugs shed
 their iron casings; drop
 to the forest floor & die
 in their hundreds.

v

Guidance fins draped
 with Grandfather's Beard;
 buttressed to the ground
 by the sheer weight of staghorns.
 Up ahead, a slender Oppenheimer
 picks his teeth with a blade of grass.
 If you listen carefully,
 the air ticks with
 water-cooled metal.

vi

Over the campsite
 the moon wraps itself
 in a black & white
 skin of explosive.

vii

When we finally trek through
 nothing remains but the skeletons
 of leaves, fragile as bird skulls.
 Antlers of moss challenge us
 at the gates.

There is writing
 beside the cobwebs of wire.
 Overhead, the last sub-sonic
 cry falls silent as lichen.

viii

As we leave the camp,
 a Prince Albert lyrebird rakes
 over its continuum of leaf litter;
 scratches at the surface
 of stories, buried deep
 in bunkers of humus.

ix

A blue tattoo of mildew
 on a wrist of Antarctic beech
 stains the late afternoon,
 a dark, stagnant hue.

Kangaroo Point Field 1830

after a couple of days
 he began to stink.

when the wind was right
 you could smell him

clear to woolloongabba
 & cowper's plains.

the stick which held his
 head up from his chest

broke under the dead
 weight of his chin.

from a distance he looked
 asleep or deep in prayer

blessing the cornfield
 & its ripe, molten ears.

his arms tied with hemp
 turned him into some kind

of ship's figurehead – a triton
 lashed to the bow of brisbane.

straw, seeped from the wounds
of his crucifixion like water

& blood jetting out of jesus,
this bogeyman propped up

to frighten his own people
from kangaroo point.

flies crawled over his skin
anoointed his wounds

with the black litany
of their fleet tongues.

as the afternoon waned
his shadow departed from

the scarecrow of his body
tip-toed to the edge

of the cornfield & hesitated:
this old spirit unsure

of its powers
of botanomancy

in the midst of this new
green industry.

sometime later as
night settled upon him

sticky as a cobweb,
the southern cross drained

into the cup of his skull
like a strong, dark liquid.

in the morning
the crop lay flattened

his effigy was
nowhere to be found.

JEMAL SHARAH

b 1969 Canberra; of Lebanese and Irish background. She grew up in several places overseas and in Sydney, and has spent time abroad with the diplomatic service. Path of Ghosts.

Package for Another World

Along the ashen path, the path of ghosts
bright with its coals that light lost travellers home,
Laika goes bounding, far beyond her masters.

To please them, she entered her capsule
to the future, and the past. As it rose
it broke the waters of the snow,

burst through blue and into black. The stars
netted her like a frostbound spider-web
while her wintry home turned opal

in the distance. Centuries compacted
as she waited, whining, for someone to let her out.
The first life

in space, she was the first to die there;
the blackness around
crammed down her throat,

stars collapsed in her eyes.
There, where the mind fails, is now
a graveyard of junk, and a dog,

desiccated in death,
who continues her mission; who carries
beyond time, the one message she knew.

TED NIELSEN

b 1968 Townsville, where he lived until moving to Sydney in 1999. He works in university administration as a database and website manager. Search Engine.

*From Sofa of My Dreams*15 *Sofa of My Dreams*

in this sofa there's a dream of you
stretched out on a grid called
the hierarchy of vision.
then the drums start, then the bass,
& that's me on your steps
like a happy lyric.
i'm full of living & dumb as a typeface
& who's my little banquet?

when I was a hat my mum says
i'd eat anything put in front of me
so stay tasty & think on darkness
& there i am like a meeting in june –
the papers start, the agenda stretches,
& someone asks to be excused.

43

in the hall of the 43rd sonnet
the swing creaks quietly to itself,
childhood something that happens
to other people less grown up,
& i'm having a scotch & coke,
how about you?

i spent the morning with a clothes-peg
on my nipple then slept on my back.

it's how you feel, she said,
it's power or submission it's negotiation
& things on the table.
your headache beats the shit outta
the neighbours' car & rampages
through the suburb.

92

behind the skin another surface
behind the surface a kind of code
that lovers use to hide their feelings.

beneath that a type of panic
moves beneath the freaky neuron
building the echo of the heart.
it thumps across the beach to a dream
of perfect drinks in shallow water.

& i believe everything you say,
even when you're lying. out in the yard
art runs through a series of postures.
let's make some serious money.
let's develop some frivolous ethics.
below the code the blood, the water.

120 *We Cross Live*

a shy man sucks a journalist's finger & so writes.
we resist the politics of hatred & re-elect contempt
as public institutions tremble in the night.
send more sit-coms & get my broker on the phone!
social justice was a troublesome abstraction –
we whacked it with a mandate now pay attention.
the treasurer's gonna tell you
how lucky we are.

can i get some new shoes in here?
a magazine with the fetish stuff down the back?
three more years of keystone cops.
last night, when you said you loved me,
was that a core or non-core promise?
three channels broadcast tragedy.

134 *Seeking Alternative Advice*

the ongoing process of commodification revises
my heart's concomitant parameters.
they impact on market expectations in such a way
that pressure differentials modify forecasts
of expected fluctuations. this increase
in the oscillation index leads to further instabilities
when measured over time, variations that throw into question
the underlying theoretical assumptions
holding the enterprise together, the exchange rate
is then adjusted downwards to alleviate the tendency
of certain analysts to panic. historical evidence suggests
the measured implementation of risk based auditing
may identify those factors now central to your quality concerns.

either that or there's a domino effect.

PETER MINTER

b 1967 Sydney. He works as a lecturer in Australian indigenous studies at the university of Sydney.
Empty Texas.

Lust

'Her remark how I fly
at miotic jargon, the pluripolar distracting a method
of indirect division, as if by chance you should ever be!' I wonder,
whose combination of incidents

accumulating degrees of withdrawal
and glare conversationalism,
that well worn mathematical limit again, like, Fucking Symbols Up
in God's Tree ('I am the live pillar, the nutgall asymptote!'
all unrepentant middle though

& sucking up glass channels he says If only people knew what was
going on
in my mind
again

oysters slice open currents, foam out the reverb,
Trojan Horse
(not wanting to destroy Da Fort
just sits there like any other code,
all oak splinters & hydro effluvia, concept & drainage
the cork floats on and on

Forgetfulness

The stiller I became, with that savagery of torpor and projection
seminal & inaudible
as the arete syntax or novel, abstract form,
hesitations encroaching distraction
as if all worlds were there
having broken the sky with affection, burning and loss,
with nothing to declare you
take A Blade Of Grass, the distant future sick with love, not from argument
but sounding
the equivalent of speech – nothing but a tune for the molars
syntaxophony doped
& pallid from long damp storage

This invocative, Modernist Living, this
sanctity & good taste

squelches between rumour and undertow, your one line
technically bedecked (via Aphrodite
in another truth about scepticism, the deepest roots
of humanism
cursory or insufficiently synthetic – falling under needles and grace
or afflictions and parody,
undigested skies and that Intense, Overall
Vibration you're close by, writing and, perhaps (it is
more accurate to say
radiating outward and limitless, reified even
taken out of context, all Flicks and Whittlings
facing back.

LIDIJA CVETKOVIC

b 1967 Yugoslavia; arrived in Brisbane in 1980, where she works as a psychologist. She has recently
been exploring, with a band, the fusion of poetry and jazz.

A Portrait of my Father

My father draws a blade
along the wired frame
as we watch perfect rectangles
of honeycomb topple into
a stainless steel bowl.

From a hard earned
78 centimetre TV screen
a voice fires massacres
mass graves, like
bullets into our lounge room
shooting father. Blood
thick as honey runs along
the fragile frame of him.

On the antenna outside
crows congregate for attack
on the raw liver and heart
he set out as bait.
Father waits by the shed
air rifle aimed, and fires
a bullet of revenge.

Long ago in his motherland
as he dozed beneath a poplar
a snake supped nectar
from his angel trumpet ear,
the translucent vessel
of his wisdom. He foresaw
the scenes that flash
before us on the screen.

So we packed our grief and
headed for the land of his dreams
the step-motherland
who'd gag his deepest cries
with lumps of creamed honey.
I watched my father's tongue
sink to the clay riverbed
of his mouth like a stone.

My ageing father
nursing his swollen knees
collapsed under two decades
of laying tiles, when at dusk
he'd return throwing dollars
in the air like pollen.

My father
rescuing drowning bees
and ducklings from his pool;
stuck in the prickly middle
between mother and I
calling truce between
the warring sides;
bringing in honey
unaware of the sticky
trail he leaves behind.

The ancient Balkans believed the eye to be the seat of passion and emotion, while the ear was the location of reason, or even life itself. A snake licking the ear became a symbol of prophetic knowledge.

Reliable Magic

When you go looking for the Cape York Lily
steer clear of the lagoon sister, for there
amidst the reeds' hush, baby spirits murmur
of a coup – plot to plunge and lodge inside
your womb when you crouch to scoop some water.

I offer you an amulet, a necklace of yak bone;
push this sea sponge as far as it will go
and you won't need to squat and sneeze
or leap with heels to buttocks. Take no heed
of the wiseweak men who scorn my methods –

trust my magic as you trust the moon's return.
Melt the sulphum sap, ancestor to the fennel,
in the warm spring beneath your tongue; feast
on ground acacia leaves, honey mixed with dates.
But if you find yourself bereft of faith, lift the lid

to aunty's box, for hope still waits herewith,
Widow Welch's pills, a glass syringe holding
pearl ash, alum, sulphate of zinc; sea-weed pencils,
a gold wishbone, or silver ring; and the bouncing
Dutch Cap – once inside reliable, catch it if you can.

LUCY DOUGAN

b 1966 Perth; moved to Newcastle in 1994. She has worked as a teacher, an art curator and an antiquarian bookseller. Memory Shell.

Hush (or fortune-cookie)

for Larry

Between the woman and the boy
it is always like this when the wind blows,
when the wind blows and they're lying on their bellies
on the bed, the net curtains tremble.
They are in rooms abroad
holding each other's known world steady.
They are all eye-glints and cheek-bloom,
his boy-hair flattened from a woollen cap.
A thrown-in fortune-cookie reads
'You will travel widely both business and pleasure'.
The woman and boy wonder where.
If you asked, their eyes would tell you
the pleasure of coming in from the cold.
In time they will turn back to the company of one another,
the knowledge of two hemispheres imprinted
on two brown irises (hers) and two green.

Even by Her Bones

On the skeleton of an unknown woman in the Natural History Museum at Selborne, Hampshire

You have gifted this to me,
a consecration,
to snap like a wish from your fingers.

Standing in my sure suit of flesh
in Selborne, this is all I know:
that I have mothered, that word,
and so shall one day be like her.

People with hands and brushes
in a hundred generations will know
even by my bones,
by a curve as supple as willow,
by a porous moment,
what has been.
Shape authors a history.

What is it that makes me like her,
this cinder of bone-woman?
Why should I be moved by a mocked-up grave,
numbering, no, caressing her absent cares,
and her splayed girdle of dignified hip?

This is a peepshow
of light and card and dust
and so much glass and time
to breathe away.

You have cordoned this off for me,
offered it up to my instinct
in a flotilla of sweeping fingers.
You have decreed, like a sire,
that this unknown map of mother-woman
will be significant.

Could it be that you are wed to her, like me?

JACINTA ABOUKHATER

(formerly Le Plastrier) b 1965 Melbourne; grew up in rural Victoria. She has worked as a journalist in Melbourne, where she now lives.

From Cyme*Part V*

1
bloodily I came
risen on meat and bone

large hands stopped me.
the world stooped

and dug up wars, worms.
the children's faces winced

before my cloak
my heavy lameness

I walked with a large
brutal stick

words, an arm raised
lovers hurtling to walls.

I could not understand my strength.
I was simply asking to speak

2
how shall I meet you,
oldest intimate?

I shall dance
slowly, one step

3
perhaps I saw you coming, distantly
from where the hills were green, distantly
across deserts and valleys, ravines and vines of rivers

perhaps I saw you, distantly,
washing your father's hands
as they shrunk into death

I too held my father's hand
asking, how do I speak with your death
though for forty days he had already kept his silence

perhaps I saw you coming
with your sheer blue eye and generous mouth
kept through all my darkness

4 (gulls)
the white stampede of wings
burning the air
from where we watched

as if the blue gullet of sky
had gasped open
to a wild god

white-flamed
a scattering
bearing towards us

scalded by the eye
of such a clear god
we emerge from sand

trembling beak, beat
stung by daylight
you, skirting the dune

with its childish incline
a tremor of legs,
a pure pace

5
the oranges are
bitter, my love
though you dragged
that looted one
to your lips

like a wish.
a waiting, as if
its honey
the colour of sun
could blind us – us? –

savage
our tongues
with a sweetness
that was bald,
that was not sweet

Cyme: a poem in five parts, each with five lyrics (from a botanical term which alludes to this formation). Parts I-IV meditate respectively on self in its origins, as daughter, as mother and as lover; Part V concerns renewal.

Pollination

The bees are eating the honey. They nest in our minds,
occasionally fleeing.
A single bee left mine by ear, only days ago.
It can be that quick: when the tongue is dumb, bees clot
the mouth, making lips alive of them.

An old man runs for a tram in the street.
The whole thing chuckles with purpose, my car being there,
the taking risk.
The flowers have made a decision too, collectively.
They're crawling with blooming, ripping buds with purpose
which leaves hands out of it, though hands were there.
Your face is sudden, too:
There's an angel in each of us, seen in the comings, though
the eyelids have a habit of closing at the crucial
moment. I said, moment.
Time is the biggest braggart of them all, settling finitude
only to displace it.
It's begun again. And what do we have to hold it?

I'm blaming it on the bees. My mouth was loosened in a dream
and another one escaped.
They won't stop because of us, because our convictions are
stumped by possibility.
They're doing it now

CORAL HULL

b 1965 Sydney. In recent years she has lived in Melbourne, Darwin and Sydney. She is a noted activist for animal rights. How Do Detectives Make Love?

The Noise That the House Made

the noise the bedroom made was her numb
determination/ as she hacksawed their
marital bed in two/ she said: he can't
hurt my feelings because i haven't got
any/ so that each stale half rested
quietly & separately/ growing cobwebs
like wrinkles/

the noise was a four-year-
old girl afraid of the dark/ the long
whine from the blankets all night: mum
i wanna drink of water/ until even after
she had stopped calling out/ the hallway

walls sighed: oohhh we wanna drink of water/ as though they were thirsty/ despite the financial tears they were built on/

the noise my brother made as he shuffled his cot towards the door was hyperactive/ his screwed up red face & fist curled tightly around the bottle of cow's milk/ lactose storms splashing the blue walls of tantrums/

the noise is my father pissed/ falling into the swimming pool/ filled with green algae & mosquito larva/ gulping down water beneath the warped clothes line/ & jumping up so my mother would notice him/ her sharp face covered in mock icing from the sunbeam/

irritated by him indulging in slime/ after pushing out the cupcakes she scrubbed the kitchen clean/ the noise is a wet plop as a fish leapt to freedom/ slamming eye first into grey speckled lino/ found by my mother a few days later/ dried like prune & covered in dog hair/

the noise that the house made was the murder of childhood/ the cold fist appeared in the silence of the hallway/ from the midst of the blue walls & paint-chipped skirting boards/ children's heads collided & cracked like thunder/ before dissolving into grief & deep carpet tumults/

(once i bumped my forehead on the sharp corner of a cupboard/ so that my mother would rub oily yellow butter into the huge purple lump)/ (then another time i broke the light in the refrigerator door & was beaten by her/ until i jogged like a ragged doll in her skinny white arms/ her tears mingling with mine as my toes tap-danced the carpet)/

children hit the floorboards like stones with bruised thighs & upper arms/ (my father was a detective who witnessed the corpses of parents/ shocked toddlers sitting beside

them/ fried eggs sliding down the walls in trails of grease/ cold omelettes & pools of crimson disappearing into cracks beneath the broken porcelain)/

the noise is black flies glued to the ceilings & footsteps down corridors & overturned refrigerators flooding the kitchen with grocery liquids/ & brooding houses built with bricks of regret on unstable foundations/ with torn 1960s wire flyscreens & broken-down trampolines/ & a stray ginger tom who no one has told to move on/ only the goldfish sedated in the bowl & the budgie in the cage were left silently observing/ & the turtle & rabbit were very quiet/ when my father took down the smith & wesson/ he cried in the backyard sandpit/ like a child witnessed by no one

Landscape Photography with Dogs

the park is inside my dogs/ we hop out of the holden on the edge of a picnic area/ ignoring the signs that prohibit dogs to run without leashes/ kindi & binda release themselves from the hot back seat to bound through grasses wallaby related/ to vanish above & below its tracks of dry waves as though it were flowing/ past the flaky grey bases of gums & old ten-gallon drum bins toppling over with drumstick wrappers/ the calm gradient of city parkland carries their bellies along to the creek's hidden edges/ i want my dogs to experience many landscapes/ as dusk nuzzles up to my ankles & to my dogs' noses turning damp & cold fogging up the camera lenses/ they will swallow or be swallowed by foreground objects like barbecues or boulders/ they will fade out over the round cupped edges of hills into clouds that sink behind themselves/ & appear like black specks on the watery grey endings of dirty rainbows/ or disappear completely before emerging again from forest darkrooms/ my dogs will be unleashed so that they may contain the

landscapes inside themselves/ in australia
 shadows of blue heelers, red kelpies &
 photographers ignite along its huge crust
 & vanish in an instant/ leaving behind
 projected movement & dust-filled film
 equipment/ & they may have left a passing
 footprint in the sand/ & they may have left
 a story for the rock

TRACY RYAN

b 1964 Perth, where she grew up. She worked in libraries and as a teacher in Perth, and in recent years has been based in Cambridge, England. The Willing Eye.

Ménage à Trois

When Mossy brought death home
 after a night out where I thought
 she'd been at it on heat,
 she dumped her bird like guilt
 on the carpet, easily discarded.
 Crouched under a sideboard,
 she pleaded, wide-eyed,
 the conquest's easy, but after?

There was nothing else for it.
 Back to the garden
 this poor parrot
 meant only to visit
 and in with it, under a bougainvillea
 whose brightness tells lies
 without words, though I suppose
 to be vegetable's
 already no small advantage
 in a murderous world:
 I too would keep quiet.

Even the ground wasn't about to yield
 but it's done now, and that's that.
 I don't live here, never planned to get involved.
 The tenant was out, and Mossy's her cat.
 Now the earth-wound is closed over,
 Mossy's shut out with the knowledge
 of her buried quarry, and between us
 the glass, the silence of a lovers' tiff.

Bite

Dark corsage I can't
 unpin, I'm stuck with it,
 drawing wry comment
 for days, however I hide
 this stamp that approves
 the boundary, proves that you
 stop short of blood, all jokes
 aside. But note
 how readily my veins
 leap up: a little harder and
 the whole heart would follow,
 I'd turn inside out, bleak pocket
 for your rummaging,
 magician's hat. And yet
 I don't; I let you pass
 like this small stormcloud on
 my white, impassive throat.

MORGAN YASBINCEK

b 1964 Sydney; moved to Perth in 1972. A second-generation Australian of Croatian background, she is a postgraduate student in literature and poetics at Murdoch university. Night Reversing.

father / daughter

it was he who taught her how to shoot
 now she perpetually adjusts her sights
 at night she slips on her bifocals
 she loves biographies

he told her one truth about her mother
 who crawled through the vegetable patch
 pulling grass out of hard earth

she watched the woman for forty years
 and decided she'd only heard
 one side of the story

he said this country has a different light
 in the light of this country
 memories flicker, stutter
 shade reaches across to taste and take

coiled like a brain it noses across each frame
 editing and feeding me in the young light
 of a daughter

he said the silent censor and i play shadows
 i am an instant of swallowed light and sometimes
 i am jesus christ black square or the truth
 a passport, thin verification of a father

this is the impossibility she almost forgets

other women / other messages

they began vaguely, dustings of skin cells
 soap scents from one another's bathrooms

then we read his eyes for what the other
 had posted
 pressed a new message into his expression
 with our mouths
 – and he flew like mercury to deliver

we were an absurd party line
 of desperate moments

i dreamt of you when you left
 – you hadn't finished packing
 your eyes sent their dreadful message
 through me like a silver infusion

your final communication
 did not slide from mouth to wire
 but flew to me

the phone gave a single shriek
 i knew it was you

M.T.C. CRONIN

b 1963 in the Hunter Valley area; grew up in Queensland. A qualified solicitor, and a researcher in feminist legal theory, she lives in Sydney. Everything Holy.

The Recipe

she was like a lens
 on the day, and in the yard
 we converged and diverged
 and even refracted
 under her gaze

the chops were where
 most of the light fell
 on transparent fat
 edging around pink flesh
 but potato-salad

was the highlight
 made this morning
 while he was packing
 his things, she promised
 at least ten people

the recipe

'Now among Lydian women ...'

early,
 before the mountains have taken position
 on the perimeter of my eye
 I unlatch the gate letting it swing
 into the first sun's free gold
 and the fireflash of lightning;

'Now among Lydian women ...'

a phrase of Sappho's
 unsinkable on my mind
 as if floating on a thick sea
 Her body unforgettably stopping
 only where bordered by my hands;
 under my lips everbearing strawberries and below,
 glossy in my fingers, vegetable silk

Memories gather and pull tight my desire:
 the belly-skin stuffed with a physical weakness
 and that one full tug
 deep in the bladder . . .

But before she can draw me back
 I put out my hand
 and scrape it along the uneven rocks of the wall
 and begin to walk,

my feet slipping
 in the street-blood of flowers

Eating Paint*(after Anthony Lawrence)*

Inspired by the effects of water-colours
when introduced into the digestive tract
of the poet, I swallowed a bucket
of house-paint – cobalt blue, good
brand with a high plastic content
but what transpired was a million miles
from a vision of the other side . . .

I woke up in casualty with charcoal
lips and so much blue pumped from my
guts that the nurse said with even
a wide brush they could have
painted the word 'ROT' in letters
adult-high around the room and had
blue left over to do the sky in the
window (there was only one)

But

*the other bloke, I said, got
the gossip from shrieking butterflies
of emerald rescued from the dozing
ears of wolves*

He,

*they replied, cut his paint not only
with valium, but imagination, while you
seem to have made some kind of
oily pact with mediocrity*

*from which poisoned and semi-
conscious you rose screaming
'It's on page 132'. You really should
have saved the stuff for the walls
and if you need outlook try
renovating; it's not as life-threatening
as poetry and if you do it properly
you can make a modest profit*

JOHN KINSELLA

b 1963 Perth; grew up in Perth and rural WA. Well known as a poetry editor and activist for poetry, he is a frequent traveller, and is currently based in Cambridge, England. Visitants.

The Savagery of Birds

As smog drifts up from the city
you realise that the sky is really
a painted backdrop, and Nature
has no part in it, that all around
you is construct – the silos,
the sheds, the tractors, the trucks,
cybernetic animals wearing
fashionable genes, mechanical
birds that fly with the gravity
and grace of a computer simulation
while wearing expressions that belong
to mythology, making Frans Snyders's
Oiseaux sur des branches relevant
to the end of the twentieth century,
to a place deep down in the South,
where grain-eating birds are turning
to flesh that tastes like muesli.

The Bermuda Triangle

Pat Rafter, saviour of Australian tennis,
maintains a comfortable existence on Bermuda;
the flight of balls determined by the weather,
which island-culture makes more tropical
than it should – the concentration of emptiness
and expectation like nationalism postponed
and sent offshore – the Queen's English
an experimental turn of phrase on the front
doorstep of liberty, the fraternal vanishings
of flight on flight of the right stuff, as if Play-
Station IS living, as if a package holiday
has you hungering after the wealth
of the pyramids, concentrated to an echoing
point of ambiguity, like the limitations
of radar, and re-runs of *The Day the Earth
Stood Still* – remaining black and white
as childhood – making an ocean of the river,
the bright ship whispering through the ever
widening hole in the ozone layer.

Visitant Eclogue

Farmer

Well, I said to the missus that something pretty odd was happening out here, this being the third night lights have appeared over the Needlings; and she said stay clear Ben Rollins, stay clear, don't go sticking your nose into something you don't understand. And I said, well it's my place and if anything weird is up I wanna know about it. And it's just starting to dry off in these parts, and it's almost a fire risk. The everlastings will be out soon and they'll dry until they crinkle like cellophane in the hot easterlies, and like a blowtorch they'd go up taking the surrounding paddocks with them. So here I am, *touched by your presence*, not quite sure what to make of it but knowing that this is as big as it gets, that death'll have nothing on it.

Visitant

radiant inner heart countertracking epicycloidal windrows and approaching harvest, as if to probe your body like a contagion that'll never let you go, corporate body politic, engraving crops and stooking heretics, this our usufruct, wickerman serving up the meek & generic as vegetation names itself and the corpse fills with a late shower, nomadic emergent anticipation, toxic cloud of otherness presence before authentic essay in defence of time's minor fluctuations, and we comprehend your gender, missus as signifier to your gravelled utterance

Farmer

Now keep my missus out of it, she doesn't want a bar of it – I've already made this clear. Hereabouts it's mainly grain, though those offerings dotting the fields in this brooding light are sheep that'll work in trails down to the dam and struggle for shade or shelter beneath a single tree. Around here used to be stands of mallee and York Gum, though I'm not sure what the natives call it. Yep, they were here before us, though there's none around now so I can't help you there.

Visitant

in family structure, as dialect wears out and you claim ownership – down from the ship we name and conquer, that's what you'd have us think,

to go your way and validate; scarifiers and hayrakes, all aftermath and seed drilled to be ellipsed by grains of superphosphate, expressionist and minimal all at once, expanding tongues as if a place of worship might spontaneously erupt, the face of a prophet frowning in local stone, or grinning out of a piece of imported fruit – the simplest is most exotic

Farmer

We've always been churchgoers, and I'm proud to say that I'm an alderman; we've just got new bells and they ring out through the valley like they're of another world, and believe it or not, the congregation has almost doubled in the last few weeks. I say it's the bells but my wife reckons it's in the air, that people feel depleted and need something to absorb the emptiness. When pushed, she can't put a finger on it. The minister has mentioned it in his sermons.

Figures in a Paddock

In their wake the furrows,
partings in long grass,
burrs hell-darning their socks
like recovered memories.

Parallel to the fence – star pickets
mark depth, interlock mesh
letting the light and visuals
through, keeping the stock

in or out – like religious tolerance.
Down from the top-road to the creek,
arms akimbo, driven against
insect-noise, a breeze that should

be rustling up a performance.
Towards the dry bed, marked
by twists and shadow-skewed
river-gums, bark-texture

runs to colour like bad blood.
The sky is brittle blue,
foliage thin but determined:
colour indefinable beyond green.

They walk, and walking makes history.
 And tracks. All machinery.
 The paddock inclines. A ritual of gradients.
 Ceremony. Massacre. Survey.

ALISON CROGGON

b 1962 South Africa; childhood there and in England, from 1969 at Ballarat. Based in Melbourne, she has been a journalist and drama critic, and has written fiction and libretti. The Blue Gate.

The Elwood Organic Fruit and Vegetable Shop

I will go walking in Elwood with my mind as smooth as a marrow
 winking at the unruffled sky throwing its light down for free
 letting the gardens exude their well-groomed scents and thinking
 everything good
 to the Elwood Organic Fruit and Vegetable Shop:
 for the counter is democratically in the centre and everyone smiles
 for people go on with the civil business of buying and selling under
 the handwritten notices
 for bawling children are solaced with grapes and handled to leave no
 bruises
 for the mangoes are soft yellow thighs and the strawberries are klaxons of
 sweetness
 for the mignonette purses its frilly lips and snowpeas pout their discreet
 bellies and the melons hug their quirky shapes under their
 marvellous rinds
 for onions ringing their coppery globes and o the silver shallots and the
 hairy trumpets of leeks
 for the cabbages folding crisp linens and the broccolis blooming in purple
 tulles and the dense green skirts of lettuces
 for peaches like breasts of angels and passionfruits hard and dark and
 bursting with seed in your palm
 for the dull gold flesh of pontiacs and knotty umbers of yams and new
 potatoes like the heels of babies
 for the tubs of sweet william and heart-lifting freesias and orchids damp
 and beautiful as clitoral kisses
 for poignant basil and maiden-haired fennel and prim blue-lipped
 rosemary and o! irrepressible mint!
 how they nestle up the vegetables, promising them the fragrance of their
 ardour!
 the marriages which await them! the lips that moisten to meet them!
 glorious speech of the earth!

Fugue

poetry remembers
 everything that exhaustion
 strews across a wasteland
 where people walk in old shoes
 with their love darkening
 in sad baskets of flesh

once I sat on a train
 and watched the clouds set fire
 to a city of blank windows

once a little girl
 whispered me a song
 and I saw that my gaze
 was the garden she plays in

I don't want to leave
 forgetting all these gifts
 granted to my secret
 and undeserving heart

there is a hand which opens
 and a hand shutting
 there is a name
 and a garden of weeds

there is a snake
 which sings a dream of flame
 springing from cold ashes

there is a knife which trembles
 through the joyous waters
 of each mute tongue

Shark

no longings summon me
 nor prayers twisting blindly on a panic
 nor noose of trailing light
 nor soft ambitions of the wan
 and petty eye nor strenuous nets of thought
 will tempt me out to struggle at your feet

but hang your gristly heart
 on ivory hooks of rib carved patiently
 in cold and silent noons
 and knot the iridescent gut
 that spills all bloody from your pulsing belly
 and I will smell the truth and I will come

Hands

and my hands are happy again in the drowsing rain
 these empty hands which held
 my face with such hard patience in the stifling rooms
 where I hid

what will I do with these hands?
 they've brushed the tumescent breasts of a childish girl
 who flickers white and black like a tree in moonlight,
 and tenderly held the penises of little boys
 whose golden urine tickled the dry grass,
 they have been secret as the lovers
 who heave aside a torrent of petals to bare
 the blazing abyss of love

how often have I winced before these miracles
 in those inscrutable nights
 when my palms turned upwards like the eyes of the dead
 freed at last from pain's midwifery

and when the nightmare hurtled through chill sweats
 and lies marched across splintering cities
 when death perched on thin shuddering shoulders
 and spat cancers into childish mouths
 and once again in the infinite human pettiness
 burned the flowering cradles
 where were you, hands? were you laid again
 inconsolably on a bare table?

how little you can hold:
 love runs you through like the bright absence
 of a stunned wild bird springing from your palm:
 and every day numberless lives
 are shovelled gracelessly into numbered fissures
 and memories dislodge and break
 the eye's intimate water,
 every day the measureless seeps down
 through the brilliant trash of mortal sadness

the heart sobs its fire on a plate of ice
 until at last its numbed wings forget
 how ardently they strained against the cold
 and so and so

should I betray the sheer human glance?
 why should I grasp these razors, but for love?

Language

This of course has nothing to do with words which
 may be hammered into atoms or dressed in tulle
 whatever you like they will do what you say
 obediently, biding their time.
 They'll outlast you anyway.

How to bud into this world that makes you so lonely.
 How to become pitiless enough
 to see one singular thing.
 How to murder the god in yourself
 in order to discover an absence
 you might believe in –
 those sorts of questions –

and how the grammar of love
 depends on the spaces and
 those several others
 who continually insist on the sky
 and today it really is blue and white
 and closer than any language.

EMMA LEW

b 1962 Melbourne, where she lives. She did office work for some years, until turning to full-time writing in the mid-1990s. The Wild Reply.

The Recidivist

There's a long-subdued fire bursting
in my erotic medicine chest;
the moon in its bruise and limping fiends,
and flesh from the palm of the hand I lost.

I've always loved the haunted moment
when night refills with fresh blood,
and dark bare death's speaking human words:
I've done it. I do it. I'll do it again.

Atoning dust blows here every day,
ancient sunlight cools my sins.
Get me out of here, there's a shortage of coffins
in this bitter hemisphere.

Pali

Flourish the little flower in the lemon-coloured hands
A grown child is known to be sorrow
Not crumpled, like the meagre of the town
These lines have been preserved, and I have read them

A grown child is known to be sorrow
Our words, and our becoming what we tame
These lines have been preserved, and I have read them
A snarl of him grows in me

Our words, and our becoming what we tame
The Wild Boy never spoke, the Wild Boy was abandoned
A snarl of him grows in me
But still there is some hope in a light place

The Wild Boy never spoke, the Wild Boy was abandoned
The Wild Boy was put in a house and forgotten
But still there is some hope in a light place
The doorway is himself, woven with want

The Wild Boy was put in a house and forgotten
Not crumpled, like the meagre of the town
The doorway is himself, woven with want
Flourish the little flower in the lemon-coloured hands

Pursuit

I have not had fortune but I have seen the resplendent moths
of Daghestan. I have travelled through clusters of their castles
and found them wingless, lain deep, like the oak apple.
And in Angola I have seen hundreds of butterflies grieving.
I have seen butterflies swerve like the fiddle and the bow.
I once heard a boy sing on the deck of a Black Sea steamer,
There is a small and fragile bug!

The respiration,
the pulses of the heart, the beating that bursts the lid of the shell.
In sago I found the weevil itself, and I smelled the perfumes
of the males. Often I've dreamt of the wasp's tumbled journey,
the mosquito's guilt and thrift, how the ant slipped down
to haunt the grass, how the hornet left only the skin of my fruit.
For insects have a beauty that hurts, and that may even darken
the sky. They drum with their bellies upon the twig. They have
learned to cleanse their blood with light. I have seen a mantis
of a delicate mauve impaled on the flea's single spine. I have
known the mere segmented grub, and I have shared the earth
with lice. In the forests of the Congo, I recorded the stickiness
of swarms. O unforgettable flies of Palestine! O cicadas of Spain
in the year I was born!

Riot Eve

I haven't, thank God, become a perpetrator.
I never caused the death of others, though I must utter these words.
I hold myself back, as the shrewd son of my father.
I see it like this: a lion will attack a gazelle.

We have one life. Why spend it being feebly decent?
We see but one night; we contain others.
I ask myself if this path and all those terrible detours were really necessary.
There is a reason for everything, and our catastrophe.

Imagine then that a father returns and doesn't speak about any of this.
He carries me on his shoulders during the long walk in the forest.
Imagine a man – so polite, so clean;
his swiftness, his warmth, his murderous ideas.

Look, nothing in this world is perfect.
This is the condition, now growing darker.
History has shown us: the Black Death, the Borgias . . .
I await the real wooden anger that shapes me.

The gardens have roared for days.
 The wind bends the trees. It is like a sign.
 I hear of a palace rising.
 It is just after midnight, and I will obey you.

JORDIE ALBISTON

b 1961 Melbourne, where she has worked as a bookseller. Much of her poetry is impelled by historical enquiry. The Hanging of Jean Lee.

Missing Him

I miss his knock on my door his
 taste on my tongue his clothes on
 my floor his breath in my lung

I miss my breast in his hand his
 cross on my mark my woman in
 his man his tremble in my dark

I miss his land from my sea his
 north from my south his voice in
 my ear my name in his mouth

I miss my faint in his sigh his
 flesh on my thigh those lips that
 laugh my face in his faraway eye

Parramatta Female Factory

The Female Factory at Parramatta operated from 1821 to 1847. Convict women were employed in weaving and spinning there until 1835. It later became the Convict, Lunatic and Invalid Establishment.

This is what I see. The flash of my
 fingers like eyelashes flitting at a
 boy in another life. My daughter's
 face out of threads on the floor.

The warden's shoes (black). Ann
 Gatty's back (bent). Other women's
 fingers flashing and flitting on either
 side of mine. Diseased wheezes of

air. Withered limbs of light. A
 clacking battalion of weaving looms
 spinning wheels treadle machines
 commands. And his pattern of hands.

The Fall

People will gasp. They'll point at you in disbelief, but before they can absorb the reality of what they're witnessing, the miracle will be over.

Paul Auster

She takes a tall building as hers is to be a very long fall.
 She was always going to fall, whether she got to the top
 Or not. Depression is holy. You have to be called.
 She hears the children cheering inside: there is no hope.

She was always going to fall, whether she got to the top
 And jumped, or was pushed. It says so in the contract.
 She remembers the small print: *There will be no hope;*
However, cleanse your heart with prayer before combat.

She will jump. Or she will be pushed. See contract.
 From this height, West 33rd Street has a silent mystique.
 Her heart is clean out of prayer: nothing will extract
 The dread, the black-dog knowledge it is all a mistake.

From the eighty-sixth floor, West 33rd Street is silent.
 There is no consolation for those who cling to the railing
 Only dread. She believes this is what the prophet meant.
 With her body in her throat, she lets go, and is falling.

There is no consolation for those who cling to the rails.
I don't think I'm lost, but I don't know where I am.
 She has let go, hesitated in the air. She has yet to exhale.
 Her body hangs over a matrix of chaos and desolation.

She is not lost, but falling like Eve into the Big Apple.
 Each year takes a minute, each week a singing second:
 Her body hangs over a matrix of chaos, as she topples
 Downwards, too fast for those below to comprehend.

In the air, a moment can take on the time centuries span.
 She falls through former selves above a thousand heads.
 No one looks up. No one looks towards the bright sedan:
 Within a handful of time, it will be her crumpled bed.

She falls, self by self, over a crowd of a thousand heads.
 Failing always at physics, this falling is her punishment:
 In seconds, her crumpled body will lie in its metal bed
 Where she shall sleep, no matter what the prophet meant.

Physics having failed her, she falls at the speed of night.
 She is spinning through childhood on a taut yo-yo string
 Aching for God, and some sleep. She is alone alright:
 The playground, the pool. She is the one with no wings.

She spins through a childhood and the cool New York
Night, clutching an orchid in her white-gloved hand.
Wingless, she is tumbling through twenty-three years
Of astonishing despair. She is the Angel of Manhattan.

Clutching an orchid, she flies through the rhyme We All
Fall Down and cannot get up (the pool, the playground).
She is often astonished at the depth of despair in her soul:
Still she tries to find God, endeavours to never look down.

She is falling down, and cannot get up. It is the rhyme.
Her descent through adolescence with its paintbox of blood
Is final. She leaves her life and her longing for God behind.
If not this flight, then what in heaven can make her good?

She descends through adolescence, obsessed with its paints
And its blood. It feels always like falling (she never flew).
Nothing on earth can make her good, for she is tainted.
See, a stocking is down, she has already lost both her shoes.

Moments are made to be flown through: you climb, and
If you have the courage, leap. She knows this much is true.
Shoes gone, stocking down, orchid clutched in left hand
She hisses by on a seam of light only darkness could pursue.

If you have the courage, leap, the prophet may have said.
Clinging to life like a leaf in the suburbs, she never took
The plunge. But now, how she sings on that hissing thread!
How bright and thin the sound of her whistling rebuke!

She clings like a leaf to the life she never took to, falls
Towards womanhood where things start to look black.
The whistle of her descent becomes a God-awful squall:
In these final few feet, she knows there is no going back.

It is during womanhood that blacknesses start to appear.
Lay your hands upon me: can you feel my broken heart?
There is no going anywhere in these final falling years
No rehearsal, no second chance. This is the lonely part.

A broken heart can make a woman climb, and catapult.
(She flashes on being caught in her father's open arms.)
There is no rehearsal, no second chance, no way to halt
This lunge. She was always going to come to harm.

She falls into her father's arms from various heights:
This was the light that held her darknesses from her.
Now, as she plunges, she invites the harm of night.
Into the smog and the New York noise she is hurled.

Out of the darkness, she blurs into light for a moment.
No one has time to point or scream at the miraculous
Sight. The streetlights and smog receive an angel sent
From the Empire Deck. Those above are still oblivious.

And then the car. No one has time to point or scream:
The word Forgive is already forming on thickening lips
As she curls into metal, perfectly. The Empire is a dream
She always had. She was contracted to climb to the tip.

Her lipsticked mouth is locked around a word, Forgive.
Yes, depression is holy. (Another soul has just been called.)
The orchid is a contract she clutches in one hand: To live
You must climb to the very top, for it is a very long fall.

DĪPTI SARAVANAMUTTU

b 1960 Sri Lanka; arrived in Sydney in 1972. She later taught at a university college in London, and is currently a postgraduate student of Australian poetry in Melbourne. Language of the Icons.

Anatolian Sonata

Finally to England, where you get
dive-bombed by the relative's
television.
You start to feel like a bird,
whose personality and plumage get
darker as it matures;
leaving your heart open,
still traversing some dry, almost barren
landscape, where the fruit shocks you
with complete and unpredictable sweetness.

Somewhere in a life full of music
you wiped out your possessions.
Refusing any livable
compromise, now face life as abstract
as contours on a map or the view
from an aeroplane.
Back home,
even your silence had been
filled with just her voice,
shaking your (speaking) body
with the clarity of recognition.

While travelling alone
in Turkey, your paranoias multiply
faster than Romeos at the bus depot,

until the trip by sea from Trabzon
to Istanbul, when you're elated to find
that you're sailing to Byzantium
again –

and that even captivity,
post the catharsis of travel,
may afford us a song.
Seagulls on the Sea of Marmara
look wasted and happy,
drunk on turquoise water
beyond the debris of the inland shore.

Looming over frailer craft like your
projections for the coming northern winter,
Turkish warships patrol the Dardanelles.

Double Vision

She shoots past without looking at me, in a black shirt
and sunglasses, looking like somebody's hit-man, probably
mine. Today she thinks 'I am not interested in your political,
familial, literary and renunciatory obsessions.'
Only she can't stop, because I'm dying to spit 'What the
fuck are you talking about?' I've always suspected her of
not believing anything she can't say. She wants to say '... or
in being further transfixed in your poems.' But she's not
going to indicate that poetry may be capable of anything,
least of all resistance. She's driven to success almost
incidentally, but definitely driven. She thinks that I should
stop confusing my body with hers, and I agree, soberly.

Talk of Angels

Yeats' wild swans stare into space
their heads are the shape of desire
and the shards of the end of desire.
And I'm still touched by the absurd
speed of your chemistry, and
I want you to come here
before my perspective smashes, and I long
to complicate all simple things
by wanting them with you.

And I consider the proposal, that
repressed attraction feels as destructive
to the person attracting it, as
thalidomide, and totally not

anyone's idea of fun.
Especially you
who flow in some other direction
from what it takes to be saintly.

But it's what those swans are there for –
they daydream so much
that their days are full
of retrospective meaning. Thinking these
and other things I start to feel
like the Moghul painters who discovered perspective
but not depth. Poets,
you've probably heard
are an incestuous tribe,
conferring recognition by the literal
laying on of hands.

On the sort of day
when metaphors follow you around
and especially drop into your conversations,
it's like a revelation
that Irigaray's work on ethical passion
stumbles on that possibility
(regardless of gender)
about doing it like an Angel;
and shaping all of this into a gesture
as the world turns.

Monday

It's early spring. Reading all of Proust
through winter nights, turning room and covered light
into an earthly kingdom resplendent with images
of that remembered world. Not sure if I was always so
or invent a life, spinning on –
not minding what the day was chasing
for itself, so far over the fence. By afternoon
the rooms of sleep
become a solitude without names;
until the alarm-clock that apportions day from night
sounds synthetic bird-notes
into the clear blue light against a window.
China curls up on my chest as I sip tea, her oval eyes
are two green grapes
waiting for summer.

CATHERINE BATESON

b 1960 Sydney. She grew up in Brisbane, moved to Melbourne in 1985, and now lives in Kyneton, where she supports her poetry by writing verse novels for young adults. The Vigilant Heart.

On Ward Seven West

There was a shadow-thin Arunta man who jiggled from foot
to foot as though his movements
could keep the metronome of his son's heart ticking.
On father's day, he was born. First time.
Hours later I'm on a plane. First time.
I've never been away before.
His wife, seventeen, stands behind him
her restless eyes track around the ward
and milk leaks uselessly over her shirt.
Across the ward a man sits all day murmuring
while his wife whirlwinds in and out, thinner each time.
She brings coffee, apples, books. Can't stop, can't stay.
I saw her sitting in the playground
her face jutting out like a ship's figurehead, totally still
but for the tugging, tugging of her hands in her hair.
All around her fine hairs spun wildly in the sunshine.
The dentist from Albury patiently smocks in the Parents' room,
trapping perfect red hearts in a web of stitchery.
There's a couple who fight out loud.
He drinks. She sleeps around.
We know the story. We make them cups of tea.
It could be us. It might yet;
There is no certain prognosis.
The heart, we learn, is a mystical organ,
capable of strange reversals.
We're lulled into a routine of sorts;
shop for fruit at the market,
take visitors to the 7Eleven for cappuccinos,
walk up and down the stairs for exercise.
We forget the room waiting at home;
the flowers beginning to smell,
the swinging mobile,
the small things folded in a drawer.
Later, sorting clothes for another birth
I sit on the floor and can't stop crying
not for us now wearing the strains of any happy family –
but for me then –
for us all who have spat in death's eye
telling our birth stories.

Learning to Swim

Every time we touched each other, we left a fingerprint of sweat,
the grass died back, the hens stopped laying,
and on the fig tree outside my bedroom the figs ripened.
That summer we read girlie magazines spilling beer
on my white sheets and over the pages of *Penthouse*.
His big body was pale as parsnip, black hairs sprouted
in unlikely places but his hands were like talc and
I loved his unhappiness, his migraines.

I'd always had boys before, stumbling through their paces
lights off and everything, even their knees, strange in the dark.
This was so different, like learning to swim
after years of walking your hands in the shallows
fooling nobody.

Look, now I can backstroke and butterfly,
I can dive from the high tower.
He opened me like an oyster,
like an artichoke. I was brine and undertow when he broke
over me, his hands full of music, each finger
singing a note purer than sainthood.

I swaggered into the year wearing that song
never again so unknowing,
never again so electric.

ADAM AITKEN

b 1960 London, of Thai and Australian parents. He grew up in Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Perth and Sydney, where he is now based. Romeo and Juliet in Subtitles.

The Corrosive Littoral

A colonial Android inspector reports in his star-fleet journal:
the lack of lawns, but the footprint on the sand reveals potential
for civilisation. That night he dreams:
the sea infested with armour plated fish
hydrogen and classic figures;
he follows the tracks to a tanned youth.
How his eye drowns, unrequited, embarrassed by such richness.
Lacking the word for desire he whistles up a symphony instead:
two gods meet in a private and very quiet time warp.

In the star-ship manual the corrosive littoral is a meeting
of skin and anti-matter (extremist tides and solar winds).

The inspector predicts the resultant explosion
 will consume everything
 before help can arrive. This is perhaps
 overly pessimistic. With the aid of a star-ship ephemeris
 and the rarely used Warp 6 formula
 we can bring back that moment of shared phosphorescence
 or a green country buried under towns.
 Isolate satyrs fallen from their pedestals of sand
 are graceful in their rusty robes, on all fours
 and hungry for mutton bird and herbal medicines
 ever present in the long
 wild grass of their planetary history.
 Their knowledge
 is useful, but to include them in the Galaxy Confederation
 will bring down rational thought.
 Perhaps the inspector is moving beyond
 the scope of his own observations, and cannot be
 assumed 100 percent correct to the eighth decimal.
 Now that human love has seduced him, his reports
 will never be the same.

Changi

Real orchid forest in Terminal 2
 where gypsies rest, fazed
 by taped bird-song. Unpack, repack
 those dreams that don't need sleep.
 On my Nintendo
 Super Mario up to his tricks again
 bouncing over cities, stretching
 bandwidth, island-hopping the crevasse
 of urban decay.
 Programmed for 'invincible'.
 On the X-ray my collection
 of South East Asian coins,
 more useless by the hour.
 A metal detector singing jingles.
 I leave a message
 via credit card phone, my own
 message-machine voice
 feeding back like hydroponics.
 Visit my own web-site
 at the Internet village,
 terminalled to coffee and cyberspace,
 jacked in to Borneo.
 Two teenage attendants flirting
 dressed in New Raffles White,
 the colour for angels at a funeral

for nurses or lab attendants.
 White noise, nothing's as it was,
 as it seems, except – my email:
 'I promise to come home, darling
 please believe me.'
 Midnight in Singapore.
 The perfect transit lounge
 unpacks, repacks. I find myself
 craving some obsolete science,
 archeology perhaps:
 a litter bin overflowing with poems,
 alive, odourless as these orchids,
 close and colourful as your face on a VDU.
 The birds, extinct, full throated, unseen
 imagine themselves a forest
 circled by jets.
 Their song glorious, their makers dead.

PHILIP HODGINS

1959–95. Born near Shepparton, he grew up on a dairy farm and later worked in Melbourne in book publishing. From his mid-twenties he was under treatment for leukaemia. *New Selected Poems*.

Little Elegies

For children lost in accidents on farms
 it's that much further for their parents' love.

Their grief, receding closer to their child,
 begins with time and place, and random cause.

The fatal tractor grumbles down a lane
 just like it did before the sway-bar slipped;

the shotgun leans off-duty in the shed,
 its bright red cartridges like fallen fruit;

the dully sliding channel looks unmoved
 by drama at the culvert yesterday;

and where the tiger-snake was killed too late
 some tidy ants are picking meat from bones.

For those two people living with this death
 the silent meals, the nights of lying still

are like it always is when they're apart.
At any time it seems that one of them

has stopped half-way through packing little clothes
into a box and stands there loose with tears

while in a distant paddock in the heat
the other one is shovelling out a drain,

becoming more and more obsessed with work:
as though they might as well have never met.

Melbourne Heatwave

Looking straight down from that stone and iron bridge
whose foundations are cushioned into the deep mud
by beds of wool bales from the glory days of sheep
the water is slate-coloured, dense but lively
with its light cargo of occasional soft-drink cans,
bright plastic straws, leaves and the neater leaves
of public transport tickets, and its quickly changing
illegible Arabic-shaped script written in sunlight.
Suddenly a coxless four pierces the cut-off line
like an enlarged but nimble water-surface insect,
surging with each perfect pull of the parallel oars
along the centre of the transformed old river.
The shirtless men have skin almost the same colour
as the boat's wood, and all merge into one entity
so you can't tell if they are rowing or being rowed.
Their oars are dipped with dark green at the flared ends.
They shovel humped water, tilting and jiggling light,
each one turning neatly at the end of its cycle
like a stiff-handed signal from a traffic cop.
The sky is tainted pale with the massive smoke
of bushfires out of control an hour north of here
in the Mount Disappointment State Forest and beyond.
It smells of smoke and wood-ash, nothing else,
but I know that there are houses in there too,
dozens of them gone yesterday and last night
along with their dreams of living in the bush.
I try to imagine what the cities of the future
will smell like when they burn: all those gadgets
flaring and melting into the most dreadful fumes.
A gust out of nowhere flings a plastic shopping bag
into a traffic-light post in a hopeless embrace.
The hot wind reminds me of Rome, the sirocco.
Somewhere among the Roman poets I'd been told
that it brings with it the smell of Africa,

of simooms blasting through the ruins of Carthage.
I had even stopped in the crowded Piazza del Popolo
and optimistically sniffed the summer afternoon breeze
as if there might be some truth in what a poet said.
Another time I stood for hours on the bridge
where Christ broke free of the pack of cults.
There was a drought in Italy and the tawny river
was right down and hardly seemed to flow at all.
It stank like the lane at the back of a restaurant.
You wouldn't have guessed that in Horace's *Odes*
this was a vengeful mass flooding the proud capital.
I talked for a while with an old man beside me
and while we stared into the putrid Tiber
he told me how, not far from here, his son-in-law
had saved a drunken woman who'd fallen in
but that (and here the old man crossed himself)
the poor boy swallowed some of that foul muck
and came down with a terrible disease and died.

Blood Connexions

'Is that an Ulster accent I detect?'
I'm lying on the trolley like a specimen
beside the leucophoresis machine.
The nurse regards me for a moment then
answers cautiously, 'Yes, that's correct.'
I tell her I'm Australian though my genes,
or most of them, originate from there
and she tells me how long she's been out here.
The red lights on the panel flash as if
it's not long till a bomb somewhere goes off.
She takes a lumen and my catheter
then pushes slowly so the lines connect
and saline comes to me from the machine.
We trade the names of Northern Irish towns
and find our mothers' home towns are the same:
so while she works on me I chat with her
around the edges of a heritage.
I tell her how my parents came out here
by ship in fifty-one and that my father
still gets his home-town paper by airmail
and knows the goings-on in Joycean detail.
The nurse unpacks a needle and a line.
'We're probably related,' she almost jokes,
but wary of which side I'm on she looks
me in the eye, just momentarily,
a look that asks, 'Are your folks killing mine?'
The tourniquet is tightened to a grip

and veins rise up in long soft flexed protest.
 I watch the needle hovering over me.
 It's big. It goes in slowly and it hurts.
 I watch the blood run through the line. It's fast.
 The machine begins to pump. The pain gets worse.
 I think of saying something but the vein bursts.
 Inside my elbow it begins to spasm blue.
 The machine shuts down and switches on a light.
 The needle is withdrawn, the site bound tight.
 The muscles in my arm begin to spasm too.
 And then the blind convulsions spread
 all through my body, carried there by blood.
 The nurse tells me the name of this reaction
 and fills a big syringe with valium,
 undoes my catheter, makes a new connexion
 and pushes in the calming drug. 'No harm,'
 she says, in the accent of my childhood home,
 and goes around to try the other arm.

ANDY KISSANE

b 1959 Melbourne; moved to Sydney in 1987. He has worked in community housing, and as an audio-books producer and magazine editor. Every Night They Dance.

Breast Triptych

My Mother's Light

I knew your breasts as only a baby can,
 as my brothers before me and after me
 knew them – warm skin, the scent of milk
 forming a blue dome over us, squeezing
 and sucking your nipple as if that was life.

When you found the first lump, buried
 like the black pebble at the heart
 of a golf ball, you passed over
 into that other light – operating theatres,
 a scalpel, the ache under your arm that will

never go away. What did I ever say to comfort
 you? I suppose I could have mentioned the mint
 that would not die, springing from the crack
 between the garage wall and the concrete
 and still there after five years, after ten,

after twenty. I only thought of it tonight,
 eating the roast lamb you cooked, pouring
 mint sauce over crisp potatoes. You know
 the statistics, the jargon – metastasis,
 carcinoma, tamoxifen – words I learnt

from a book in a library. 'Everything
 will be different in the light of the morning'
 you used to say and you live in that light
 now, I see the tip of it, pink and glowing,
 there, below the fold of your blouse.

Fanny Burney's Mastectomy, 1811

After my maid and one of my nurses fled,
 I gathered up my reason and approached
 the men. They stood around two mattresses,

covered by an old sheet. I lay down
 and Dubois spread a linen handkerchief
 over my face. I refused to be held,

but when, bright through the cambric,
 I saw the glitter of polished steel,
 I closed my eyes. I imagine they took

their orders by signs and made
 their examination. I did not breathe.
 Dubois tried vainly to find my pulse,

until Larrey said in a voice of solemn
 melancholy, '*Qui me tiendra ce sein?*'
 No-one answered, though Dubois held his hand

over me, drawing a line from top to bottom,
 then a cross and finally a circle, indicating
 the whole was to be taken off. I started,

threw back my veil and cried 'I will,
 sir,' holding my hand under my breast.
 I explained the nature of my suffering

which sprang from one point and darted
 into every part. They listened in silence,
 then Dubois replaced the veil. Again

I saw the fatal finger make the cross
 and the circle. Hopeless, desperate, sadly
 resigned, I turned my head and waited.

I cannot describe it, my dear Esther –
eyes so firmly closed that the lids dented
my cheeks, the knife raking the breast bone,

scraping. When the dreadful steel cut into me
I screamed – for all of the incision.
I almost marvel that I cannot hear it still.

No Ending

When the phone call brought the news
we made love. If it is true, if the dead
do walk the earth for a day or two
before they leave this world, then perhaps

you were with us, your legs dangling
over the edge of the wardrobe, your arms
sweeping back the curtain to let
in the evening – an accelerating car,

the birds squawking in the camphor laurel,
the street five floors below. This poem
was written after words looped
through the air above parched fields,

over grazing sheep, beside the road
from city to city. This poem followed sex,
two bodies trying to forget the sound
of three pips and a familiar voice.

Later, cycling by the river, I watched
the golden beam of light spill out
in front of me the way the cancer spread
through your body – breast, bones,

lungs, liver – the calcium levels rising
in your blood. Arched over the handlebars
I pushed down and pushed down on the pedals,
the light constant – always before me

Fanny Burney was an English novelist and contemporary of Jane Austen. At the age of 59 she survived a mastectomy of her right breast, without anaesthetic. She lived for another thirty years after the operation.

Pelicans, Night Fishing

I came upon them suddenly, on a bend of the Cooks River
where the mangroves are growing back,
their salt crusted leaves hiding the ugly concrete
embankment they built in the thirties. I came upon them
swimming in formation, like the fast break offence
we practised and practised at basketball training
in order to spread the defence and create
an easy shot under the basket. And as if drilled too,
the front pelicans pivoted against the current,
forming a tight circle, five pelicans facing each other,
their white wings ghosting the dark water
and as crisply as the pass sails to the open man
and the ball banks off the backboard and swishes
into the net, the pelicans dipped their heads,
mandibles drooping to scoop up fish
and then the lead pair swivelled and they swam on,
holding their line before closing again for the kill.
I slowed my bike until my pace measured theirs,
the night air biting at my neck and lips,
the winter moon hovering between the abandoned
Sugar Mill and the sandstone cliffs of Earlwood
and I watched them feed as if I was watching
something private and sacred. But the feeling
that bubbled up, that marvelled up in my chest
was a human one – it was the joy of a boy
out beyond the foul line, taking two bounces and leaping
and knowing as soon as my wrist flicked and the ball
left my cupped fingers that the jump shot was good.

LIONEL G. FOGARTY

b 1959 on Wakka Wakka land in south-east Queensland. An activist in Aboriginal rights and culture, he is based in Brisbane. New and Selected Poems.

Just Woke Up

I am waiting for friends to come and the Bus came.
I have immense silence here in my land
I watch SBS and ABC if there's anything on blacks.
I go walking up the gulleys of white properties
When we find a spot to sit and fish, white man says
move on.
I have ten acres of just dirt no flower, plants, trees,
a cow donkey and one miggrou horses ... koala roos
passing by.

Five dogs one duck and I'm gonna get more with my
 next cheque
 I put our blackfella flag up high in a tree out front,
 but miggrou came and took it down
 I am alone but surrounded with peoples in the
 skies clouded.
 Happiness rest in the fires I make out back.
 I worry dat yesterday I didn't write a poem for them
 Murris. And I hear today a Uncle is coming to teach
 the jarjums more corroboree, but this uncle is a
 believer of jesus bible thing from jews
 So I don't know how to sing dance dat old black
 magic cultures.
 I just have a drink and smoke and if clean up not
 done the swearing wife come out yelling or throwing
 hints. I was born in another tribal country but
 I'm living here with the love spirits of this disappeared
 tribe.
 Here I am immense in silence yet I'm still wilder in
 mind I am your writer FRIEND.

miggrou: white people; jarjums: children

Frisky Poem and Risky

Regarding respects I'm fully
 purchased within my own
 exchanges
 Please give my regards to our
 God down and above
 I would also like more spirits
 so the list can be send
 Before receiving your hearing
 I had to write to a conference
 Sincerely I'm yours against
 all evil co-ordinators
 I decided from myself stems
 a meaning and a creation
 The prices I payed in every
 eye ear and tongue will
 wish they gave the correct addresses
 My project have been pulsed
 by blacks, and repriced
 rejected too personally politically
 This document I place, will be
 the birth shown
 A division by me is true

of knowledge in poetry
 I've got history information
 My date rave into sane real
 I am amended then lended
 Are you prepared for the
 Nee Nee who died
 I anticipated my pissed mind
 I wish to withdraw all
 my poems from the
 building and put in the
 open spaces.
 As for gardens of me growing
 out to another country
 I may do honestly
 My heart ain't pure love
 My brain ain't poison daze
 Ngunda Bimia spoke the message.
 All I did was draw this.
 All I did was pass on
 But one thing they gave me
 is my own selfing self.

Ngunda: messenger of God (gloss from New and Selected Poems)

Am I

Am we lonely these days
 Am I grief in the wind
 Am us friend to nature
 well hooked me up and
 we'll fish
 The dreamed dreams are
 opened for wishes to come to life
 Am you hurt
 Am you to see me
 We am and dem gonna
 sleep and dreams of my people
 There all alone in the mind
 Murri stranger came to me
 and said, Am I the one outside
 you all getting spiritfully
 When sun shines in the rains
 we find summer here sooner
 Treat my mother with a career
 Treat conscience with rotten
 education
 Women are allowing bodies to

be taken
 At last moment of life
 Love even nobly came
 against my skin
 I heard a roo cry
 Am I hearing attendants
 to my hearts
 Am we lovin' in these days
 Am I sadden these nights
 Forever it possess you man
 something must tell
 Am I me or you am us.

LAUREN WILLIAMS

b 1958. She lives in Melbourne, where for many years she has supported her poetry with part-time typing work and intermittently as a singer of rhythm-and-blues. Invisible Tattoos.

Seeing Elle Macpherson

After 18 hours of unsuccessful meditation
 in one position (Western, 'The Traveller')
 L.A. International Airport is a polite giant
 high security detention and transfer centre
 and a relief
 My face in the ladies' room mirror
 is an aerial view of a finely shattered desert
 with small pink ranges of incipient volcanic activity
 My hair is seaweed abandoned on a rock
 My ankles could be hooked up
 in a delicatessen window

I return to the transit lounge
 Prop like another bag on the bench
 Hear the *Yo!* of television
 direct from the mouths of the natives
 At a nearby gate – flashbulbs
 the small, hushed super nova of fame
 and all eyes prepare
 to exact celebrity tax

It's Elle Macpherson
 smiling from the chariot of her perfection
 She draws nigh somewhere
 between too fast and too slow
 between forced and natural radiance
 between modesty and false modesty
 between cool and chill

She gets away with it
 Luck is being born with the means of production
 Capitalism is making it earn –
 hair like one glossy animal
 the honeyed skin of her face
 matching the honeyed skin of her neck
 matching the honeyed skin of her hands
 matching the honeyed skin of her ankles
 the cut of the cream jacket and matching
 mid-calf pants hugging her
 like beautiful insurance
Elle! Elle! I almost call
I'm Australian too!

She sails past in a small cage
 of recognition and freakdom watched
 by the life forms of a brutish planet
 She carries nothing
 Her companion pushes a luggage trolley
 His grey suit exudes wealth
 extrudes a small grey skull with thin grey lips
 Elle bends down
 to catch their murmured comment

I find my planet again
 in the humid industry of the ladies' room –
 the hoarse moan of hand dryers
 the universal amoeba of wet tissues
 the busy mirror of ordinary women
 colouring-in the human.

Finally

We are at that place
 where clothes masks wit
 leave in a rush the last guests
 at a tense and glittering ball
 The room grows small
 fills with the half-light of dream
 and the solid milk of private skin

Faces naked with concentration
 searching within and through each other
 for some believed-in destination
 searching with the bravado of travellers
 who've been lost before
 searching with the urgency of whispers
 closing in on treasure

a perfection that all our skill
 can make no less a gift a surprise
 The all of me curved into the warm vine of you
 and we are stilled
 by the inarticulate gratitude of our senses
 the fall into grace

We worship at its night-long fire
 in our sleep like cats
 the story of our bodies condensing
 into a series of vignettes
 that go deep into the house of memory
 like rightful owners there to ring
 the bells that call the servants
 so eager to serve they answer
 with soft moans.

MARK REID

b 1958 Brisbane; grew up in Sydney. Since the mid-1980s he has lived in Perth, where he works as a patient-care assistant. Parochial.

Johnno

Swears incessantly
 in his stroke victim slur –
 fuckin this & fuckin that –
 or laments a lost wife,
 howls her name, curses his own,

says he's been bad,
 a bad fuckin man,
 calls us cunts then apologises,
 can't fuckin help it.

Night shift can't quiet him
 so he's wheeled into the games room
 to curse the pianola.

At breakfast he has his own
 little table in the corridor
 where he's tied to the chair.

Asked why no cunt likes him I say
 'because you call them cunts' –
 he tells me I'm alright,
 a good cunt.

Morning shift he's strapped in bed,
 madly rattling the cot-rails,
 says

*hey cunt
 can yer stop me fuckin doin this?*

The Mercy of Things

She makes strange cargo,
 her unmanageable bulk
 harnessed & slung
 from the hoist's long arm,
 me turning slowly
 the handle of this device,
 its ratchet tick-tick-ticking
 like an instrument of torture,
 the tightening straps
 taking the strain,
 she emitting
 a small gasp
 as she lifts incrementally
 away from the bed,
 is swung ineffably
 through space &
 positioned
 carefully above the commode.

To Landor's Memory

Not for the view
 for the view is blind to you –
 the garbled silver rooftops
 spilling into the sea, the tall crops
 of masts that mark the yacht club's tenure –
 but still you sit out
 on the west ward verandah.
 Whether it be thought
 in which you're absorbed
 or if merely a nap,
 the weight of it draws
 your face toppling forwards
 to the blanketed pool of your lap.
 My shut-eyed seer,
 may the spokes of this wheelchair
 be musical strings,

its handle-grips remnant wings.
 No muse nor her mother
 shakes now your shoulder;
 it is me, as pictured
 on my clip-tag ID,
 who wakes you (such as
 waking is) & with the
 squinting evening
 squinting thinner,
 wheels you quietly
 in for dinner.

'Memory': title of a poem by Walter Savage Landor, 1775–1864

MARCELLA POLAIN

b 1958 Singapore, to Armenian and Irish parents; arrived in Perth in 1960, where she has taught creative writing at universities since the mid-1990s. Each Clear Night.

kondinin 1964

these roads are the longest i have ever seen
 way ahead this blue one trembles in the sun as if it knows something
 i wait for us to hit the water it promises
 for the tyres to swish through
 for it to steam off the body of dad's beetle in the sun as if it were
 a train rushing across a country they're afraid of
 i've seen a train on the littlest hobo
 this is the first time we've been anywhere but mum says we came on a boat
 and she was scared and she can't buy coffee here and she can't swim
 and the shops are always closed

in the front she feeds a baby in a small white shawl
 sometimes I stand up & look over at the baby
 it has a red face and sticking up black hair
 my brother sleeps in the back with his mouth open & his closed-in sandals
 flung out from his feet along the red shiny seat
 all the windows are open
 the wind is so loud nobody speaks
 i sit in the space between the backseat & the window
 i have a day old chick
 i push it into a matchbox to sleep
 it's hot but the view is good so i keep watch
 i don't see any trains or aborigines with spears
 sometimes there are kangaroos on the side of the road with their legs

sticking up sometimes when we pass them you can see inside them for a
 second
 i say look but nobody does

when we get there the house is dark inside & cool
 i open the matchbox
 the chick is dead
 i lie on the red shiny lino
 i put it in a hole in the garden
 i feed a joey on the back lawn with a bottle
 i test it on my wrist the way mum does
 it's watery and blue like the skin is there
 there are so many flowers & vegetables outside that i can't work out where
 i am
 there are horses across the road
 when they shake their heads & snort dust flies off them
 mum says stand back they might hurt you

postcards from spain

i hold your postcards careful as a pack of lies
 & i see that you are living amongst ponderous exteriors
 that yearly miles of wall erupt with scarlet bougainvillea
 i am learning the geography of flowers
 & you teach me like a bird mother
 that plazas can be orange groves with
 wide & tangerine umbrellas sprouting prehistoric between trees
 that dense purple flowers fringe your buildings
 like an outsized tablecloth
 that valley drops like gasp
 like god stepped there & all the earth just rushed away
 & that on every side cliffs retain this
 utter as a fingerprint
 clear as the image of your face that light
 minute by minute certain & invisible
 deepens like a mouth

in answer to your questions:
 i am looking for you everywhere
 studying the handstitched shape of each rosette
 it takes to make a skirt for small & dark-eyed girls
 the dusty slant of donkey rump
 the strands of faded braid laid there
 the face of a boy told to sit
 to turn this way
 or that
 for me

your hungry chick
open-mouthed
to kiss

writer's subject

forgive my paradox
of course it should be so:
step through my door
my myths my skin
(each cell bloody with memory)
as if my birth is not
a miraculous random act

let me steep rose petals for you
halve eggplants set yogurt in a cloth
& swing it in a window
let me teach you how to dance
& read you poetry by Tekeyan
let me take you to my mother
bring your questions your curiosity
watch her creased brown hands
work frantic at the patterns in her tablecloth
watch her eyes meet yours
full & brilliant
with the most appalling courage

come bright postmodernist
we are your writer's subject
claim our borders as your own
for what is truth?
you are our turk
exile us again
again
we will march for generations into mesopotamia
our family shod like horses
& let loose

SARAH DAY

b 1958 England; arrived in Hobart in the early 1960s and grew up there. She has taught English and writing at senior level in Hobart. Quickening.

The Wheel

It all began with the wheel,
dispassion cast in that first axle
that would one day outstrip
the most dogged footprint.
Inevitable, that the rider in the chariot
advance, and the seedsower, pedlar, tramp,
looking up, see one who, passing in a cloud
of dust or rut flinging clod of bog,
revile them as obsolete
or pass on, future-blinded;
day's craving for the new as yet unmet.

Think of the first handcart as petit bourgeois
precurring the observer in history –
the eye behind the lens, the window
of a moving car, aircraft,
from which all land, lives, drop away.

We have travelled so fast.
Once, news was local;
celluloid strips and artifacts of the exotic
described the world abroad.
But they were curios from beyond
the outposts of imagining,
visions from Mars.

A jet plane, a bird's eye view
or God's, of the slums of Bombay,
coffee, the *Herald Tribune*,
music to slow the breath for descent
and you might observe corrugations
in the black tin roofs and scrawny children
gathered on a junk heap.

From a wine cellar turned hide-out,
a woman addresses me in my lounge room,
she speaks in the quiet tones of the condemned.
A cellist, missing his orchestra, plays adagio
by candlelight to the demented.
There is something like calm
which I cannot understand
in the faces of the listeners
as the camera pans the balance of their lives.

This could be simulcast were it satellite technology –
 hearing words as they are spoken
 or the sniper as it hits. It's sexy,
 and these tears gratuitous.
 What is the point of looking
 when seeing is the most that can be done?
 The tiller in antiquity must have wondered,
 looking up from the hot earth
 at someone passing through
 the landscape he, she inhabited.

Navigator

Dusk obscures distance; fades in a ghost gum
 which in turn dissolves into shadow.
 A spinifex pigeon dashes into the night
 leaving just the close-up –
 desert grass stitched like lazy-daisy knots to ochre sand.

When like an hourglass
 it is all absorbed and the black
 has finally come through,
 darkness brings to light
 half a hemisphere of desert sky:

you, a newcomer no bigger than my thumbnail
 inhabiting this flat belly
 set your intricate course by the star map.
 Seeing you, the night sky offers all,
 a galaxy's imprinted on your tiny crown.

ANTHONY LAWRENCE

b 1957 Tamworth. He has worked in various manual and teaching occupations in NSW and WA, and is currently based in Hobart. New and Selected Poems.

The Boiling Head

1
 In the dispersing light
 of juvenile seabirds,
 a tuna with a ruptured air bladder
 turns side-on,
 its fin the moon of Islam
 as the boiling head
 loses three teeth and surfaces, bobbing
 like a bald statistic in the wash.

2
 Whatever breaks away from the boiling head
 underwater, at such a temperature
 – fat bubbles, skin, boneflake, vein –
 accelerates the cleansing of the head's origins.
 A hot skull is all you need to know
 of displacement.

3
 The steam-infected air over the boiling head
 returns as fine spray to the coast
 where you are eating earth
 for its restorative elements, the blood-bellows
 of your lungs mapped with twin,
 sideways-crowning bonsai elms.
 You stand, wraith-like on Diamond Point
 breathing spent slime,
 holding forth on the anemography
 of wonder and desire.

4
 If the boiling head turns
 anticlockwise, count the revolutions.
 One circle authenticates
 your involvement with the dead.
 Two circles render you faithless.
 Three circles:
 drain the water,
 open your lip, marvel
 at how blood finds purchase
 in the seams of a cooling skull.

5
 Whenever children gather
 to watch the boiling head,
 light follows the contours
 of a circle of small hands.
 When adults stand behind them,
 darkening at the edges,
 the boiling head turns twice,
 anticlockwise.
 Tall, departing mouths leak:
Close your eyes.
Leave the boiling head to its auguries.

6
 The boiling head is influential
 in all weathers.
 Have you seen,
 when cold fronts build

their horizontal towers in the South,
 how thunderclouds bloom
 head-like, as though the sky itself were boiling?

7

At the height of the nineteen
 ninety four fires,
 off Era Beach,
 side stroking through a rain
 of hissing sticks and leaves,
 a woman burned her hands
 when she mistook the boiling head
 for a child's flotation device.

8

Somewhere in the Dorriggo forest,
 a retired ranger awaits the dawn chorus,
 his head to one side
 as it was sixty years before
 when, out of respect and love,
 he pressed his ear to the wall
 as his mother sang
 a lament for the boiling head.

9

If you see the boiling head come apart,
 you will find, at the centre
 of a cage of bone splinters,
 your own heart
 oxygenated with equal
 measures of confusion and loss.

10

The boiling head has its acolytes:
 lapsed Creationists, survivors
 of crystal dolphin therapy.
 Someone should tell them
 before they top themselves
 there can only be one head
 boiling away for the world.

11

What lies under the boiling head?
 The sinuous properties of the neck, of course,
 like a severed telecommunications cable
 in the rain.

12

The boiling head won't listen, no matter
 how many times you tell it to shake

the cartilage from its ears.
 It's been listening to you for decades.
 Now, with the new millennium
 a change of water away,
 it wants to be left alone
 in the relative silence of creaking
 hotplate, spillage,
 saucepan-lid-rattle and steam.

13

On the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel,
 located between the folds
 of a green tunic and a row of breasts
 Michelangelo was ordered to conceal
 with a cloud,
 the boiling head,
 a peacock-blue halo like a faulty gas ring
 over its blistered crown.

Even the attendant angels seem amazed.

14

The day the boiling head was canonised,
 a woman in British Columbia,
 pruning Queen Anne roses
 with her fingernails, remembered
 the smell of green apples
 in boxes on a verandah in winter.
 So what, you say?

 Then consider
 the woman's arthritic hands
 like bird-eating spiders feigning death;
 her broken nose –
 a wad of blue putty, hastily arranged.

15

Fireworks, riverlights, the shell
 of a land-bound moon!
 The boiling head is turning.

16

The cuckoo's day-triggering
 vibrato and refrain.
 The pendulous swing
 of a lizard's tail, then the nightjar's
 dark-imitating cough.

The boiling head is ready.

JUDITH BEVERIDGE

b 1956 London; arrived in Sydney in 1960. She has worked there as a researcher, a library assistant and a teacher. Accidental Grace.

Yachts

They are the sound of teacups wheeled off,
of a woolly butt's littlest birds rattling
song-bottles in all its sun-tiered racks.

And if you can imagine brittle bells
fiddled with and shaken, if you can hear
a woman placing her earrings in a pearl

shell, if you can hear the chime from
a lacquered box at the gateway to a Palace,
if you can hear the feet of a bird on tin

shingles in the depth of an agate sky,
then you'll know too the sound of a latch
dropping shut, and you'll know the little

shovelfuls of laughter children scatter
on the grass. You'll know the call
of an oriole on a lakeside walk and how

rain drips from branch to branch in bushes
that have broken out in buds. And you
might even know, some evening when

the weather's calm, the sky still blue,
how a child drops a soup-spoon in a dish.
Or you might hear the bird, the one that

calls to whoever sits on the porch on
a summer's night and listens to the tripping
of bells from a bay, having already

struggled up a precipitous pass
and dared difficult, sultry questions
with their face open to the sea.

Maybe you only hear yourself stumble
up a staircase and drop your keys. Maybe
you only hear the sharp strike-notes

of bell-ringers announcing the passing
of another life, or hear your name on
the lips of sailors who sit with spray

on their fingers as they pull in the weights
and chip and chisel into the night.
Perhaps you hear your life winched in

under a dying sun. Or perhaps you hear
a child count stars in the water off a rickety
pier – despite clouds moving in, despite

gulls in the wind just off the masts.

The Dung Collector

Tarn Taran Rd, Amritsar

Each morning she wipes the sweat that runs
from under the red dupatta veiled across
her face and lifts another load with a gasp.
Soon, she'll sit with her stupas of dung
and hallow the flies. Soon, she'll pray
each stack into the day's chapatis;
each new vat of dung into a tureen of dahl
to stir above the evening smoke. And she'll
work another hour or two raking the unbaked
yet steaming dung from the mud.

I have seen heifers
given more freedom to wander the earth
than this woman who carries another load
to her wall then chants with the traffic.

She could almost be any
woman humming at a task – moving a ladle
through vichyssoise in a perfumed apartment
off a sunny boulevard; watching light
slip into a room like a spoon into ingredients
for hollandaise sauce while she contemplates
the arrival of guests, the early yellowing
of the alder leaves.

Clearly, though, this is not
about workmanship; not about having a thankful
heart in a beautiful place; not about
being a speck in the slurry of a rushing
Punjabi street, or about a woman who must
save herself by labour and prayers.

It's about a woman who
must live under the anus of a cow as if
it were her star; who must slap dozens of

discoloured moons onto the side of her house
for an orange sun to bake; who hears
the sighs of the world as her bracelets
slip up and down her arms like the songs
of insects in overflowing grass; about
a woman who bends to scoop dung into a dish
each morning with her arms and hands
and looks straight into my eyes.

Bahadour

The sun stamps shadows against the wall
and he's left one wheel of his bicycle
spinning. It is dusk, there are a few minutes

before he will be pedalling his wares
through the streets again. But now, nothing
is more important than this kite working

its way into the wobbly winter sky.
For the time he can live at the summit
of his head without a ticket, he is following

the kite through pastures of snow where
his father calls into the mountains for him,
where his mother weeps his farewell into

the carriages of a five-day train. You can
see so many boys out on the rooftops this
time of day, surrendering diamonds to the

thin blue air, putting their arms up, neither
in answer nor apprehension, but because
the day tenders them these coupons of release.

He does not think about the failing light,
nor of how his legs must mint so many steel
suns from a bicycle's wheels each day,

nor of how his life must drop like a token
through its appropriate slot; not even
of erecting whatever angles would break

the deal that transacted away his childhood –
not even of taking some fairness back
to Nepal, but only of how he can find

purchase in whatever minutes of dusk are left
to raise a diamond, to claim some share of
hope, some acre of sky within a hard-fisted

budget; and of how happy he is, yielding;
his arms up, equivalent now only to himself,
a last spoke within the denominations of light.

GIG RYAN

b 1956 Melbourne, moved to Sydney in 1978, returned to Melbourne in the early 1990s. As well as a poet, she is a songwriter and performer in a band. Pure and Applied.

Compass and Map

Gone are all the vines, hands, wells, sills of discontent
the aqua head slipping in its purple pool
Fed up with every network slub you come to like a cross
People are people. Take it or leave it.
And leave along the white atrocious vales
leaving judicial behind with its tin of promises
the pocked roads leading you from death to furnished death
where friends pull the font across to them
and unflock every arrow that contains your purpose

Weary and complacent sorrow drives you
to every passing straw. She floats on an exuberant lid of water
Beneath, the roots tug dense and introverted
Blindness drills me in its tub

His favours pull the globe he drenches What a greaser
and where I wrenched he spins
Plato rids me, waiting for the holy boats

that stir across black water
Jazz consoles with minuets
Baffling truth will raise you from his bed
I listen to the scathing drums
the toy wrapped in kid
and blast your travel and your voices on the black bay

3-Track

1
You pause from a track of petunias you're tied to
shickered and remorseful
after the full bell of his stringy mysticism

but it didn't exactly pinpoint how he sought rest
 in her cherub brow, and she also
 in his lack of matter, or why
 or what his feathered eyes see
 in a tumult, a bill, of old drugs
 You listen to the kids for a while instead
 saying Think on life
 but let's face it they're encumbrances,
 impotent drones, tram-catchers,
 waiting to be guided to a tip
 The scientist says we're born to wreck
 the sleek clouds and coals the moon rests in

2

Reflections twist the transport glass
 each face a deathly haze
 the skin trips off
 when him you held is ash and squawking air
 and his soft words you junked
 Talk finally arrests
 The cold tube of your life he pleaded like a rail
 Hope and despair argue grammar in your courtly head
 at breezing work
 At home bills sheet the floor

3

Voices raise the other flats
 His flat clinging reproach sulks at winter
 Wind channels through walls
 He unscrews his windows and cans flip
 bones of laughter their trammel voices
 in the galleon iced room
 His puff and breath mounts the stairs, emphysemic and collateral
 and huddles at the door
 while she berates the shining night
 Friends and lovers die
 You dived into the blowing tails of wheat
 Across the corridor, strings and forks and keys
 Curled in winter's rooms and hammer clock
 A phone unravels through the flats
 Friends twist back like screw into their days
 Couples aria abuse
 in the sad heats doubt and pity reign
 Tomorrow she waters plants
 when last night's knife and throng were spent

Venerdi santo

Green birds play on terrace weeds
 Shadows swipe the flat
 Keen on profit, shops stay open through the hours of agony
 Pigeons clack and echo in the eaves
 The shrieking water heater punches
 Cabinets of desires chase each painting's plight and gorge

I search through the black ditch while she talks
 The street sinks. Sun shines on lightness
 The old chill returns like a friend
 Go down through crypts and slabs
 Centuries fall away
 Above, small voices ring, coins fade

Day falls calmly down behind the thorn-crowned flats
 Spools of flowers my ring my sheet
 The dreams' confiding friends guide me to the source
 Loves fall like wax
 A gold hooded skeleton flails in marble sheets
 holding the only key in mocking bones
 in night's cracks

Electra to Orestes

(to a friend, leaving)

My friend, before we met I was in pain
 as one who loved me I could not requite
 and so pretended for some paltry gain
 of status, satire, end to cabled night,
 to return affection when faith had shone
 its last extinguished prick – then this was made –
 faithless sand he built an edifice on
 and I colluded, mired in false trade.
 Then recognition blasted into wit
 to apprehend what I had thought had died
 for true love souvenirs and now unfit
 to love, but now you prove me wrong who ride
 the ceaseless world, not injured but inured
 to former life. How have I since endured?

PETER ROSE

b 1955 Wangaratta, where he grew up. He worked as a medical bookseller, and later for a book publisher in Melbourne. In 2000 he moved to Adelaide. Donatello in Wangaratta.

Donatello in Wangaratta

It is a kind of speculative night,
 the room so close and populous,
 resonant with every rover in the town.
 A butcher who is all Adam's apple
 stammers for a joke. There's talk of
 stratagems and cakewalks; some triumph
 is intended or delayed. Dumb,
 I wake from a terrible gulping sleep,
 dreams of an antic pogrom,
 the goanna we hacked that afternoon
 and threw beheaded in a box.
 How we gathered in the dream and in the life –
 a posse of us, myself as scout,
 surprising it dozing on a fence;
 my father, too, awoken from untimely sleep,
 singled in the afternoon, but dutiful.
 Then we all looked up and saw,
 saw goanna flinching on a wall,
 beautiful as the tattooed Icarus
 with his methodical axe.
 Then sleep, sleep for sleep's sake,
 a chant of wasps around a bush
 and something leaking in its blood.
 Returned blinking to that room
 I chose the bonhomie of women,
 shades of Swan Street circling
 in a sugary alliance. One
 I recognize is bearing meringues,
 spectacular in their dollopery,
 hanging like perilous, illustrated towers.
 It must be night, or something obscurer,
 ill-defined, say five o'clock,
 the light beginning to wane
 and something toppling in the fire.
 Whose bored hand on the pianola,
 strumming not ivory but case?
 Whose handsome wrist drawing me
 to the isolating performance?
 Impatient of music, the pedal of tactics,
 childlike despite yourself,
 despite your height, your dark evidence,
 you finger my new red Caxton encyclopaedia,

perplexed at such a gift (for I am six),
 turn the page, a robe on enlightenment,
 reveal David gleaming, audacious,
 uniting us in his slim mimicry.
 And suddenly the room is alight,
 fired with its own brazen iconography,
 silencing and separating as it unites –
 hieroglyphics of blood,
 sprays of instinct on a wall –
 reshaped in its own tense and furtive imagery.

Greening

Let's not watch the main event,
 let's watch the people.
 There we shall be beautifully private,
 each lake with its own suicide,
 those grand disclosures
 aching on a beach.
 Your beauty is the last quotation,
 an available dark.
 In the forest, single lights flicker,
 day rapturously evokes night.
 Soon we shall descend
 into the public acre,
 a rhapsodist will forfeit
 his throne by the view.
 So let's postpone matter for a while:
 the ritual caper, an auspicious turn.

PETER KIRKPATRICK

b 1955 Sydney. He teaches literary studies at the university of Western Sydney, and has published books on Australian cultural history. Wish You Were Here.

The Mango Suckers

That first morning the mango suckers
 discovered their beloved fruit hung
 wonderfully untouched on trees in the main street.

The pubs were still shut so they set to work
 sucking those sweet-smelling breasts till their tongues
 turned yellow and the pubs opened. Next day

the town's mango bounty made even the shortest jaunt
a journey into Lotus Land which left strips
of lip-damp skin and seeds like flattened testes

sucked hairy by the highway, alongside cane toads
re-run over into templates of themselves.
But on the third day mangoes became the same

as all that had not been mangoes
two days ago. Meantime the sun had ripened
their own white skins to pink and gold, and couples

amongst them had begun sucking each other
under slow ceiling fans in the hot nights
as it rained – and dark leaves rustled

and bobbing branches rocked and shuddered
to deliver up their soft delicious bodies,
till they lay there like windfalls and like wood.

When they were home they'd maybe tell their friends
how good the swimming was if you could get out
to the reef, and about the heat, and the cane toads.

Tailing the Q

(Lake Wendouree, Ballarat)
for Peter and John

Begin with the transcendental and you'll end
in relationships: discussion is a circle
walked around the water of an idea
that curves upon the limitations of saying
world inside of world outside of world.

Joggers pass, re-pass, running their mystic circuits
while we remain pedestrian and prosaic,
stopping for a piss, to ride the swings,
or to be hissed at by protective swans
shepherding their cygnets with hooked necks.

Plato, Heidegger and Nietzsche blend imperceptibly
into stories of the Jewish ex-wife's family
who argued endlessly and made no sense
except to one another,
and accounts of a lost
scholarly domesticity in Washington,
and of the late morning dream
of holding a Rubens woman.
The Word, it seems, irretrievably is flesh.

If there's an argument that ends in *light*
maybe it's not a destination
but a continual beginning
as everyday as dawn, warm beds and daily papers;
a story that always gets retold, re-edited,
to wind up as the stuff of opera – Wagnerian or soap –
even while the breakfast cup is drunk,
the car is started, the train is boarded,
and the shapeless afternoon takes on a body
(your own).

Ideas bend into the meniscus of things,
into the shifting dialectic of ourselves
against the lake's peeled lead,
against a gilded wind blowing with the intermittent sun.
From where we walk our feet turn
serenely with the undulating ring of the horizon,
set in the east with Warrenheip and Buninyong,
those mountain stones almost as big as words.

But it's with cloud mass after cloud mass
that the afternoon spins on. Us with it.
Recycled joggers grimace as they fret about,
make sacrifices for the physical;
it's obvious our bodies are neglected kids.
As evidence, our circle trickles
into the tail of a Q into
the all important question: *ice cream?*

Returning, the white sunlit room waits like a filmset
for three lonely actors to enter, full of wonder.
Only the nude looking out of the window
and holding a steaming teacup is missing.

OUYANG YU

b 1955 Huangzhou, China; taught English at Wuhan university; came to Melbourne in 1991. He works as a translator, and is a research fellow at Deakin university. Songs of the Last Chinese Poet.

After Death, After Orgasm

1
living in australia is like
living after death
you hear all the outside happenings
totally unrelated to yourself:
cars roaring on distant hills

keep roaring every night
 until they are night itself
 houses remain so unattached
 each an island on its own
 swimming in a sea of streets
 books are the closest things
 cheek to cheek and back outwards
 showing square wooden faces
 so knowing and unknown
 to each other

that you feel once you hide yourself
 in a word and get in there
 you'll forever live
 knowing and unknown

2

after china is after orgasm
 you lie down on a plain as plain as australia
 your body emptied of seeds
 your root washed clean of its soil
 by space between
 you can actually touch all the orgasms before
 political scientific religious artistic metaphysical philosophical
 national international sur/real intellectual surgical etc
 without a second of arousal

after china
 after orgasms
 lie down
 forever
 on
 australia

Alien

i stand on this land
 that does not belong to me
 that does not belong to them either
 alone like the land itself
 alone like on a planet

i often tell myself to ignore those
 unwelcoming eyes
 unsmiling noses
 murderous cars
 resentful phones
 houses secretive houses

i don't care
 being alien
 i stand alone
 impervious to questions like
 when are you going home
 how do you like it here
 etc etc irrelevancies
 can you ask the land the planet the same questions?

to swap a question:
 do you know why a chinese
 deleted of any smile
 stands alone behind a window
 gazing into the distant future/past
 ignoring things passing by

your answer is simple:
 the bloody inscrutable chinese has no friends

JENNIFER HARRISON

b 1955 Sydney, where she grew up. She spent 1980-91 in Asia, Europe, New Zealand and the USA, and now practises as a psychiatrist in Melbourne. Dear B.

Michelangelo's Prisoners

The female nude should have
 two classical breasts
 rendered in marble, oil or words.
 How odd to hang on a gallery hook
 this one-breasted woman
 her mastectomised body
 her naked side, a pigeon's breast
 of ribs so flat they could be Jung's own
 archetype, a complimentary male-chest.

Dali admired eccentricity: the melting clock
 the eyeball-stalk in the sand . . .
 but he would hate the peasant rhyme in her eyes
 which longs for a woman's symmetry.
 What can a stitch do with the mind's flaw?
 It hits her in the baby's mouth
 peels the billboard off her sex
 and flattens the frothy dress.
 What can a stitch do with how good the knife feels?
 She will have no pedestal.
 She will look her father in the eye
 a clear gaze which travels into his

so that he remembers Florence
 where Michelangelo, the man
 left his prisoners unfinished
 to state with impossible perfection
 that it is not the anguish of the chiselled stone
 which matters.
 It is the standing-still which kills.

Cancer Poem

Stiletto heel-marks pepper the linoleum
 staccato blemishes
 through which no single animal can be tracked
 beneath the surgically white moon.
 In the ceiling where stars should be
 the ventilation holes are exact.
 The moth-eaten breast repels.
 I can understand the story is small
 but I have come to the house of white linen
 to the strangers luminous as mothers
 and need to find the significance here.
 It was a birth taking place.
 Absurd prayers which spoke to a god she forgot
 to the miracle of loaves and sardines
 to the expanse of bloody sand between nipples
 to the poisoned scalp and the androgynous
 line of wheelchairs gambling their gears.
 Words can't wait for a precise blade.
 Some scissors spill a glistening gut
 drench her in wine, cut up the lake
 with star-shapes and poignancies.
 All the shadows and angles need you to hear.
 Need no one. Need words that are
 shuffled for comfort, meanings that multiply
 defying the rudderless air.

Electra

I walk the dirt roads with my cousin.
 Boys whistle only at her
 but she wants me to walk with her all the time.
 She won't go alone to the beach or the shop.

Along Cudmirrah's paths and to the movies
 we walk arm in arm
 counting the whistles on all her fingers.
 I'd prefer to be talking with Moss

in his rattle-trap caravan
 about the ships big as black meadows
 which, all along the reef, tilt into silt.
 I tell Moss that a dog dreams

flat on his back
 flat, docile, but sharp in his bones.
 Sometimes I sleep like a drowned river,
 I say, and sometimes on a precipice

a falling into or away from.
 Sometimes I sleep like a one-eyed gull
 swooping from a clifftop down
 to submarine canyons of fish.

(I can't imagine how bored he was)
 but sometimes, I say, I dream
 flat on my back, as an animal does, and
 hundreds of kingfish swim in fertile pairs

gliding over wrecks where gold coins
 dance in the fists of statues
 and anchors rust in anonymous caverns.
These are the ballrooms where no rules dance

Moss says, and he calls me Electra.
 I tag alongside my cousin
 watching the Pointers, the surfing boys circle
 her urn-bright nipples, and dream of being older.

Model Home – With Stick Figure

The day's inflammations soothe into opal.
 Dusk settles against windows.
 Waves swirl around the struts of a pier.

She lowers the blinds – their brief clatter
 synthetic and grave, recalls the way an affair
 ends – each slat collapsing in sequence.

She leans back into oboe, against a white wall
 hung with squares, sets the sun with her thumb
 flicks on the stars, her larval Mars – all

her appliances, her uncluttered control,
 blades, micro-motors, her digits in thrall
 with the surface of touch . . . lunar

by now, the blank television screen
has the soft, dull glow of a woman lost
inside the silk of her home.

KEVIN HART

b 1954 London; arrived in Brisbane aged eleven and grew up there. He teaches comparative literature and literary theory at Monash university. Wicked Heat.

September Rain

I'm fine like this, just fine, as evening comes
Like some sad Blues turned on next door
Played low,

No one about, only
Streetlights ready to welcome it
And rain nestling up to them,
a rain I hadn't heard till now.

It's Ella Fitzgerald singing "The Blues are Brewin"
And so the rain comes down, bringing
The evening on its back,

And people quickening along the street,

The day's focus going everywhere.

It's fine, just fine, sitting in my room,
down at the back of the house,
My books at rest for the evening;

And prowling down the hall,
A good long smell of frying onion, meaning
I can stay here some more,
not putting the light on.

The rain now in a great passion about something,
And Ella getting hard to hear . . .

Outside, things riding on the surface of the past
And inside,
the taste of time upon my lips.

It's fine, just fine.

The Bird is Close

Half-dreaming and naked, I am laying dresses over my left arm
While night blows through our bedroom window:
Here are the easy florals of summer

And here a velvet gown whose crimson folds I love . . .
How strange a thing in the wee hours
When the only sound is a flutter of a bird's wings

And that heard just the once.

A whisper of feathers in a wardrobe near an open window
And I am handling silk and tulle
For mother,

And it is 1963, so nothing is ever lost
I tell myself, except

It is 1989 and I am laying out her clothes
After the funeral and wondering what to do with them.
Years later, a sound, half-heard, of wings at night,

Is making me go further in the dark
While my wife sits on our bed in a little lamplight
Feeding our new daughter

Who startles when I bring down a box.

And I am shivering now in the warm summer night
For I know the bird is close
With a wing broken perhaps and eyes as wild as mine,

But there's a final box, with faded maps,
A notebook brimming with sweet days.

Inside the wardrobe now,
Crouched down
And sweating, as if covered in black felt,
I have crossed a line I did not know was there:

I cannot see my hands
But they are holding the bird, tightly and tenderly,

Before I touch the bird.

Beneath the Ode

Just there, beneath the ode, a speck of dust.
 You flick it with a little finger. No,
 A spot of ink. But wait:
 Now that you look up close,
 It is a word. Quick, magnify the thing!

Good Lord, there are two words, no, three or more,
 All blowing up like helium balloons.
 And so your hand transcribes,
 And so the glass falls down:
 The words all shrivel to a dot again

As though graffitied on a baby's eye.
 But who? An angel pausing from the dance?
 You take another book
 And there it is, that spot.
 So was it always there but never seen,

Or has it come on just this summer day
 Along with letters, clouds, a line of ants?
 It is a strange strange world,
 This one in which we live.
 Whom do you call, the cops or cardinals?

Do state police answer the phone these days?
 Is there a prefix for the Vatican?
 The questions multiply
 While in each book you own
 Each poem edges closer to that dot.

GERALDINE MCKENZIE

b 1954 Sydney; grew up mainly in Grenfell, central western NSW. A teacher of English and history, she lives in the Blue Mountains.

the honey-pit

I
 historical:

these are strangers with
 their awkward gaze claiming
 kinship like an egg
 teetering in rough
 hands

you signal
 – no

II
 numerical:

60,000 or
 63,000
 1915 '16 '17
 6
 million
 40 million (minimum)
 ***** ***
 *** **

III
 lyrical:

hyacinth
 lily
 the first
 forget-me-nots

and yesterday
 a breath of
 jasmine steamed
 out to wind

open to a mild
 September sun I'm
 glad we're all
 replaceable

IV
 metaphorical:

the brutal sheep-let-loose
 flick knives shimmy
 a suave gestalt –
 fiddlers disappearing faster
 than you can count them

always someone
 running

(meanwhile, beneath a haystack

V

liturgical:

item: one pr. womens shoes
 item: one pr. workboots
 item: one pr. mens shoes
 item: one pr. womens shoes (evening)
 item: one pr. childrens shoes

VI

biographical:

I don't think poetry
 can save us

Mulloway

Did you dream your death last night –
 breathless as a mulloway rasping silver over
 the ledges, the gaff entering like a judgement?

Did you see me running moon-armed
 down a narrow street, carillons of garbage cans
 jangling the pavement, enough to wake the dead

in their cosy parlours surrounded by whiskey
 and sandwiches and you in an alleyway
 straddling some tipsy mourner, tears unpeel

her face and you swearing the same old lies
 sweating on your usual hook though you allow
 her mouth and sing a soft bum curled

like butter and breasts falling plums into
 your ready hands. Everything's edible of course
 including the mulloway, which lasted nearly a week.

DOROTHY PORTER

b 1954 Sydney and grew up there. Principally known as a writer of novels in verse, she has been based in Melbourne since the mid-1990s. What a Piece of Work.

From Crete*Gorgeous breasts*

After our first time
 we went to a Chinese restaurant
 and counted on our
 charged fingers

the relatives
 the friends
 who'd never be the same

we were breathless
 in the high wind
 of our secret

that first kiss
 like a dancer
 in the bullring
 flying
 over the bull's horns
 on a quick breath

what a flirt
 before the gorgeous breasts
 of the crowd!

Archaeology

Am I the Arthur Evans
 of my own lost city?

Excavated
 with shovelling obsession

Restored
 with wishful thinking?

Glint. Glint. Glint.

The sun picks over my trash
 for treasure.

And on my layers
of gleaming silt

Stamp the thick legs
of a cement palace.

The Dead

*Though of weak faith, I believe in forces and powers
Who crowd every inch of the air.
They observe us – is it possible that no one sees us?*
Czeslaw Milosz

How did the Minoans cross the line
between the quick and the dead?

did they dance over it?

their ghosts waiting
in ecstatic mid-air?

We have found the top quark
but lost our dead.

Are our most violent poltergeists
books?

gnashing their shelves
smashing things in the dark

they leave a greenish tombish
smell on our reading fingers

they make us musty
and bereft.

The Minoans didn't read
their ghosts

they sniffed
their blue perfume

and went wild on them.

Sir Arthur Evans (1851–1941) was the archaeologist who excavated Knossos.

WENDY JENKINS

*b 1952 Fremantle, where she has lived for most of her life. She has worked principally as a book editor,
at present part-time. Rogue Equations.*

Poltergeist

There's a shift
in fiction
I'm thinking of

where the table
the thigh, the half
written page

host a viewpoint
so strategic
nothing happens.

The eye, the ear
are still

then the table
turns
on its axis /not
losing its place for
a moment/ and

another eye
slides over the
grain, along the
thigh, addresses the
remaining whiteness

and this all
so seeming and
seamless that the

clunk

when it comes (you
feel so graceless
to hear it)

happens in the flat
upstairs.

Two houses down
a car door slams.

Not satisfied it
slams again.

Love Poem as Chemistry & Credo: 'tell me what you want'

What I want
is a landscape
of such keen weather
 such clean lines
the action
is sub-atomic

negative/positive

language as biochemistry (speak to me)
 – charged particles meet and fall in love it
 was ever thus –
metaphor as rogue equation of desire

if you like and you did

I thought (think)

believe?

so tell me: your reaction?

so tell me: what do you want?

JULIANA BURGENSEN-BEDNARECK

b 1952 Brisbane. Of mixed European background, she was adopted into an Australian family in Brisbane, where she practises as a medical doctor. Bermuda and the Other Islands.

Identikit for a Date Rape

The perp, well he was three feet tall, or thereabouts,
maybe six and a half inches either way,
complexion grey, no, make that green,
green as ripe snot after a eucalyptus inhalation.
Said he hailed from Ganymede or somewhere

just as classy. Talked uppity, yeah. Said his name
was Ping, but I wouldn't bet a tab of E on it. Hobby,
parthenogenesis, whatever that is, when it's at home.

His UFO was simply wicked, but. He pulls over
halfway down the Esplanade at Main Beach
and he says, 'Coming to the Rave at Ivanka's?'

and I look at him, slow and easy like,
and I think, 'Cool.'

Introducing Zhou Luyun (also known as Irene Chou)

after the Asia-Pacific Triennial, 1993

Keeping time with
Grandmother's singular
heart, in a catacomb,
or carpark, underneath
an Art Gallery of sorts,
searching, not finding,
from behind, the tyres
screaming more quietly

than silkworms breathing,

the family caterpillars
along, beside. Stepping,
shuffling, halting, bumble
stumbling. Suddenly

the centre arches, divinely,
gathers itself up high as
Tai Mo Shan. Grandmother
starts. Grandmother swings

Grandmother swings about.

Tilts forward. Doesn't fall
from grace like old Kowloon,
the entrepreneurs pouncing
even as you and they go down.

Face, eyes, mouth, heart
open as a dynasty of Os.

Master Calligrapher.

The Catch

My husband-to-be came calling Sunday
afternoon just gone, with a dozen diver whitening
for his sweetheart – that's me, in case you didn't know.

A school of dreams, each pupil legal size, but
underage, each tinier than the parts of his palm,
mount of Venus, Solomon's ring, white flour fish
brimming with bones paler than the eyelashes

of an albino baby boy, and roe, phlegm-fresh
and gimlet gold, laid across two peace brother
fingers like our first born's christening bracelet.

Anna Akhmatova is Watching

Stroke my eyelid
with your wedding ring,
like Grandma,
till the ticking stye
is still.

Rub my head
and read it
as she did the family Bible,
every day.

Murmur my patronymic
and the two times table
in slang, in colloquial
Russian.

From the permafrost,
from the bottom of the Neva,
Anna Akhmatova, Anna,
no daughter of Akhmet,
is watching.

Sing Anna, Anna,
Anna Davidovna, Anna,
now contralto, now soprano,
as you make me over.