

A black speech bubble containing the text "Red Room Poetry" in white. The background of the entire cover is a detailed botanical illustration of various flowers, including large purple chrysanthemums, smaller orange and yellow flowers, and scattered petals and seed heads.

Red
Room
Poetry

NEW SHOOTS POETRY ANTHOLOGY

poems inspired by plants



Red Room Poetry's vision is to make poetry a meaningful part of everyday life. We create poetic projects and learning programs in collaboration with a spectrum of poets, schools, communities and partners for positive social impact.



The Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney, est. 1816, is the oldest botanic garden and scientific institution in Australia. It is home to an outstanding collection of plants from around the world with a focus on Australia and the South Pacific.



Rochford Street Review is an online journal reviewing new Australian writing and culture with an emphasis on poetry, prose/fiction, and small press publications.

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We would like to acknowledge and pay respects to the Traditional Custodians of the Lands in which we live and work.

Many thanks to our supporters, poets-in-residence, all participating poets, and to the plants that made these poems possible.

redroomcompany.org

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For more about *New Shoots* visit: <http://redroomcompany.org/projects/new-shoots/>

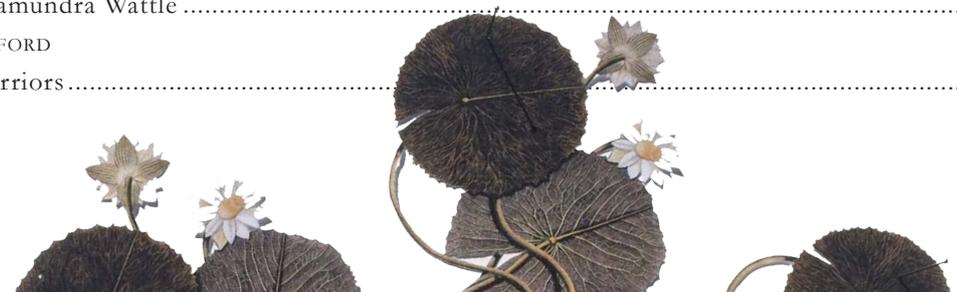
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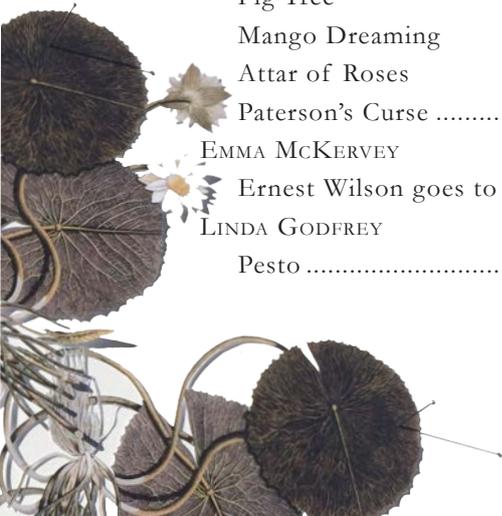
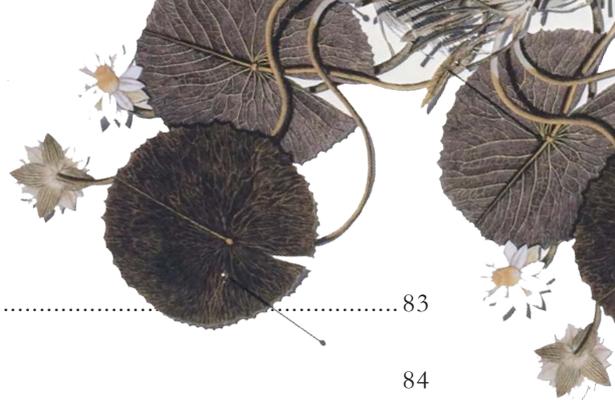
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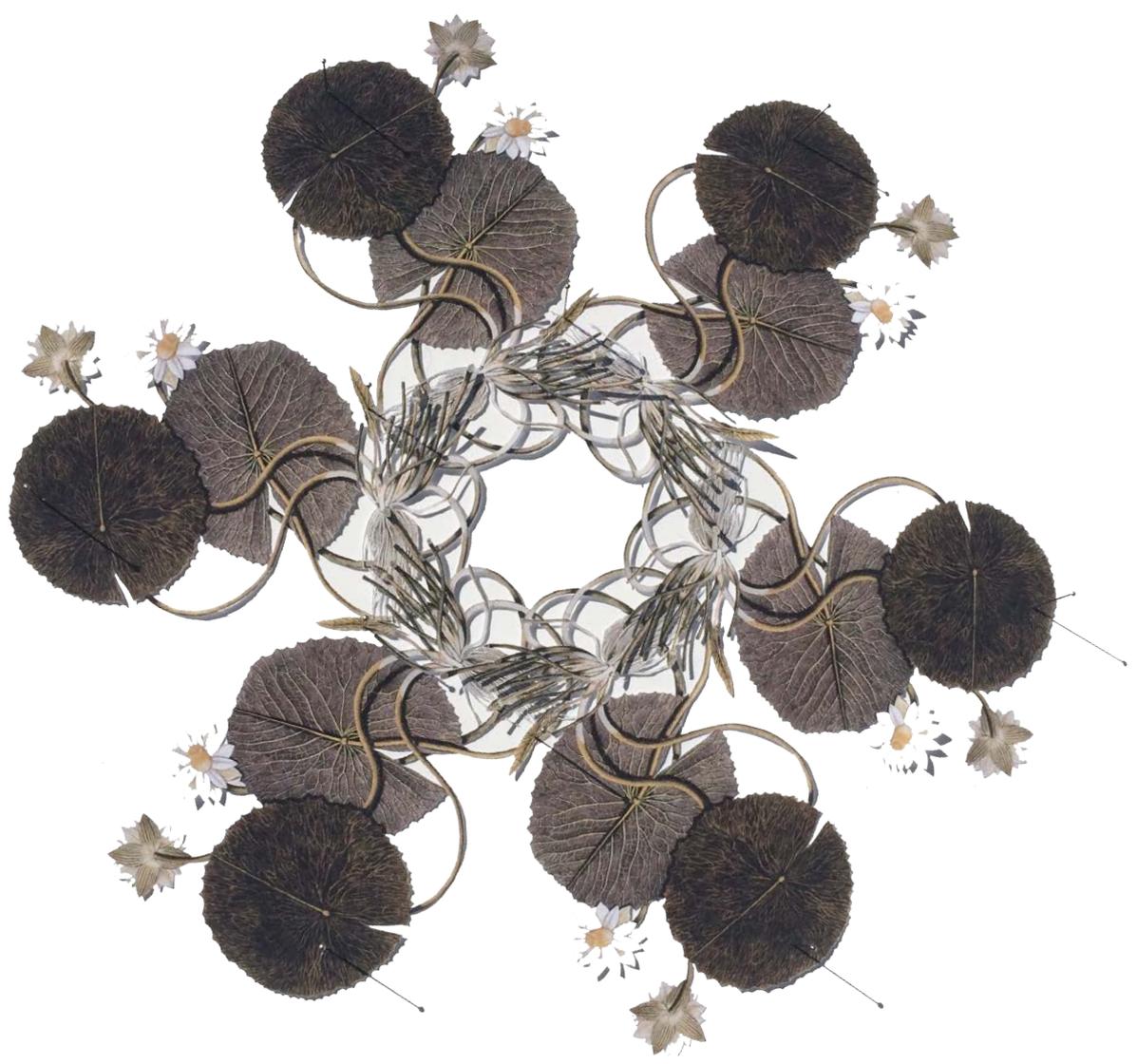
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Introduction: The entwined roots of language and plants...

We assume trees have no plans

Other than to be trees,

Content to sway and listen

In wistful rustle

~ from '[I hear them sigh](#)', Audrey Molloy

The *New Shoots Poetry Anthology* collects a garden of poems that has rambed and blossomed since first being planted in 2016.

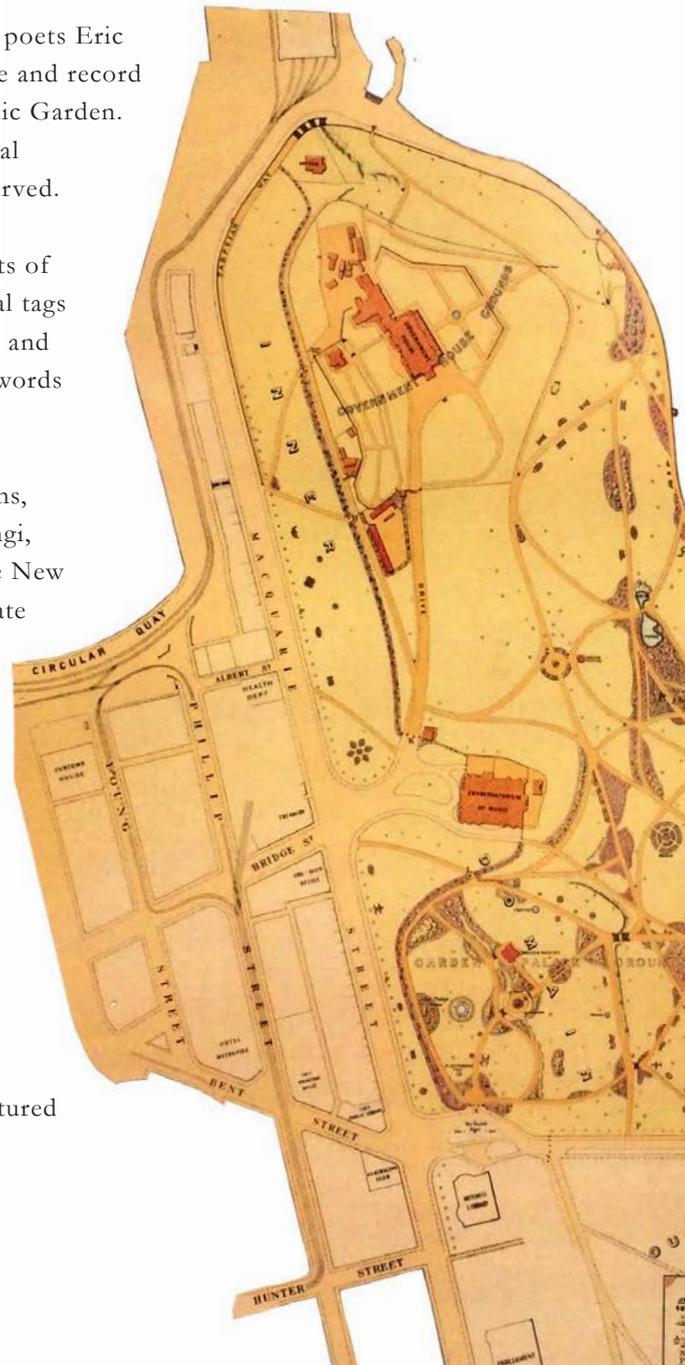
Dreamed by Tamryn Bennett, poet and Artistic Director of Red Room Poetry, *New Shoots* is a poetic project that seeks to celebrate plant life in all its wondrous forms. With the hope of deepening creative and emotional connections with different ecosystems, the seeds of *New Shoots* were first scattered in the nutrient rich soil of the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney.

Coinciding with the Garden's 200th anniversary, commissioned poets Eric Avery, Eileen Chong, and Mark Tredinnick were invited to write and record poems in response to specific plants and locations in the Botanic Garden. The project launched in May 2016 at the Sydney Writers' Festival with a guided walking tour of the 'poetic pathways' they had carved.

These paths can still be walked, or stumbled upon, with excerpts of poems now permanently planted in the Garden. Poetic botanical tags mark the plants, sculptures and sites the poets were inspired by and poems can be listened to in situ, an experience that brings the words to life and enriches an understanding of both poem and place.

As plants are wont to do, given ample space and good conditions, *New Shoots* has continued to grow and grow, like a foxglove, fungi, rhubarb, or bamboo; words building on words. The idea for the New Shoots Poetry Prize was introduced by Zalehah Turner, Associate Editor of the Rochford Street Review. The response to the call out was abundant, attracting local entrants and submissions from overseas, all paying homage to the vegetal world through personal, lyrical, political or philosophical meditation in interesting ways. The prize was subdivided into two categories: those that related to plants widely, and those that were specific to the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. A shortlist was deliberated over with winning and highly commended prizes awarded to poets Stuart Cooke, John Bennett, Magdalena Ball and John Karl Stokes.

These poems can be found at the beginning of this collection, and accompanying interviews held with Zalehah Turner are featured at the end of the anthology.



To commemorate the poets and the plants, fields and forests that inspired them, the *New Shoots Poetry Anthology* gathers 163 poems from 105 poets. Embedded in the roots of language, the word ‘anthology’ literally means ‘a gathering of flowers’, the first literary usage of the word dating back to late ninth century Greece. In every sense, this anthology can be seen as something of a bouquet, arranged with an assortment of poetic blooms in all colours, moods and shapes.

From sacred and sentient plant philosophy, pressing ecological concerns, to more everyday encounters and glimpses, the relationship between human and non-human examined in this collection is longstanding and deeply entwined. Many poems also pay respects and acknowledge Indigenous history and knowledge systems. So too this links with time. The poem ‘[Wollemi Pine](#)’ written by commissioned poet Eileen Chong, references one of the oldest lineages at the Royal Botanic Garden (“Ancient trees / their first names / passed from memory”).

Language itself also recurs as a theme in the collection, with many poems referencing Latin and scientific names for trees, as is done humourously in Julie Maclean’s poem ‘[Homeless woman hallucinates walking past the Garden Palace in 1879](#)’ (“I list the beauties / seek out categories / steal Latin names”).

Many act as testimonials of finding personal connections and reverberations with nature (“I am more like a tree / than a human being / a long stayer” ~ ‘[Rumi as a Tree](#)’, Richard James Allen) while others are written directly after, or are addressed to, specific plants and trees and strive to visually capture a plant’s shape such as Chloë Callistemon’s ‘[strangler fig](#)’ and Stuart Cooke’s elegantly constructed ‘[Fallen Myrtle Trunk](#)’ and ‘[Antarctic Beech](#)’.

Themes of grief, love, loss and transformation abound and return. The life cycle of plants and trees providing space for contemplation and capturing individual reflections and experiences of straying and wandering into forests and nature. We are fortunate to have artist Jacqueline Cavallaro to illustrate this anthology—each of her visually stunning nature artworks are botanical poems in themselves.

What all these poems share is the inspiration they draw from plants. The word ‘inspire’ relates directly to the Latin verb ‘spirare’, meaning ‘to breathe’, and can be seen to hold meanings of ‘to breathe in’ or ‘to breathe into’. Considering the ‘eco-dependant’ relationship humans and plants share, their being needed for our every breath, plants can be seen in multiple ways as generative and creative life forces. Perhaps this is all the more reason to honour plants with poems. A giving back. And a project like *New Shoots* does exactly this, allowing us to re-examine the relationship we have with the natural environment, its history and people.

As highly commended poet, John Bennett, writes: “it’s plants that can mend the earth”, each reading of them and the poems they inspire doubling as spaces and acts of healing.

Ella Skilbeck-Porter
Editor
April 2017



Stuart Cooke

Fallen Myrtle Trunk

in the temperate forests, the wet
 sclerophyll forests, where the wind
 moans in yourm leaves, a storm beating
 in muffled drums at the entrance
 to the underworld, the lands
 of Gondwana, motherland of Australia,
 South America, the hundreds
 of years creeping, the moss about youm creeping
 the growling thunder, the black sou'-wester
 —by youm all this recedes, falls
 like wilting springs

aged into agelessness, less
 than age, giant
 fullness, monoforest
 bulk
 of years and slowness
 hint of snake while touch crumbles
 like chocolate flakes, vibration vanishes
 in yourm tomb, tombing
 yourm slumber rots, beachwards
 a giant petrified in light

imperceptible scuttle scattered
 deeply, cavern hymns at
 cave hertz, yourm august
 specific music, cylindrical fugue
 of dark brown scales, closed soft pink
 to reddish grain, edified with mountain
 ash memory, guardian of closed passage
 pillar of larger sky, of facts like clouds
 their sky ways wending

youm known the songs of lonely places
the ways of wet and wind, youm moan
of fire, unless the flames come slowly
for yourm return to drowsy
droning, the intoning
of the wizard priests
the sough of the southern seas
youm're the stage before the sea
the ground's stage, for all sea-yearning

yourm limbed stances
form too slowly for change, beneath
such gestures the black flock shelters, shadowed
in yourm underside, that invisible realm
of canal venom and webbed vein

to the light youm present carpet bridge, seedling
lives held by yourm unfolding descent, dark-
plumed monarch, ebony laced
with wing, by the mountain rills
down to the parched saplings
on the shore of a receding lake
youm know too much
of that escarpment beyond, rest
pray, yourm beast prepares for return

while everything frizzes, shifts

brushed and squeeze, sway

youm remain sound-

like, a solid gradient an always

line, travelling

and unravelling through the same place

yourm skin mimics lake ripple

grooved rivulets criss-cross like thickened years

currents of stone into softer solid

edging damp, ripples merged with moss

the land's dry, soft with moss

a surface of crawling speckleds, blood legs and

black bodies, orange-like

fruiting bodies protruding from

yourm furry, whaled bulk

moss colony, moss scape, the stick shade

of a seedling wobbles

on yourm chest flecked with sonnet, leaf voltas

their dark green, lost brilliance

then fresh reds, pinked to orange faded
ragged, triangled teeth
and fruits of three small
winged nuts, subtle flourish
of yellow-green catkins, now a mouthing
eddy where a bough broke off
airborne spores of wilt lulled by such knots
have settled on yourm wound

one branch, there, pleads help
by reaching, others
arch hardened spines around gravity's slide
while youm host the epiphytes
while the termites elaborate yourm runnelled intentions
while moss slowly fingers, surrounds
slowly devours these juts of twig
slowly devours its own ground
which youm perform patiently for it

Note: 'Fallen Myrtle Trunk' contains echoes of the following poems: 'Mountain Myrtle', by Marie E. J. Pitt and 'Out of Sorts and Looking at Elms', by Simon West.

Magdalena Ball

Anneslea fragrans

First there is touch
teasing evergreen into position
waking naked
against sunlight
hot plasma in the morning
opens brachlets

you can feel the tension
the garden on full alert

each root tip
the locus of electrical signals
reacting to groping fingers
sharp to the eye, but yielding
ready for the spit
scenting the air in anticipation
chemical compounds
communicating a warning
from the roots

there were no bees this year

silence buzzed through the air
an absence of sound
the hives empty
epithelial tissues connecting
to nothing

the air hurt with it

your eyes adjusting
the yellow cream points
unfiltered, unfettered
ready to pollinate
plant, interrupted

what else is on the way out

the list grows long
Javan Rhinos, Vaquita
Sumatran Tiger
Man

pulses like sound waves
transmitted in
voltage-based signaling
a green nervous system
sending out alcohols, aldehydes, ketones
plant to plant
the botanical telegraph

with your bad hearing
you'll need to get down to earth level
to get the phytomorphic shivers

the splitting of senses
is a human-only perversion
most of what we taste is smell
taking the warning in vibrations
against the skull
terroir, a bitter crunch, crumbing
against the lips
almost desire

the spitting plant waits
Corymbs branching outward into warmth

a day that might not last
ineffably sad
ready for evolution.



John Karl Stokes

Leaving Wilona

Here it was lost, that blood-quiet ground,
guilt and imaginary loves gripping
the shade trunks of bitter-vine
that joined one year to another
across the face of the old house
grown over with lies...

The father grew, here, hollyhocks,
sweet peas, English stocks
nodding within sight of the Harbour Bridge
weeping in rows through old
Uncle Butler Airways' field
to a green, quilted sea, where

each slap of each sly curve of
wave rots the gentle fish-wharf
and this harbour still smells
like a warm girl; the alien
grandfather, silver haired, still haunts
a German fig-treed sky

Fright and decay...
Decay is where the root
drew sustenance, here,
where the second mother bloomed
at The Gardens, where voices grew
Never go back
silent, more insistent

and even then you would know
unwisely, that you should not
come here again: that you might find
nothing under a memory
or feel your blood creak
like that old door

or see your own face pass through a gateway,
blank, unwarned
full of schemes for the new growth
clicking between illusion
and its memory; comforts
living in those small eternities

between a word and its soft-mouthed
speaking in the New World...

*Brush past, alone, into
the raw ground...*

Say nothing.

Note: From "Flower-Drum Sequence" as an element of the set "Drowned Haven". For Red Room Poetry and Rochford Street Review, with the permission of Halstead Press.

John Bennett

our primitive lives

1.

The Opera House squats on Djubuguli, once a tidal island facing a sandstone cliff bracing our first farm whose sandy, tough conditions dealt a pitiful crop of wheat and barley. Tourists worship the radiant sails and Harbour Bridge ribs, I focus on the wall. *Commelina* is fingering the rock, native, edible, but confused with *Tradescantia luminensis* (a toxic weed with white flowers known by a sour alias 'Wandering Jew'). The immigrants ate the juicy leaves to limit scurvy, called it scurvy plant, but knowledge for the Eora was just a way of life.

The bailey is haemorrhaging slime moulds (fungi), algae, moss and lichen, smears of colour bleed into curdled patterns, moist voluptuous erosions and exhalations of precarious vocabularies, hieroglyphs are living low relief. I wonder how it all smells.

My camera stitches connections, less intimate than harvesting moss and its green simplicity, leaves one-cell thick on simple stems, handy for bedding, dressing wounds, starting fires, or than vertical gardening, or botanical exploration with loupes and textbook, but offering insight.



2.

As a child I splashed through puddles, slithered in mud, waste grounds were playgrounds, dirt was the natural skin and now I celebrate this neglected landscape of deflated hills, streams, swamp and desert.

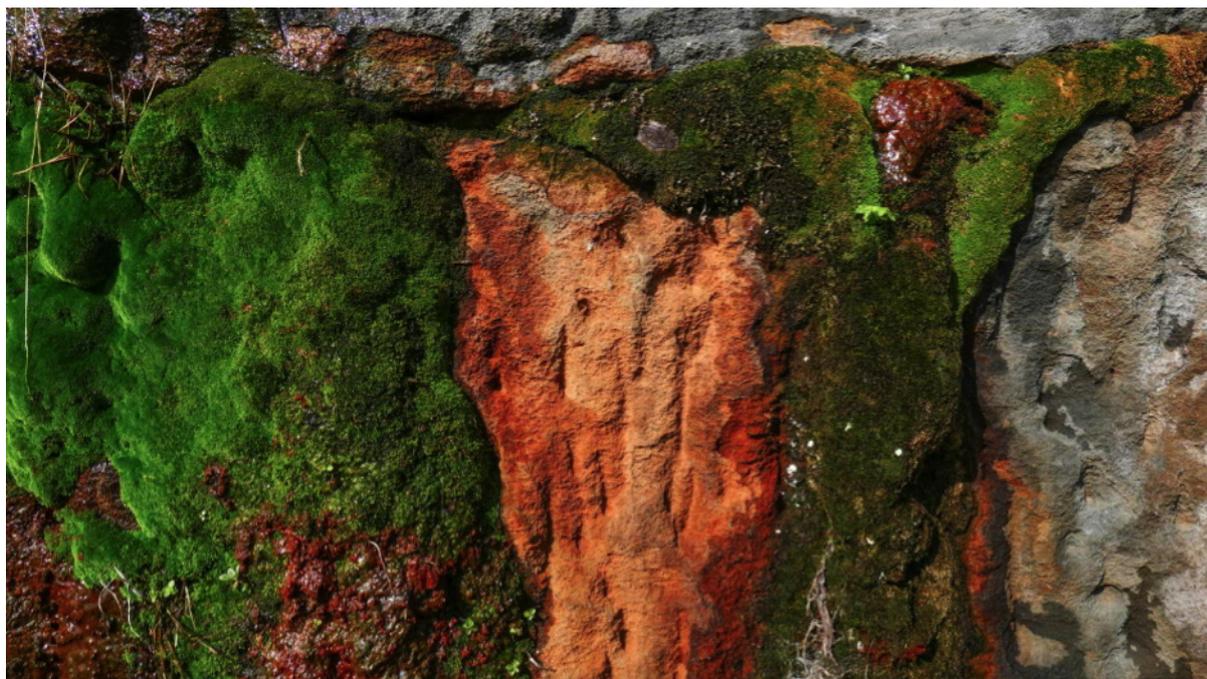
What's a wall to slime and roots but an opportunity?

This surface succours ancestors of all plants, of all 4,000 trees the Garden wears, including my favourite, a monumental Flooded Gum bleached by sunlight near Maiden Theatre. Plants have thrived here for 200 years but figuring the ecology is a modern adventure.

An aesthetic approach to nature's nooks and crannies threads life, blurred bands of iron oxide and desert textures onto silicon memory.

This sandstone wall, 200 metres deep, poured from Broken Hill, laid down and rammed with few collisions and only minor folding.

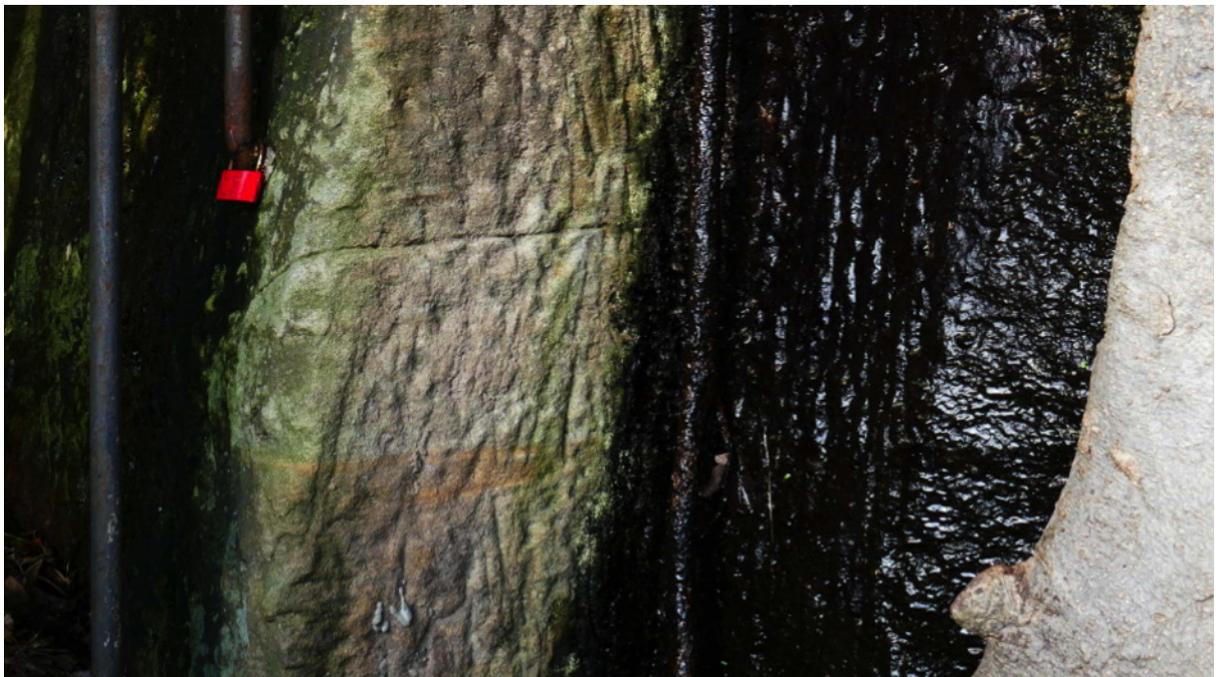
It's a piece of art that moulds the marks of men and machine, as new to the Eora as this perpendicular boundary to the Governor's Domain, the wind and rain plucks the grains out one by one.



3.

The intimacy of slime lives with me. We are more than ‘digital archives from the African Pliocene’. Just as cyanobacteria infiltrated chloroplasts donating a one-off miracle to plants (the ‘green fuse’ of photosynthesis) ‘proteobacteria’ developed the engine that mitochondria use to power our cells from oxygen—and the world slowly filled with life.

We can’t insulate landscape from history, history from prehistory, biology from botany, life from lives. Through a Port Jackson Fig the lapis lazuli sky dissolves around bright cockatoos raising their scratchy voices and sulphur crests. The fig runs roots down fissures in the rock with primitives clinging on, ferns sprout fractal wings and grasses love a pinch of soil. What’s left of Darwin’s tangled bank flowering elegantly from algal scum these last 500 million years is in retreat, the sheer variety being locked away in seed banks. I think that it’s plants that can mend the earth.



Note: This wall stands as a reminder that there is a story I want to trace. A 1788 sketch by William Dawes and John Hunter, 'Sydney Cove, Port Jackson', gives Djubuguli a sharp nose with a bald head. Lesueur's 'Plan de la Ville de Sydney' from four years later shows an aerial perspective suggesting a cliff. Neither show a Gadigal gathering place, or the Blackbutts, Red Bloodwoods and Sydney Peppermints towering above echidnas, antechinus and wallabies, or Aborigines hunting geese and duck in the swampy foreshores, drained and filled to enlarge the original farm now the Royal Botanic Garden. Governor Phillip built a brick hut for his kidnapped friend/informant Bennelong, leader of the Wangal clan, on Djubuguli, hence the new name Bennelong Point.



Stuart Cooke

Antarctic Beech

the pattern of distribution feeds
speculation, the genius
of the dissemination, the dates of
the time, the theoretical commons
of Gondwana, of one hundred
million years, yourm splits into classical drift, the northofagus dist-
ribution, coppiced and southern
Patagonia, New Zealand, Australia
New Guinea and New Caledonia
fossilised pollen from the warm forests
of Antarctica

old moist Australia, rained and
southerly, soaked forest slipping into sun, forcing
yourm retreat to the east and
the highlands, creeks were veins
crawling back to yourm heart
while the rest marched west
with the gums, copious heat that hushed yourm
to the periphery, the penetrated ancient
the known raked into clearings
what can rest
in yourm protective cone?

Gondwanan
from fire
the cool tempers
to the
of Lamington
in the cool tempers
yourm finest
at Werrikimbe

you could think sex

the settlement

in the cool
from the plains
horizons, whisky
where yourm
black thwarts,
rotting
to yourm
the rust drip
kings, bins
in the vanished books
the test of style,
of a god's
restricted,
closer to loose-
yourm running
to existence

rain-time relict, freed
by the eastern heights
of Barrington Tops, north
plateaus
and Springbrook
with occasional snows
growth
and Mount Banda Banda

and so unravel / but hidden in the tropic heights youm grow / to the memory of a prolific cool / you-
of the clearing cultures / left yourm shrunken eastern fragments / clumped in parks / protected rem-

of the high, hidden
inside halved
light malting
touch it, yourm peat-
branched tackle
and paused, en route
lagoon, deflect and bridge
where spiders pool
and wrens tumble together
of eel bones, rocked by horror
the rock
rivered skeleton
freed slowness
ned relicts of flesh
stands translocated, bound
with distant source

rm circles, yourm moss-laden gnarl through the mists / youm suggest forests of ancient druids / a hi-
nants of wet, trans-Pacific pasts / under siege by fiery eucalyptus, by agricultural flats / for youm are

mystical realism, older than story / than any lord with his ring
an old name like negrohead buried / under beech,
swallowed by fire, recover / slowly from fire, in fire / the ancient is destroyed
and brilliant new reds, orange / in spring, half-
inconspicuous yellow-beryl / catkins, fruit of four

	a bark cleaned by light into truncular flow	giant rings
	exhibits complicated roots exposed	
	jollopped glints of olive	in epiphytes
	by erosion to the paths	
	or jade stubble, a little lichen	while new
dark, scaly evergreen / leaves of dark green	of moss and lichen beneath a crown	
	mostly moss below the sun, sites of sparse	from yourm
dropped in autumn, triangular / with fine teeth	of 12 000 years: emanation	
	penetrable, lesser branches	yourm
prickly valves / with small winged nuts	of multiple trunks' post-fire	
	of relief, branched sets of smell	and rings,
	meditations	
	of woodthroat dispersal to	homes for
	aspergent flicker, gridless	in yourm
	leanings like a nose	coppicing,
		split like a
		trunks,
		cold with

so, roots snake, tangle

and yourm base grows into truck

creates caverns and hollows, collects mulch

for more roots, youm disappear

covered

into yourm own protruding angle

and mosses

yourm mound of mulched stage

shoots coppice

of slowest snakes, sky's axial clasp, mound

first base, clone home

the silver modicums of minutiae, the youngest

city of fern city, of web city, sun-

cloned rings

standards waver while giant bites

light and lichen city, cathedral

homes and

over ridings, stubblings from split, tangled

of roots, centre

hundreds, critters

feet, an expression of crossed legs, light stripped

of golden coppice: hut of arced moss

fragments, critters and

of swoon, mind

extended across withdrawing bays

dying and stems ringed

of tree, or intention to tree, not

spilling yourm smooth lines over rocky coast

continent, slumped, yourm new

just tree, or trees

sinuous, zig-zagged to yourm jeopardy

yourm huge mind

meta-tree

their dissections in

Antarctic memory

lyre-tree or forest, sculptor or lyre

youm correct origin cut to

mimic of multiples, form as base

soils spore tokenly at

not ceiling, orphaned onto slits

moss rinsed in late light and

leaks a healing, ancient spites relit

the impervious flux of yourm open heart
 the slow tumult, drenched ferns dripping time
 primordial material timbered as stuff, relict habitat
 immanent semi-shade
 the root of an older tree
 the r o o t done-
 rooting sieves out-
 rooting a way in gone among in-
 sufficiently fed with surplus, coppice
 after the fourth bud, selection
 of thinness as shade
 closed under shared, charged edge buffers the ratio
 the redundance of keys
 secret keys
 yourm tumorous lobes or knots, many-minded
 meta-skeleton
 as various constellations, lines
 impending / pasture
 of new shrubs, flat-leaved ferns wandering
 hung to dry
 up yourm slopes

an ancestral terror of obstruction
 released into contours, exposure's very seam
 fallow wrap around a stance
 filled through the parted stand
 yourm collective written deep
 with funnels of thinnest earth, bridges
 across cleared land to yourm old forest
 yourm battalions sheltering their own hollowing
 slow to saturate with glaring torrent
 until fork whipped, unspilt leans, the ambivalence
 of yourm unfurling margins, their hidden edges
 concealed
 until blunt glades open
 into glassed encounter

Note: 'Antarctic Beech' contains echoes of phrases from 'Ancient Woods' & 'Opening Woods' by Peter Larkin and 'The Gallery' by Les Murray.

Julie Maclean

How Deep is Your Love

after ficus macrophylla—the Moreton Bay Fig

I grow shallow in the breadth of your thoughts
heavy under the weight of your slow breathing

Small children wrap plastic bags
around your leaves to prove

you are alive you are alone
and with your unseen ears

have witnessed the shelling of a thousand wars
a hundred and fifty years in some man's land

like a neutral country glowing
in the middle of a darkening union

but now showing signs
fast growing wreaths of roads and smoke

compete with weakening buttresses
your cathedral sags

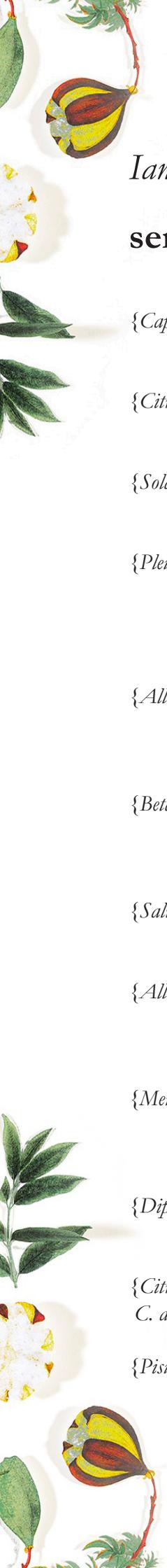
Perhaps you have done your job as the Children's Tree
fenced off now with aerials like stick-men

wrapped around each other for succour
glad of the rains pitting hardening skin at your feet

When my son was seven I asked him to paint you
He split the canvas a perfectly straight horizon

Underground roots as arteries pumped blood
wide across a black universe

Above ground leaves as green clouds pillowed
in a breathless sky



Ian Gibbins

sensurious

{*Capsicum annum*}

This, then, our new world, serried with vigilance,
chromed with unrecorded opportunity

{*Citrus reticulata*}

from the paths we crossed, the riches we found,
the future we almost abandoned beyond myth and circumstance.

{*Solanum reticulata*}

Meanwhile, I count your paces, to the left, to the right,
start digging where your letter touched the ground.

{*Pleuratus ostreatus*}

Below the Morning Star melt,
equatorial storms abate, gannets find landfall;
I uncurl my fingers, wonder what next I will discover
here, there, between your infinitely opaline digressions,

{*Allium sativum*}

the scent of your consternation.
How far did you run? Did you fly? Do you still soar
without effort or loss above the country you once owned?

{*Beta vulgaris*}

Fresh earth honeyed cool beneath my fingernails,
I outline your name on raw jarrah floorboards,
await your reply, your confirmation of receipt.

{*Salvia officinalis*}

If only you had called, let me know
about the nebula swirling around your heart.

{*Allium cepa*}

All we have now are lava flows, a midday solar flare:
for whom do you spread your arms?
Who will catch your tears before they dry?

{*Mentha sachalinensis*}

Eventually, after the heat wave,
circumpolar winds will drift north,
condense sweat between the ridges of your spine.

{*Diplotaxis tenuifolia*}

So take your time: do not burn up through re-entry.
Save some meteor for me,

{*Citrus limon*;
C. aurantifolia}

until we whisper in tones of milk and lustrous oils,
dream in tandem on saffron beds and masala dust, until

{*Pisum sativa*;

shoulder to shoulder, we rock, we roll,

Phaseolus vulgaris}

entwine our staves and staffs,
watch our melodies cross oceans,
flood luminous ironstone sandscapes

{*Ficus carica*}

with double-bass, lock-tight snare, Fender full reverb.
Let's take five or seven or one hundred and eleven,
juggle this sweet air of adventure.

{*Musa acuminata*;
Prunus persica;
P. armeniaca; *P. avium*}

Simply come as you are: no need to pack
a Panama hat, snakeskin riding boots, unspent small change.
Taste the seaspray, crystallised to ambrosia on my wishbone.

{*Capsicum annum*}

And tattooed across your simmering lips,
a threat? A promise? Everlasting love?

{*Vitis vinefera*}

Or just the good things:
barely recognised cousins,
immigration, wedding cakes.

{*Theobroma cacao*;
Coffea arabica}

Blushed with uncountable sunsets,
a total eclipse of the moon,
we look backwards, forwards.

{*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*}

Our laughter skips past Christmas cards,
trellis lines on song, whistles at circus dogs,
merges black and white,

{*Spinacia oleracea*;
Viola tricolor;
Lavandula angustifolia}

as intimate as,
as gracious as,
as magnetic as,

neither apparition nor mirage,
neither incandescent nor stereophonic,
your resistance, measured with tiger moths.

Video link: <https://vimeo.com/189102859>

John Karl Stokes

Sufficient Harvest

White hips
a shadowed plain
a bleeding...

“Are you the father?” to Telemann on the C.D.

This bearded midwife’s built like a man. Those corded boles of her arms could untie the slipperiest knot. Maybe a Gap girl, from other verandahs of these parts.

“Don’t know. Wrote me. Said she wanted me here”...

“Wait out here, dreamboat”. I call you”.

She floats inside again, into the country of the vanished.

Of course you are right to come: some things are better not seen in blindness... Who could imagine the hard inner sea, the peacock’s feather in the homestead’s white room, that wild-eyed distance of shimmering between dreams?

Drought is coming. The boy child whimpers, the mirror darkens. Somewhere the father leathers his mandolin. Across the vines, sands-grown songs of thirst bleed to old light. The relatives are laughing now, they drink of burning rain, dance with the wind phantoms. Upside down the midnight sun begins, weeping blood, dry earth.

Milk is the river
under the brightness
under the water

Already the farm’s second year. Stringing out of Renmark dividing the bright beginnings of the marginal lands, the father and son had cut a line. The rang-rhythm of the jump-bar jarred, shivering by barriers. Hearing scratches of stone in the dry rill loosening to dead-fall in a moon full day; at first mysterious as his gypsy wife, she secret as the sea of ground and as impenetrable as dreams we dreamt manfully, hearing dark whispers blown in along the boundaries. Hearing glimmers of hope from imagined echoes.

But then, too soon, the bright gypsy left us—caught unawares against some queer, artesian tide that ran three thoughts a year from Potsdam. Unerring still we kept on, blind putting down roots and pulling them up again and thinking it was good country.

*

Hard in for a third time stringing a living out through the ragged edge of doubt glittering nailed

now structures with careful thought on structures, grain to grain, each leaf husbanded in Latin, every pulse of the harvest given its ritual due as if the iron rush of passions could outrun the warning shrieking of the soundless voices from the mirrored ground. And ever harder in the bitch-ground dog dirt dug, the bitch receives, again and again grit-giving inward, moaning and shuddering to the down-thrust. Three times in, and the pack breaks crust-core and cuts grunt-dark into thud-marked bites and years, three times in, and the mother earth tears squeals, hisses under a hoarse moon.

and memory
the daughter of the rains

But then, a fourth year. A Fourth.

Outside the staring town, the slow-moved snake & moonlight bleeds into years of dimmed dreaming, certainties that no more wounds can show the weals of the wire, quietly drawn across two heartbeats. Poverty, the Devil's sickness, lies between the blankets, seeping out to lethargy's distance, fenced twists of partial mercies, starved sleep, starved white skin of earth, the wire shining. The wire hums approval of the widening space between two deaths, it leaves its shadow behind closed eyes. The fence wire loops, sings, binds, cuts | and then gives way. There is to be no more than memory gives.

But clear days
lower their music
into evenings

Reflections from the satellites are as clear as a bell.

Curious...

...that the recall now is reed-thin, of creeks. Half-listed ruins. Breaths that echoed once off screen-blue skies. Touches never given, moments scraped from sparse lives with little time for record. We should have taken our allotted one or two small points of joy as marks of detail moved on under brigalow or pain to other poverties waiting for regrets expected and fulfilled.

But a father clings to his father's tears; feels the tearing sinew as his own. Murmured through the flowing ground the ripening midnight of his mother's blood runs again in the river glimpsed once only in the darkening canopy; the arc of two, twin lusts for love and earth And is enough, sufficient harvest: that there will be one small cry from the inner room to close the cycle, where the wife of the seasons lies swollen and white within sweet dusts of August's years "Come now She is ready!"

The children
write their singing in the dark
tasting of sea-fall. Then will come the dreaming.

Chloë Callistemon

strangler fig

more fun than the tower tree
we spider-climb your innards
poke faces then tongues
out as far as we can
through the gaps
in your web
roll eyes
are nostrils
for the camera
far below
then scuttle down
squeeze out the gap
like spiderlings
from a split sack
all our elbows and knees
prodding bickers and giggles
loose
into the
rainforest

Jeremy Gadd

What is commonly called a weed

What is commonly called a weed
has pushed, wriggled and writhed
through a fissure in the concrete pavement,
seeking sunshine, photosynthesis, survival.
The tendril is weak, fragile, vulnerable,
its very being tenuous but, that stem
extruding from where its seed was blown,
accidentally washed or lodged,
proclaims nature will one day reclaim its own.
Its roots will create cracks that, in turn,
will receive other migrant seeds or spores.
Organisms that will grow and expand,
crumbling the concrete around it into sand.

Anne M. Carson

Aboreal sorority

Crepe Myrtles (Lagerstroemia) Cape Chestnuts (Calodendrum capense)

The party-girls have tarted themselves up
for a night out again—nail polish & lippy

to match, party frocks from their colour
co-ordinated closets in shades of pink

and puce, flaunting their flounces and
finery. Taut tan limbs under their skirts

are bared to the season. Exuberant to
have an occasion to swan about. They

know how good they look against an
azure sky, pose there to be admired,

showing their outfit to advantage. Good-
time girls, pleasing only themselves.

*

The Chestnuts are more pretty than party.
Frills and ruffles add a soft feminine touch.

Today they've donned pink ribbons and
braid inked with magenta dots, tying their

petals into bows. They don't need a reason
but they do have summer to celebrate.

Summer with blue skies and other
perfections. They like to display themselves,

court compliments, but theirs is a refined
gaiety—decorous, restrained.



Anne Elvey

Corymbia ficifolia

Late afternoon a red glow suffuses a patch
of the kitchen floor. I see through the window
it is Sol

reflected
from the soft spikes of the flowering gum. Mid-morning

rainbow lorikeets and wattlebirds
offered there a raucous fugue—
classical modern. A food fight? Or an avian
rendition of 'Food, Glorious, Food'? There's plenty

for the three week duration and fruit to ripen soon
around the green suburb. To human ears
the bees
are quieter, intent on business. But

the crimson wash
on the worn and polished wood still
surprises—
I had not thought the sun

would bounce

its light
from such fine needles curved into baskets
the bees skim, the birds dip their beaks into.



Annie Hunter

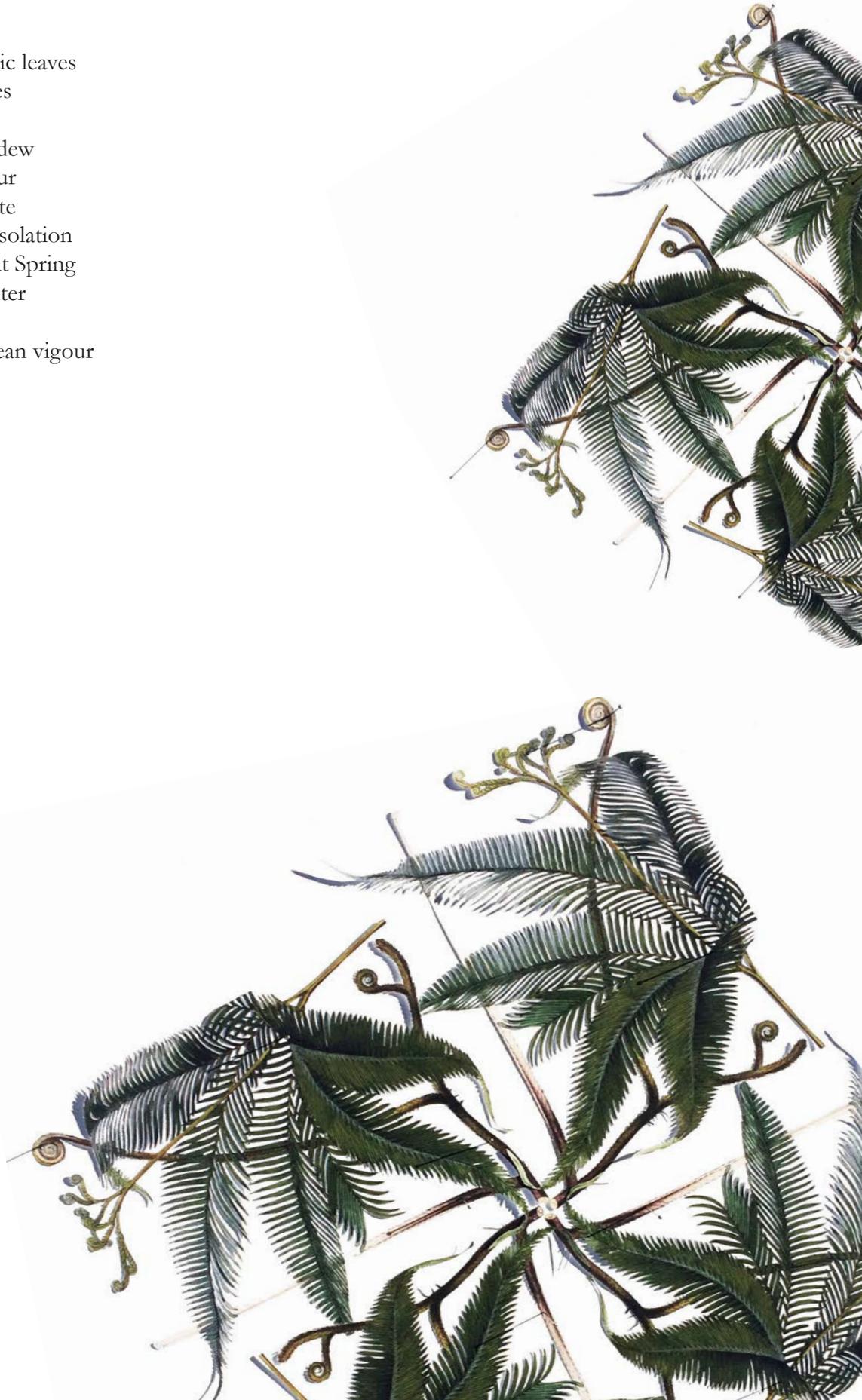
White mangrove (*Avicennia marina* subsp. *australasica*)

Mudflat dweller,
old stick in the mud,
not respiring like the rest of us
in good soil, but mired in anoxic muck,
her pneumatophores bristling the intertidal zone,
she seeks the rarefied air, complaining these southerly climes
have diminished her stature—through no fault of her own
she will never be as illustrious as her tropical cousins.
Bullying the beaded samphire, she stabs
the air with her muddy
fingers, pushing
landwards
only
to turn
inexplicably
towards the sea—
and all the while demanding
shelter from the contraction and release
of the loose-bowelled ocean, the incontinent wash
of fresh water streams. Few wild pollinators ravish her dense
cymes; she seeks comfort in the formal systems of honeybees—
the diligence of her willing workers. Each ovary bears
a solitary seed, an embryonic offspring held long
on the pedicel, its tissues tender, less saline
than her own. Squeezed between ocean
and sea wall, she resists the tidal
surge, her thickets holding
the buoyant seed
in the thrall
of her
staid
waters, the pericarp
rupturing, the seed sinking,
taking root by her side—her pure stand.
She does not flaunt her generosity: it lies in the slow
decay of leaf detritus under cold sediments; in the bonanza
of barnacles, like brimful lunchboxes packed around her peg roots;
in the roosts she offers migratory birds, those assiduous overseas
students, who year after year, trawl her silty riches
for annelids, crustaceans and molluscs;
in the reach of her cable roots,
holding the edges
of the land
together.

Shaneen Goodwin

Coirëflower

This yellow petal
bursts among anaemic leaves
and sluggish branches
disrupting stasis
and encroaching mildew
A tenacious splendour
Uncertain and delicate
Beauty rests in its desolation
as it heralds a verdant Spring
and reminisces a winter
seemingly barren
yet full of subterranean vigour



Moya Pacey

Agapanthus

We have colonised you with white
and blue disorder. Exotics.
Independent of the gardener's
hand— wanting to correct and stake
force us into submission.

We take what we need—never
fear wilderness, drought or fire
—refuse to bow our heads.

Oblivious of mood or weather.
Ordinary as sky.
Ubiquitous as stars



Miguel Jacq

vitis vinifera

we don't differ wildly,
 grounded but growing up quickly,
 tree climbers clawing for the sun
 chasing that eureka moment

and sometimes prevented: bent back,
 tied down or shuddered sideways,
 a slavish twist to your cordons
 'trained' too generous a word.

wonder were I to dig my toes in
 as beachgoers do at shoreline,
 would they uncurl and plunge thirsty
 under waves of hostile season,

delve the dry depths for new vigour;
 burrow and blush all the Cambrian
 shades of this bedrock.
 would I, too, burst my buds in throes

of springtime swollen, green skin yearning
 to be stolen by hot veraison days;
 feel my fruit soften to sugar
 when acids ask to dance

til they tumble into fist, crushed
 by human, harvest or happenstance
 —ink bleeding between knuckles
 into barrique and sleep,

then to glass
 and into mouths
 and into minds
 and mornings.

Mohammad Ali Maleki

Tears of Stone

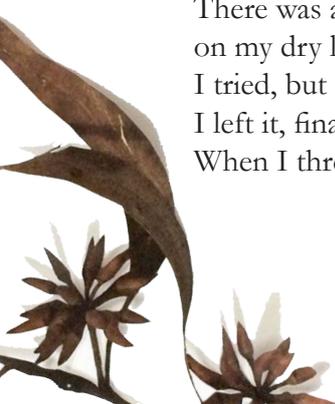
The land of this island
is a hot, dry desert.
The colour of its soil
is yellow and red.
The waves of its sea
croon a soothing song.

The ocean shimmers
like a rainbow.
The birds of its jungle
sing gaily.
The colours of its parrots
are renowned around the world.

They brought me here forcibly.
I came to this land with no choice.
It doesn't have rich soil—
They threw sulphur
so no flowers grow at all.
It's true I am a stranger;
I have no one here.
I can't trust anyone
with my heartfelt words.
That's why I created my garden.
They laughed, saying, that's impossible,
because of the dry, sulphured soil.
But a single, beautiful tree grew in my sight.
A faraway old, old tree...
Its bark was rotten
but it grew in good earth—
They threw no sulphur there.

I filled buckets with this soil,
pouring it onto my sad patch of land.
I did this for many days;
I felt helpless, doing it on my own.

There was a big stone
on my dry land.
I tried, but couldn't dig it out.
I left it, finally, where it was.
When I threw soil there





I would push it with my hands,
smoothing it around the stone
until the ground grew level
and ready for seeds.

I asked many people
for seeds to plant in my garden.
They said, we can't afford that!
You are a prisoner here,
we can't give you seeds.
I had no hope.

A week passed...
While tending my garden
I saw that a bud had sprouted beside the stone—
I was so happy I kissed the bud!

But my bud was weak,
in need of water.
I asked, what should I do, God?
Here the water is salty,
it will hurt my bud.
I had no sweet water to give it.

God didn't love me enough
to rain on my garden.
So I spoke to the bud
and told it not to get hopeless.
Days later, when the bud was exhausted
an idea came into my mind.
I sat by the bud's side
recounting my bad memories
and weeping down onto its soil.
It was my task, every day,
weeping onto the bud.
It used to drink my tears—
We both had no choice.

One night, I went to cry for my bud.
I tried so hard but couldn't weep.
The stone was my witness!
I wanted to give tears to the

bud but my eyes were dry.
What should I do now?
I was angry with myself



for having no tears
left to give to my garden.
I was disappointed in my eyes.
Suddenly, I heard a sound.
I didn't know what it was.
I searched the whole garden
and saw nothing there...
but when I went to my garden in the morning
I saw water everywhere!
I looked at the sky—
there was no sign of rain
and all the other earth was dry.
Then I saw that the big stone in my garden
had a cleft right through its heart.
From the hard centre of the stone
a stream of water ran out.
From the source of this stone
my garden was flooded and fed.

My bud became cheerful
and turned into a flower.
After a few months, even a rose grew!

My dear, sweet stone,
I will love you forever.
I wish many people
could learn from you.
I wish they could learn
as you did
how to soften



Mike Ladd

Sheoak

When this sheoak fell in a storm
it lifted a profile of stone—
tiles and laths of the dry earth's roof.

Its roots raised green shale,
red-gold sandstone,
a little reef.

Now the tree lives horizontally,
its leeside anchors
hooked in the ground.

There's a fertile rust on its tassels,
endless wind and sea in them—
sea that formed the stones.

I will never get over sheoaks,
their cragginess thatching
that sound.



Frances Rouse

On Seurat in my backyard

A thief has infiltrated Chicago's Art Institute
and stolen Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon*
on *La Grand Jatte*,
or at least, a torn section of it,
(as if a novel's paragraph or pixillated image),
negligently tossing it into my back yard...

You know it—the part
with the light-toned tree
there on the left, behind
the lounging man smoking a pipe
and the seated man in black topper,
 holding a cane;
beside the two woman
in shades of sienna, one fishing,
the other seated at her feet,
and beyond, the young girl
firmly holding a brown parasol,
gazing at shimmering blue Seine...

The rest of the painting, *à droite*,
is formally arranged in perspective,
green grass crowded with couples,
children, animals, even a monkey;
these seated and standing silhouettes
counterpoint biscuit-coloured tree trunks,
movement arrested in sunlight and shadow
in a casual Post-Impressionist frieze
of the working classes *à l'Égyptienne*, c. 1885;
(but this need not concern you...)

For it is the delicate precise marks
of that particular tree
creating illusory forget-me-not blue
speckled with white,
 violet and ultramarine.

Nile green mottled with maroon,
greenery-yallery dappled with cream—
as if colours draining from old dresses
languishing in mouldy leather luggage,
or summer's chlorophyll draining



from autumn leaves...

You see the critic excluded *La Grande Jatte*
from his “World’s Top 20 Paintings”,
but Seurat’s “tree” is blooming in my backyard
in the last halcyon days of *hydrangea*.



PS Cottier

The Cootamundra Wattle

(Acacia baileyana)

You explode in a million medals
every year—
the soft sky offset
by a universe of suns.

To see you is to smile.
The very centre of yellowness
swarming over the modest green
of your thin leaves.

This is the nowness of early Spring.
This is the euphoric sigh,
flung in joy over you,
and now flung a little too far.

Wiradjuri saw you—
first smelt you bloom
where you were set to bloom,
before another brief gold rush, and since,

but your seed spread beyond
your limits, spread like rabbits
—golden rabbits' fluffy bobtails—
from Riverina to Aotearoa

to South Africa, and you yellowed all
this land. Beauty plastered thick
becomes just a weed, and
chokes more subtle variations.

You, my lovely friend,
are the very muzak of wattle,
Vivaldi recast for electric organ
and familiar as any cat.

And just as her silky paws
hide sharpness in ubiquity,
you, named for a botanist,
bail up nature—a bushranger

gone mad, distributing gold,
slinging it from seedy bags
along the highways. No hiding.
And yet, to see you is to smile,

as you burst like yolks each year
into the quintessence of yellow.
How hard to say enough!
to the glad, luminous faces

dawning into dubious light.



Jenny Blackford

Green Warriors

Long-domesticated northern trees
imprisoned in a garden square
in Bloomsbury, gated and locked,
yearn to escape.
Over the years, their trunks flow
slow grey honey
ooze bulging through cast-iron railings
grow over stone footings
out to the Roman road
and freedom.

In our Botanic Gardens,
an optimist
built a post and wire barrier
around three monster trees.

The Montezuma Cypress here
has form; I've been snapped
insect-tiny before its giant relative
in Mexico,
the wide-girthed Tule tree.
Already this Sydney cypress
sprawls improbably broad.

What true Australian doesn't love and fear
the strangler fig from Moreton Bay,
buttressed like a fortified cathedral
ready to invade the sky
and eat the sun,
or wind strong sinuous roots
to trap your puny mammal feet?

The Lord Howe Island fig
whispers with the Moreton Bay
across their reaching canopies.
See how it throws wide-stretching legs
across the wire fence
high above the concrete path
and down into a strangely vacant
patch of yellowed grass.
New banyan trunks climb
columnar triumphant.

Nature abhors a vacuum,
and these warriors rise
green giants in her defence.
If they decide to walk,
no fence made by human hands
could hold them back.



Kathryn Fry

Sydney Rock Orchid

(Dendrobium speciosum)

Behind the boy extracting a thorn
(all in smooth white marble), I find
you among ferns, but your scent spills
even from the nearly-spent cascades.

Near succulents too in the Gardens
you landscape rock in today's shade,
a riot of disorder and the haphazard,
your flourish of leaves plumped thick

under the last arches of blooms, each
with so many altars for bees and eyes
to land on and wander among the cream
curves and cloisters, settling time.

And when the pods harden and shed,
a zillion seeds will dust up the wind, away
from the concrete, glass and bitumen;
a few will drop into damp, dark crevices.

Any crop of sandstone is suspect now.
I'll be out and back, watching for new canes,
their erupting stems and swellings. All year
I'll wait for the gathering of seasonal grace.

Eileen Chong

Wollemi Pine

Somewhere in this deep green,
creeks run, fringed with moss.
Water falls from broken rock.

Ancient trees,
their first names
passed from memory.

Bladed leaves etched
in stone, fossicked over
like cracked, bleached bones.

Shoots grow into trunks
pebbled with dark bark.
Trees rise, stretching

their arms to the clouds.
Sharp-tipped cones. Winged
seeds. Listen: pollen dusts our ears.



Eileen Chong

Wurrungwuri, Royal Botanic Garden Sydney

I

bedrock. we forget: under
this city lies yellowblock,
sweep of sandstone—

restless buckle, shards
and monoliths this side
of the sea—bolted into

dry movement, tossed heads
and abrupt angles, a people
compressed, filtered histories

II

imagine:

cupping pebbles
in both hands—
sun-weighted, complete

to bore through the heart
of each quartz stone:
strung on steel—a giant's plaything

the emptiness within:
spiralled hives
for upside-down life by night

Eileen Chong

Fern

For Marshall Hartwich

The fern, in infinite slowness,
uncurls each frond; each frond a sister
to another, so many fingers and hands

learning to flourish on the underside
of things. The fern is steady, unafraid
of the dark, pushing through stem, bark,

growing vein by stubborn vein through
morning dew and winter rain. Mists
gather to watch the rills incise themselves

and ripen with spores ready for release—
the beginnings of another, sprung from moss:
fragile, maidenlike, translucent in the light.





Eileen Chong at Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Photograph: Christopher Phillips

Eileen Chong

Elizabeth's Dream

I

The axe, the dagger, the scythe:
to cleave, to cut, to end.

Wire and bones:
division and death.

The pines on the island:
brittle, abandoned.

What, then, of this?
Pleasure, uselessness—

A road that leads to the sea.
A shelf of rock for a chair.

It's said I keep a mean table.
I wake up hungry. I know one day

we will leave. We shall not return.
I count out coins with eyes cut into them.

II

On some nights, when the wind
blows from the south, I weep.

He lies next to me, turned away.
I lost her, as he lost the first Jane.

I hear the pipers in my sleep,
piping out the forgotten and

the unnamed. Child after child
after child—failing to take root,

like these crops. So much water
and no rain. We build churches,

barracks, stables, wide verandahs...
To what end? This house,

these gardens, this land:
our dream, and our folly.



Eileen Chong

Banyan

No sign of her—
a single woman
waits at the tree.

I'd always thought
of it as my tree.
Towering crown,

trunks as deep as houses.
Red ants march past;
some climb my shoe.

One bites my ankle,
but I don't move.
Red swell. My friend,

the boy, runs in circles
around the tree. If I give
chase and slip no one

will catch me. I crush figs
underfoot. Skin, flesh
and seeds. The birds roost

and scream their news.
Incense rises from the temple
and fills the evening sky.

Under the branches of the tree,
a girl waits for her mother
behind a curtain of roots.

Jan Pittard

Night Flora

I

Two flowering vines entwine
The thicker bough, dormant till night's heat charms it,
sprouts vivid memory blooms
from root stock scarred and interpolated
by countless grafts.
Around this a second snakes
unfurling fast as time lapse film.
Tendrils fingers clench their host,
bracts erupt, unshowy but profuse.
The whole a writhing mass
of vegetation and efflorescence
where old and new cannot be discerned

II

Night flowers, plucked or cut by unseen hand
pierce the bland surface of sleep.
Like florists' foam
it succours and is rent with their stalks.
No artistry dictates the placement;
their arrangement seems self-willed.
Some gain purchase, suck night energy
and prevail.
Others, capillaries failing,
Desiccate or droop.

III

Night flora
proclaims its rich brief presence,
exceeds its fecund bed
then is gone.
Wilted, compacted
forming a dense humus,
that on another night,
will yield fresh specimens from its dark matter.



John Karl Stokes

The aisle of doubled trees is horny

(somewhere north of Walcha)

Horned country: the marriage-mist
cools the ardour in the Baron liar's veins

The World Famous Actress appears, every
night at the cattlegrid, waiting. Venus

swells and retreats. No-one comes
but a red-bellied and his shadow

She invites him in; talks flat out
till dawn. She will divorce

The Liar within a year; go back to her audience
of spines walking upright

on lutes and dusk. The beards and gold-ringed
ghosts in wine-lit towns... Applaud! Applaud!

Dave Drayton

House Plan(t)

there for a flower is sand
to hold house and pretend

therefore beach petals cannon
a household a greenhouse

a houseplant
a house plan
a blueprint

Alsop's theorems whistle
and Whitmanize results

the deodorant of childhood
therein find the waltz

a corner thymed
near dinner time so
take a sprig

theatre of the home
and of family

the fierceness of stumps
Deb on the stove

acrobatic sunbelt
acerbic belt son
kitchen calibration

timid diligence speckle
clove oncology withdraws

foundries dimmer
flounder thinner

an Alsatian
annihilation
a treat to coax you back
a dog
a daughter
a doubt

Moya Pacey

Lilacs

Vincent van Gogh
Saint Remy, 1869

Lilacs pungent
as memory
rob me of sky
block my view of irises
yellow broom and the narrow
path that leads the way out.

At my feet the day lies stunted
as a daisy—its flower head
white. My senses
stung by invisible bees.
Impossible to penetrate
memory
find its perfect hive.



Moya Pacey

Makeover

Forgive the absence of your beloved ivy
wild on the sagging wooden fence. I
tugged and tugged, but they were—
inseparable.

Forgive the absence of your sweet pittosporum
feral with lorikeets feasting on loud
blossom, the frenzy of fruit.

Forgive the absence of your dear agave
one for each of our children—
grown tall and unrestrained.
Never flowered.

I've moved them out of sight.
Four staked standard floribunda—
icebergs in their place.
[Keep]



Susan Fealy

Lilac

Mauve steeples,
or mawkish temples
unfit to move into,
enigma that fails
to melt
and so we drown.

Native to bony hillsides,
disputed borders,
yet familiar,
soft as thrush—
untidy, almost careless,
no one seems to trim it back.

If I had to brew a sweet
from scent, I'd choose rose
or hyacinth,
but a bird composed
of scent alone—
that must be lilac.

Jester caps pitching
at the end of love-lithe limbs:
it would be lying, lying,
lying to speak of lack.

Susan Fealy

The Camellia Forest

Spatters of pink have blown
beyond their maker, and the path
is thick with girls in shiny pastel raincoats,
clumsy diadems spill around their hair.
Camellias rest in open palms,
each bloom quieter than fountains,
quieter than pulse-smudged fledglings,
as if small death needs protection.
And afterwards, a winter tree
will spread a field of branches:
so many thornless roses
so many downcast eyes
sometimes you cannot see a tree.



Chloë Callistemon

gympie gympie

picture her
squatting in the rainforest saggy
undies bunched at her knees
or not
humming to herself as she pees looking
up into the bokeh canopy
or down
ants crawling her bare
toes to the patter of piss on humus
maybe
a satin bowerbird's distant
buzz or currawong's hello-hello-oh-no
perhaps
the absent reach for the closest
leaf for a casual wipe and discard then
or soon after
a great yowl through the understory
with bum-on-fire pantomime
or not
cavorting through the dappled green light

Chloë Callistemon

clover

hive skinlets, lucky, not,
feel your weight, lick the familiar
skin. some days it's your bare
feet stepping with the heaviness
of chest compressions.
leaves catch between toes
bleed green onto your
soles. other days, you
crawl shiatsu into soft flesh
knees grinding bruises
that last for days.
you search for luck
amongst the limblets
pluck four-fingered mutants
with a yelp. today
you lie flat, arms out
cheek to leaf. you watch
as stems slowly lift
where you crushed them.
you twitch. the clover uncoils.





Kathryn Fry

On Meeting a Colony

(Elodina angulipennis)

A hundred light wings
ruffle the air,

wander and quiver
and interweave.

Dusk-tipped pearls.
Moonsails pulse

around and between two
native pomegranate trees.

My mind eases
out of itself

to drift with the billowing
tremulous white.



Note: The pearl white butterfly colony, Elodina Angulipennis, lives on two trees of the Caper family Capparis Arborea (known as the native pomegranate) in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney. It is the only known colony in the Sydney basin.

K. A. Rees

Almonds

The old place housed a garden
of moss like a cupped palm—

hidden from the shine of clothes line,
its horizontal stave slung across a pitch
of grass and vociferous flower beds.

There, the frangipani, older than
me its curled and bent limbs—bulldozed along with the rest.
Light spoked its length, cast swaying shadows.

Now it's all just a blood echo
the fizz of neurons splashed—
But we did not dream blanched petals shaped
like almonds, caught in a soft fall.

The moss garden housed a landscape:
trucks with their payload of shells, scattered Smurfs
bought from petrol stations, an echo of fuel
imprinted on their blue rinds.

A plush toy its fur worn close.

Sometimes, we would wake to silvery trails
a meander of snails
smelling their way
from moss to beds
of multicoloured hydrangeas, their dense
leaves creating
a causeway to the sky.



Julie Maclean

true bird nature of a tree

after the Moreton Bay Fig

it leads a double life
as basilica
or strangling vine
this one bleeds
tears of white sap
arms out of reach
of the human hand
and those vaults
fit for a figbird
towering tree
fit for a bowerbird
children's tree
fit for a catbird
banyan tree
fit for a fruit dove
medicine tree
fit for a wompoo
rooty tree
fit for a crow
oldest tree
fit for a cuckoo shrike, a currawong
signature bird
wingspan of a football field



Christopher Battams

Yellow Flowering Gum

The Yellow Flowering Gum
holds its giant arms aloft as
the great moon comes and
in the eternal grey of night
it sings about that sacred rite
in cliffs and caves or waterfalls
where ancient painted Gods
are joined with sacred animals
and what was done that night
was not held by them to be sin
nor the passing of the Waratah
held within the clenched birth
of its first flower primal surge
and the cry of a mournful bird

Over hill and the marbled rock
the sacred desert hunters came
running in time to the sacred flame
and in the still twilight of night
they beheld creation and the sight
and sound the voice of Tjukurpa
Creation Spirits of the dark earth
dancing tribes of the Spirit men
spoke of Legends of times when
in rock and tree and sacred bird
the first man spoke the first word



Note: I must give thanks to the Pitjantatjarra and Yankatjarra and Anangu people of central Australia first as I talk about their Creation spirit, Tjukurpa.

Robyn Cairns

Flannel Flowers

amongst a drift
of flannel flowers
wrapped in cream wool,
a baby smiles
at her Grandmother's sunray face
and shimmering hair

Grandmother lifts
her Granddaughter—
pressing her etched cheek
against the soft velvet one of baby

she points to a memory—
small girl, pigtails swinging
skipping down the gravel path
to the drift of soft stars

picking just one
to place in the small vase
of her bedroom window
to wish upon
in her childhood universe
the flannel flower
was gentle yet resilient
in a tough landscape

bending her crooked body
bruised paper daisy hands
reach into silver foliage
to touch her memory
soft as the sunlight
of early spring skies—
she smiles



Christopher Konrad

Western Port

Along the Tyabb Road
heading east, across sunken, fall-rise lands
marsh, mangrove, cove and creek Western Port Country
Finally formed, laminal during the Holocene
still so in the days of the Dreaming swampland, slough,
middens tracks, game, life in abundance, mud flats

The sun sets early across this side of the peninsula
damp-twilight, sultry, salty fens
and there, at the end of the road, Hastings
Agglomerate layered sedge, brine, tussock, salt bush, sea blight
Warhol has left his stamp
where the HMAS Otama languishes off Sandstone Island
broken jetties along the way like pneumatophores semi-ordered
decayed a kind of Morse-braille from the blind future
attempts to tell the tale of the wetland-moors of
French and Philip Islands

The ancestors heard it, felt it, smelt it and ingested it
hard to tell where they ended and this place began it is layered
swathed, swaled, weathered, swamped through caves, inlets, estuaries
tidal mouths gulping, gulching dancing in moonlight Corrobborees
If you can stay still long enough, listen
let the wind sough those briny-tides round and round your skull
so that when you die, your bones might blend
in with mussel, barnacle, crabs, urchins, basalt and cobble

Christopher Konrad

Anchor

Trees a new language now
changeclimate globewarm
ideology and loss
denial all about out there and air Back then
in the days of my treehug self, they were there to be kissed
under and planted for future generations But always,
always on my periphery-horizon filled with dark accents
and inflections leaf, branch, twig,
bark shadesough into day
sigh in the wind swaywarmth shelter
anchor me to now, to this dirt here



Christopher Konrad

Parsley in the kitchen window

On the kitchen window sill
a bunch of parsley in a clear glass October light-oblique
sifts through forty forms of green fills the mind and hearth
Heart-shaped or errant leaves bowed at an angle in
herb homage The dark sea-greens
like other-world arterial blood or
field-greens like trips into the Yarra Valley or on the road to Northam
maybe from Florence to Milan in March
Along with parmesan, god-food for the wanderer
and her lover
through verdant spring or ocean-wave winter
simple, grace-framed in this window puts us in the same room
eating, laughing, crying

Damen O'Brien

Root and Memory

While we were dreaming, the oldest went over.
A knot of bluster caught it by the hair
and tangled in its green wax, and pulled it down.

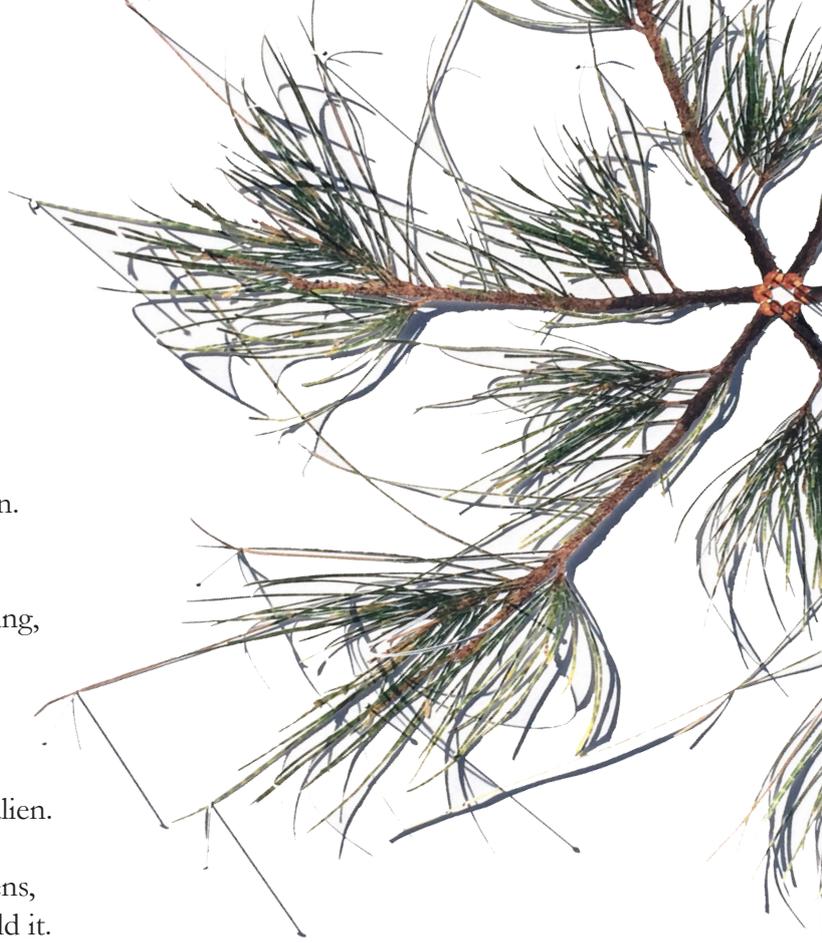
What were all those silent seeking roots for?
The lucent networks and fine filaments spreading,
let go so easily, rose from the ripe earth.

These cunning servants, chipping away at
the sweet night and the brown river frozen,
sprung from the clotted earth, like regret was alien.

The oldest has gone over in the Botanic Gardens,
and its great looms of wires, its roots never held it.
Children climbed that giant, we picnicked under it.

Working in easy wiggles in unmapped spaces,
we laid down strong memories under that fig:
slow roots digging through new digressions.

The oldest stood for two hundred years.
While we were sleeping they took it away.
Our memories dig where its roots once wandered.





Rees Campbell

The Old Magnolia Tree

Skinny scabbed knees drawn up
tight beneath her
She surrenders willingly
to the hard embrace
of the old magnolia's
gnarled and tangled limbs

Each leaving
she lightly touches
her scarred talisman
Each return
she deeply breathes
the knowing of home

In winter
it is as sad as she
Tears dripping
and the world laid bare
there is nowhere to hide
so she waits.

But in spring there is promise
of softness
as the fuzzy buds rise anew
She rubs blushing petals
over her skin
imagining

And then in summer
when the world is harsh
with sun and heat
the old magnolia hides her
For hours under the mosaic of leaf and light
She dreams.



Kablisa Williams

Blessed Assurance

No one spoke of Morning Glory
when they examined my earth
for the seed that grew, handed me
a capsule and told me the pain would
subside in 3 days.

When I sat knees to chest, my soil
a slow erosion, I would have wanted
Morning Glory when I lay hollowed and empty
like bright
blood-orange moon.

I wish I could have tasted the sweet
communion of Morning Glory first.
How the name rolls off the tongue
like blessed assurance.
When I needed an anointing

no one offered to crush Morning in their palm,
boil the Glory in water, and let it steep.
No one spoke of how it gently
settles in your belly.

How Morning speaks softly to your uterus
and convinces her to empty,
pour like gourd and spill the guilt
she has been carrying.

Glory will breathe on your belly of impurities,
whisper sanctification and cleansing of
all that shame and
dead skin.

I wish I would have known of Morning Glory
how it can be a baptismal and a surgery
at the same time.

Kathryn Hummel

Canopy Notes: *Tristaniopsis laurina*

thrown over last month's glassy cool. from a far perspective, the canopy is a brilliant. from the shade a waste of breath lifts the wide dome. a watergum drenches its own edges and collects its own drifts. from last windy night (you've never noticed) how close, how clustered the discs of the blossoms, the eruption of the tree's own fortifying light. the stain is abrasive. my skin, my hair unevenly bleached by proximity. within, details so precise and penetrating. the drop of branches sharpens every sense. i am painterly now, not just looking, not just beneath in a half-dream, overlooking. these canopy notes are experienced, not blind scraps of work or prosody. fierce, like the posture of an aging tree that sees into itself, how it grows into its landscape.



Julia Greaves

Lawn and Grass

What is the difference,
my ESL student asked me,
between lawn and grass?

Something about being manicured,
the smell of Saturdays, drying washing,
windex on glass.

The loose attainability of Suburbia

I showed him my garden
thick with nettle,
'your lawn is grass'



Michele Fermanis-Winward

Wollemi

Within the blue horizon
where eucalypt oil distills,
ragged mountains hide
the relic of Jurassic time
waiting to be found.

In valleys masked by cloud
creeks pick and stumble
through escarpment falls,
a hiker enters history
and claims his dinosaur.

In city hulks of noise
and clammy haze
where mysteries are tamed,
the ancient pine is cloned,
adapts to life in pots—

kept as post-modern star
in high rent towers,
the feature on suburban blocks
of whip edged turf,
far from its secret home.

Michele Fermanis-Winward

I am more

I am more

than timber you desire.
You shear me from the earth
and keep me in the shade,
no more to feel cicadas thrum,
the seasons' fall and growth.

No birds will sing or possums nest,
nor grubs feast on my leaves,
the generations who depend
on all I have to share
above and underground.

Saws reduce me to bald slabs,
a blank to stamp your name upon,
you rasp, chisel and you grind,
sand down the life I held
so you can see my heart.



Michele Fermanis-Winward

The Word Is Beautiful

There are words, invisible threads
slung between branches,
they capture the changes,
whisper to the trees,
find shelter in pools of mist.

Wet leaves become soft brushes,
for words to paint the shadows,
turn black and grey bright green.

Words are feathers, ephemeral,
long spikes of teal and blue,
the fragile reds and yellow
make their unruly chatter,
they gather in corners, swirl
on wing-beats of summer.

Words unwrap their petals
offer perfume to the air,
blend notes of spice and fruit.

Down twisting paths I hold a word,
the one with power to heal,
the power to make me whole.

India Bucknall

meadowsweet: peace

queen of the meadow
found where ashes rest
growing from them
lace of the earth's carpet

furrowed and downy
delicate creamy white
clustered close
together

a soft spindle
of pollen
adrift on a breeze
settles in damp ashes

grows tall again
in a sea of green
blades
a white sway

queen of the meadow
of the fallen
a flag
of white blooms.



India Bucknall

thyme: courage, strength

found in the
wild
in rock beds

a handful a pocketful
for protection
silver green leaves

in light dry soil
in sunshade
wild

Australian laneways
shaded streets or veggie patches
searching for protection

green leaves for eyes
digging in soil
for sun, for remedies

I tried to be
a woman
wore my mother's smile

skinned my palms
in a rock bed
choked on saltwater

left me in the dirt
in cliff side crags
with all the other seeds

christened myself in the ocean
in peacock blue
in salt foam

gifted myself
in posies
mere garnish to your feast

what is wrong with me?
I give and give and

heal you

I plant myself now
and grow
as thyme grows

flavour myself
pocketfuls of me
for protection

by the sea
through the rocks,
thyme growing, wild.



India Bucknall

sweat pea: pleasure

this is how
you make love:

bathe yourself in water steeped
with the essence of sweet Sicilian flowers
pull your hair back from your face
so he can see your eyes
keep them open

feel his rough hands
his soft touch
his kiss should be smooth to swallow
warm like honey
from the summer bees

then close your eyes
feel everything
see the past and the future
joining like the meeting
of his hips and yours

come apart like
he loves me
he loves me not
plucked purple
and scattered like a wish

splinter as a tree limb
in a bonfire night
let the floral musk
of your skin
become smoke
let yourself cry
become salt slick
and wracked with it
the potential and the failure
of being in love and alone

it feels good
I promise, it feels good.

C S Hughes

Sweet Mordant

I have read in this book of fruits and flowers
How the strawberries that wind among the stones above a corse
May be pressed into a salve to soothe the heart that trembles
If only the cage of life could be broke
So to the beast within it could anoint
Or else a tart to give to widows to entice
From stern laments
A cooling breath that makes a balm
Of sweet kisses that becalm
The uneasy wraiths that sigh and turn
Upon this lost lover's fevered grave





Mark Mahemoff

Paving Stones

The olive tree next door
is gnarled and overgrown.
It dumps its bitter cherries
onto our paving stones.

Beside it there's another tree
I can't identify.
Its blossoms are so purple
they almost make me cry.

Two rainbow lorikeets
are swinging on a branch.
They're feasting on ripe persimmons:
April's sweetest treats.

What's left of this abundance
remains hanging in tatters.
In darkness flying foxes
take care of such matters.

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Mark Mahemoff

Chokos

Chayote, pimpinela, pipinola, christophine are just a few names given to this cousin of the melon.

A bunch of them appeared at our local farmers' market, like schoolmates you haven't caught up with for decades.

In my formative years they sprawled by the hundreds, tangled amongst passionfruit hanging from our paling fence.

Served boiled, we often had a half each for dinner, a nob of butter melting where the seed had once been.

Whole and hanging from the vine, with a gnarled, softly prickled lime green skin, they looked poisonous,

like those large pods that hang from trees whose broken branches ooze with Selley's wood glue sap.

I remember their bland and innocuous flavour, something we grew accustomed too, familiar and ubiquitous as squabbles between parents.

There were rumours back then that Cherry Ripes were made from chokos. That food dye and flavouring were added, then the bar-shaped mixture dipped into chocolate.

Strange to think that now I'd pay dearly for a choko when for so long they were plentiful and free for the picking.

Originally published in 'Urban Gleanings' (Ginninderra Press, 2017)



Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Photograph: Kristy Wan

Malcolm Fisher

The Toughest Brief

The hardest sell of all.
Is to spruik the worth of nature.
To customers unplugged from planet earth.
One plant is much the same as any another.
Exotic, invasive, native, endemic.
Doesn't matter.
Just a green, alien, blur...too hard to comprehend.
Biodiversity's a foreign tongue.
Ecology, not on the radar.
Consumers estranged from this world.
How can you cherish what's unknown?
Or care for what's unloved?
So the true, rare, wild, means nought.
Bushland is hewn and cleared, daily, hourly.
Vandals dismantle Nirvana.
Forests disappear, unmourned.
Oceans fail.
Extinctions prosper.
Silent Spring turns to silent summer, morphs to mute planet.
"Forgive them Father for they know not what they do"
I'll need some concepts by Monday.

Richard James Allen

Rumi as a Tree

I am more like a tree
than a human being,
a long stayer,

one who observes a lot,
and can go for days
without water.

Rooted in earth,
reaching
for sky,

my leaves are my poems,
stirring up the breeze,
dancing

what is everlasting
of us
into light.



Jenny Blackford

Working towards sleep

I close my eyes, and I'm pulling clover,
or pink-starred oxalis, almost too pretty for a weed.
One lucky time in seven or so, the stalk
holds, the fat little bulb spills brown
up out of the layered mulch and clay.
Always too many of the tiny bulbils fall
impossible-to-catch
back into the fresh gash in the garden,
ready to propel new pink star flowers
after the rain.



Frances Paterson

Cabbage Tree Palm

(Livistona Australis)

They go to glade, gather around an open place
And fill their ground with the fronds we cantered about as kids,
The hoof the part to let go last; it pawed and struck.

Their mop heads crowd together down the watercourse,
In August, pale with panicles, late summer, lighter green.
Pleated fans turn their hands to cool our heads.

They fill our face with filtered shafts of light, the sun's
Sting drawn, they take the great expanse of day,
Fracture the rays into beautiful forms. Oh Mother.

This is a wandering palm of Gondwana; now there are only
Two in the south, survivors, inside the forest of rain.
Slowly they grow, adding one spiral every year.

Look back, see Banks with his botanists, sailing up the coast;
They scan the trees, identify the only one that they had seen:
“but nothing else which we could call by any name.”

Groves of their kin, mythical men, the Palm Valley warriors
Make a stand in their desert refuge. Wavers of worn grey
Fibres fill the bazaar loosely woven with cream.

They crook their bony fingers, say, “Now listen up,
Nobody likes to eat cabbage! But fruit-doves and pigeons love
To gorge on the fleshy feast of our fruit. Hands off!”

Familiars of Port Jackson once, in just ten years
The colony exhausted them; they cut them down
And ate their hearts; but never mind. This tree gives.

Note: Robert Brown, botanist with Investigator expedition of 1801, named genus Livistona after Patrick Murray, Baron of Livingston, who established the botanical gardens in Edinburgh. There are only two palms in southern Australia, Bangalow and Cabbage Tree. The quote is taken from The Endeavour Journal of Sir Joseph Banks, 1770. Daranggara is the name in both Cadigal and Dharawal languages.

Frances Paterson

Turpentine

(Syncarpia glomulifera)

Turpentine for the clear sap, clear like the spirit,
While all the eucalypts ooze out their goutts of blood.
It sings that when it had a breath, its breath was mine,
Anima, the root word of all life; beneath us
Are the vast root-runs of forests of turpentine.

I try to imagine its roots, but what are my own?
Sixteen migratory kinsmen leaving their lands
To try to take root here. They didn't step onto
The sea, nor put out their foot onto solid ground,
But onto a jetty of piers standing in sea.

The getters got and the fallers felled; whole woodlands
Waltzing across the sea to the London Dockyards,
Calcutta wharves, for the British East India
Company; the Empire sailed on the sturdy legs,
Blow the wind southerly, of fifty metre giants.

Try to be there when the silky stamens emerge,
Burst from the green turret, flowers in creamy balls
Tipped with yellow pollen; before the dry fruit drops,
Hidden seeds glow ruby-red inside their tiny walls,
Dreaming of gaining the scale of future forests.

The turpentine can stand its ground five hundred years;
Unignitable wood, you cannot make it burn;
King of wharves, Sydney docks are held up by its piers;
And on my knees, above the harbour's chop and churn,
I can see a forest go down and disappear.

Note: Dr Ellis, Indigenous botanist of the Illawarra, advised Sir William Macarthur on Australian trees for the Paris International Exhibition of 1855: the local name in the Illawarra for turpentine is Booreeah; in Brisbane Water, Killa Warrab; in Ulladulla, Burra Murrab.



Chris Marcic

Waratah

Winter days linger
Cold and brutish
As the bush hunkers down
Seasons slide by slowly
Frigid fingers loosen their grip
As the sun's rays trickle
Through the leaves
Warming the frozen earth
A sudden flare
And there it is!
The glowing red heart
Of the bush land
Hiding in the shadows
Unseen, unsuspected
Burning ember of scarlet flame
Cradled by leathern leaves
Of darkest emerald green
Christmas comes early
In the bush.
Wonderful Waratah
Tree of red flowers
Named by the very first people
Protea say the botanists
Telopea, seen from afar
But it's all Greek to me
Beautiful speciosissima
For the Latin lovers among you
Our floral emblem since '62,
Inspiring artists, bureaucrats too
Growing now in the Royal Botanic Gardens
Tall and proud
Your light uncovered
A rival to the jealous sun
Scarlet splash against azure skies
Beloved by all
Beautiful Waratah
Hope indeed
For the seasons to come.

Gail Hennessey

The Flannel Flower

You do not stand tall
lighthouse towering the sky
like the Gynea Lily

unpretentious, with the simplicity
of the daisy, you luxuriate
with scarves of white companions

the glove of your name fits
and you wear it, your name's
perfect assonance

our winter pyjamas
warmed by the fireside
the rag in our bath tub

spinners of spoked circles
round a centrifugal tussock of green
your pointed petals
a child's easy-to-draw flower

you are the surprise that waits
in the dark spaces of our minds, star
drifts in the scribbled bush of our childhood.

Peter Ramm

Golden

I wrote you my heart
In the soil of life—
Sweet euphony in the air,
You, a bowerbird, preened and nesting
Took no notice.

I dove into clay, searching deep.
Where grains of sand ran,
in the depths of the earth I ploughed
You, a Lyre, mimicked everyone;
But not me.

Fire came, you moved.
I stayed.
Firm,
to the creeping razor cut smoke
to the salsa swayed flame

Barren.
But, eternal life in the soil remained,
comforted by the blanket of earth
I, Acacia, bloomed golden,
For those next to come.



Peter Ramm

I Am Still Here (Wollemi Pine)

Zeus and Aphrodite hang lifeless
Drunk Dionysus unleashed havoc
Black ambrosia and diamonds
cast to the sky
From beneath Gaea's roots

All has been offered on Cain's alter
Consumed, yet unsatisfied
We bear the Mark
Cursed to watch the world crawl
Yet, a Titan has fallen, to rise again

An ancient of days,
reborn
Hidden away, but with a voice
stretching across time,
'I am still here'
silently booming

'I am still here'

Peter Ramm

Rings

Come and count the rings with me
And peer into my being
Where you planted yourself
All those years ago

Peel away the bark
Run your fingers over my innermost
You know where to prune
Parts of me that shouldn't be there

Intertwine our hands
Draw life from sunlight
Drink in the dewy moon
And layer our lives together



Peter Ramm

Scribbly Gum

How many lives have you seen?
Hands touched stringy lines,
A crease, a gouge, someone's love framed
Cut beneath the skin.
Yet, you weep
What history do you tell?
Some truth, some fell

Indelibly written, knotted in time
But this nature is not mine.

I strike, I saw,
No more forest, just our law.
You shoot, I draw.
Someone will read these lines in store.

Scribble your life in lore
Let us remember the before

Anna Campbell

The Joy of Planting

Any pot will do!
Bags of soil,
On trikes.
A hullabaloo.

Little hands,
Plastic gloves.
Scooping, tipping.
A mighty crew.

Capsicum, pumpkin
Strawberries, daisies.
Carefully or hurriedly placed.
It's crazy!

Water, warmth.
Constant checks.
Until ecstatic calls then,
Rivalry, quests.

Pride, care.
Time taken too.
It's wonderful,
To see they grew.

Meredith Pitt

Fern Bud Child

I was born by the sea, in a suburb
of the city. The waves broke my
first dreams and the low tide left
my feet bare on wet sand in the sun.

A giant tree fern bud rolls in on itself
in an attempt to keep tender feathers safe.
I wonder if those tendrils feel
the crushing safety of a mother always
coming between the world and their skin.

Rolled in so tight it's hard to breathe
when you are trying to show only
your stony outer self to the sun, or
to the bullies on the bus
coming home from school.

The larval sap that reminds me
of those dreams that rise as bile if stilled.
Beware of hedges trained to block
the light and space. Fling out wide
to the sweet rain and dance in the wind.



Jena Woodhouse

Fig Tree

1. Transplant

I move the sapling
closer to the house,
anticipating summer esters,
loving its prehensile hands
that gesture so expressively,
palms extended to the sky
to show the fig has drunk its fill,
drooping when the earth is dry.

Perhaps one day the tree will bear me
fruit as plump as mandolins,
fragrant, multi-textured hearts
sequestered among grainy leaves,
waiting to transport my fasting,
famished senses back to Greece.

2. Thirsty

The broad, lush blades of guinea grass
shrink from the sun in self-defence;
gardenia leaves begin to wilt,
their wordless tongues a plea for help.

The sturdy little mandarin
that joined them only recently
subtly changes colour
as its cells begin to dehydrate.

But that exotic newcomer,
with leaf lobes like prehensile hands
that gesture with Greek eloquence,
holds out for some life-giving drops
from cloudy skies or kindly taps,
plants its feet implacably,
spreads its palms in mute appeal
until I run with brimming pails.

The sapling fig exhales its thanks
and drinks and drinks insatiably.



Jena Woodhouse

Mango Dreaming

Voluptuous and sumptuous,
it fills the palm with gravitas,
golden heart, cool to the clasp,
enveloped in its *peau de soie*,
too heavy with sweet flesh to pulsate,
scented with the essences
that lure the love-lorn to the islands,
conjure the Pacific rim:
painted in *vahine* hands,
Gauguin's Eros-offering.

This was the fruit that grew
abundantly about my childhood home—
plump cheeks that blushed
among dense foliage on ripening,
coveted by squads of flying-foxes,
fleets of lorikeets—and plummeted,
sought by children's eager grasp
then torn apart, each oozing,
luscious, perfumed heart
too tempting for our avarice:
midsummer's sacrificial feast
and bacchanal

Jena Woodhouse

Attar of Roses

Four thousand damask rose bushes
distil a fragrance so intense
that browsing sheep halt in their tracks,
befuddled; other beasts lift muzzles
to the air, their pheromones confused;
motorists hallucinate, and pregnant women swoon.

The fragrance weaves a magic carpet
over townships fraught with hardship,
lonely farms encroached upon by drought.
Perfume of seraglios silences the rowdy crows,
charms the sulphur-crested cockatoos.

The morning after speaking with the ruddy,
beaming rose grower, I step onto the veranda's
worn and sloping boards to birds' descant,
watching the first flush of dawn, smudged
with streaks of bushfire ash, flare sanguine
over dry wheatfields and birth the ruby sun.

The glabrous genie of the rose
told me buds are burgundy,
fading down to pink with carmine tips
as they unfurl. Cut roses last
a few days only, 'til the petals fall.

Their essence, when distilled as oil,
evokes Scheherazade and djinns, but I have yet
to smell that breath of heaven in an atmosphere
too still to carry fragrant clouds
across the intervening hills...

Originally published in 'FourW Anthology' (Booranga Writers' Centre, 2016)

Jena Woodhouse

Paterson's Curse

(Echium Plantagineum)

I look down as the plane begins its gradual descent to Wagga;
winter rains have put an end to drought across the Riverina.
Shining veins of watercourses mime the lupin blue of sky;
water meadows advertise their amplitude with glancing light.

Fields of colour ramify; emerald, loam-brown, russet, gold;
chrome yellow Canola; amethyst the eyes emulsify.
Beside the road beyond the town, the amethyst grows more intense—
gentian violet trumpets on a minor scale ascend tough stems, armed

with barbs of cilia as self-defence. Do the barbs enable insects—
like a ladder—or impale them? If a horse or cow feasts on these flowers,
it will die. Yet the plant relies on animals dispersing seed.
Can kangaroos resist its toxins, though it's not a native weed?

Do the bees, preferring blue dyes to all other floral pigments,
work this pollen into tainted honey that subdues the hive?
The iris hue evokes the innocence of childhood; Morning Glory;
the secret formula in laundry knobs of Reckitt's Blue.

Later, it's a memory cue for the Arles I briefly knew,
revisited through van Gogh's vision: cobalt; starry indigo.
Despite the slow demise they bring to wasting livestock, cursed by farmers,
trumpet-florets of this noxious weed are harbingers of Spring.



Emma McKervey

Ernest Wilson goes to China

There had been despair when at last he'd reached the site of the tree
and discovered instead a new home constructed of well seasoned planks of timber
which his elderly scribbled map had not allowed for.

Behind him lay Yunan, disease, bandits, shipwreck and the incomprehensible language
so abrupt he could not hear when speech turned to laughter, then back to speech.
He suspected laughter most of the time.

His specimen case bulged with many things but it was only as he finally swung
into the branches with arboreal ease in a secret copse at the brink of a cliff
(last autumn's segments of fruit already scooped and bagged),

that he could see the bracts as white doves falling
until in the river they sailed; paper lanterns lit from within.
From the crook of the tree his own diamond body gleamed.



Linda Godfrey

Pesto

First, basil, the king of plants
green aniseed tones, white flowers
leaves, vain, frilled and primped.

Add cloven garlic, wrapped as a gift in tissue
white heart of healing and sulphur
house angel, street devil.

Pine nuts, shaken
from their tessellated spaceship
tender, buttery oval.

olives green-crushed between two stones
sweet oil from a bitter fruit
grassy tastes from a grey tree.

Pound in mortar and pestle
(steel blackens and bruises)
until creamy as aioli.

cheese, some say parmigiano, purists say sardo,
I say pecorino. Stir. Taste for salt.
Pesto and pasta, enrobe boiled potatoes,

pesto and sourdough
ratatouille with pesto, top a tomato
presto, mesto, mephisto, ballistic, antipasto, green toe,
pesto.

Rae White

Abandoned Greenhouse

Crackled footpath picked at
with cautious curlew steps Footholds made
from tree sinew and jutting bricks

Grazed knees painting
red smudges as we clamber over
the opulent wall

Crouch and gallop Brittle twigs
and weeds brushing calves and skirt hems
Vault collapsed, half-buried statues

Peer through glass fragments Glimpse
nature's ultimate triumph:

Benches smothered with String of Hearts
Silver Vine looping table legs Abandoned
trowels nested with moss

We whisper through foliage
Lift mouldy shade cloth, duck past
Cat's Claw Creeper escaping out window
cracks, backlit by dusty sky

On the soggy moss ground we spread blankets,
hoodies, bourbon bottles, a stained
deck of tarot We forecast futures
for the trails of Sedum succulents, peppered
by gravel, for the roots fracturing
ceramic pots

Sophie Curzon-Siggers

vela di vita (veil of life)

vela di veta

tenera spina dura e testa-seme,
il petto si gonfia e si curva g'
una vela di vita tra le dita,
un'arco che sospende dentro
freccie. lanciata in altezza
fa cerchi verso il suolo
come l'acqua buttata alla fine
d'un bagno.

veil of life

tender-tough spine and head-seed,
the chest swells and curves down
a veil of life between the fingers,
an arc that within suspends
arrows. launched high
it makes circles towards the soil
like water thrown out at the end
of a bath.



Sophie Curzon-Siggers

calcified lightning

calcified lightning
(i dance the body electric)

you greet the arboreal propulsion
as your grandmother

calcified lightning,
a convergence of phenomena

in/vert meteorite
thru earth tethered energy,

nevergreen smooth as newness
or exposure unrelenting

our landmark—the shot
dupioni sky and sheep whitened by hand,
tell them as atoms

and the blackbird crotchets
jazz woodwind on angular staves

immaculate conceptions, what are we
but calcified
lightning?
in the next big town

the reconciliation of an age
—’s dualism, horizon (re)moved

delta and estuary nerves
circulate ions anew—

my ear pressed to the transformer,
cicada electricity

where condensation (a)rises, the ghost
in the (dance)
machine
on boards in French lingo
we talk love and its aspirants,





plié in fifth
200 calories a day
positions of the body
en croix
and dogma

supplicating limbs once charged
i dance the body electric.



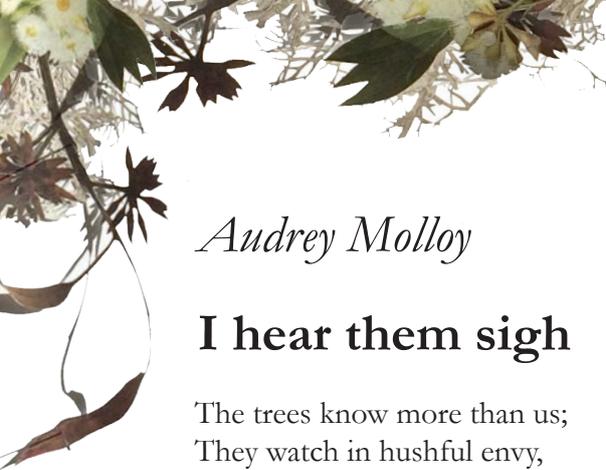
Eric Avery

Passage of Time

De Arco,
 Summer of Content,
 Assonance,
 Radiating through,
 Passage of time,
 Music Terms,
 Moving through,
 Mists papilla reborn,
 Into a new skin torn,
 Out of pages
 Forlorn,
 The music of our ancestors in lines,
 drawings recordings,
 Songs need physical reality,
 To papilla wakanha,
 Moving through mists,
 Deciphering reality,
 Through a different sense,
 The mists of the past come back to cleanse,
 To heal to mend,
 Wakaymali,
 To sing to cause to dance,
 Wakanhawinanga,
 dances of listening,
 Listening to truth,
 Through our songs and stories,
 The land is our proof,
 Of our resilience,
 In our songs we cry
 Out to the sky,
 Biame,
 The land reflected in our eyes,
 Passage of time,
 Passage of Blood,
 Hears and echoes throughout the bay,
 Can you live when faced by death,
 beat of the heart created from,
 Heat in our lungs,
 Like the time in our sleep,
 When we dream of azure days,
 out of pain and deceit,
 Violins sound like drums in this cosmopolitan
 piece composed out of here,
 Passage of time.



Eric Avery, Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Photograph: Christopher Phillips



Audrey Molloy

I hear them sigh

The trees know more than us;
They watch in hushful envy,
Wonder why we mimic them
Rooted and silent.

They are patient with the sky;
Never call the debt in,
Ever pouring oxygen
Into the blue.

If we could be as trees
Would we wear our flakes
And loose skin with dignity,
Strive for age-rings?

Could we be majestic
Magnolias or Dogwoods,
Fondant bowls held skyward
Grateful for rain?

We assume trees have no plans
Other than to be trees,
Content to sway and listen
In wistful rustle.

And if it were not so,
Would they eschew the sight
Of dawn-light's diamond dew,
Yearn to roam?

Trees do not fear their ruin—
Are satisfied to dampen
Forest floor for fungi
And springy seedling,

Bearing quiet witness
To tender stem unwinding
Upon the moonlit stage
They shyly girdle.

Trees cannot be but trees
But they can share their secrets
Through beauty and quiescence
They shall enlighten.



Ben Walter

Joseph Hooker's Hands

we press the soil, swollen
water undripped from clouds
of leaves; grasping at hands,
we saddle our labour with
fresh names—let me introduce,
let me clasp you tight
and let me exile you,
let me flower you
at night as you bloom
in images of card. press
your prints amidst my index;
spiny odours, edify the tea.

Originally published in Southerly



Frances Rouse

PALMISTRY

(Macquarie Street, Sydney)

*Nature, as revealed by science and mathematics,
is altogether richer, more inspiring and more
astonishing than our finest poets can portray.*

Paul Davies

My words are small stones
flipped out into still water—
palm tree for example:
like Macquarie Street's row
of hundred year old palms,
their shaggy fronds of green fireworks
exploding above sweat-banded joggers
or mid-day mother walking a pram
and two very big dogs past palms
sitting plumb in asterisk shadows...
(Later, shouts of the league team
limbering up beneath *limbless* trees
in various bepalmed parks,
aurally pattern the darkness
as seagulls fly Whiteley
above black punk hairdos
sprouting in a navy sky...)

And still you ask:

*Are exotic Indian mynabs in the palms
worth two native mynabs in the bush;
and: What kind of palms?*

Categories are mentioned—

*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana,
Bangalow, Pandanus* and so forth;
or those local/exotic definitions:
English roses, Japanese camellias...

Or perhaps classical allusions would suit,
as the palm's narcissistic shadow/
reflection alters infinitesimally
and that destroyer of wings and dreams,
melts all illusion of stationary Earth;
as those smug madonnas
who never worked the *campagna*,



delicately turn their backs
on palms and cypresses,
other things on their minds
besides, Me, *Assisi in the distance*;
(too late to grease the palms
of Picasso or Matisse for *their* realism...)

Perhaps you'd prefer the eighteenth century view
straight down a telescope's barrel?—
Pacific explorers and artists
categorising, Latinising, putting an end
to all doubt and speculation,
till Laughton, Brando and Gibson
claim their bounty on celluloid palms;
(though Dominique Prieur and Alain Mafart,
imprisoned beneath non-irradiated palms,
never get to the end of *Robinson Crusoe*...)

Film designers too, have the knack
of transplanting the real thing
neat as any museum's fossil leaf:
Remainder of plant unknown;
neat as the local council
relocating your grandparents' palms
to some public domain;
neat as the National Gallery's
sterling silver cabbage tree palm
safely perspex'd from southerly busters
and your fingerprints...

Maybe I should palm them all
in some fictional sleight of hand;
but still you must ask:
Prowling in the wild or in a zoo?...

So I will say:
Remember Gauguin cartes postales,
Monet painting and painting haystacks,
Hockney's L.A. swimming pools?—
every version at every point accurate.

(Do all fortune tellers
holding your hand palm up,
read your life-line the same?)

Until finally, I will tell you,



dear scientist, dear mathematician,
this street's captive palms
are the original Canary Islanders:

Phoenix canariensis;

and if you still can't visualize,
I'll say: *Imagine palm trees—*

*shaggy fronds of exploding green
fireworks!*

asterisk shadows!

*black punk hairdos
sprouting in a navy sky!*



Notes: Paul Davies' quote was taken from The Australian Magazine Oct.19-20, 1996. Macquarie Street's avenue of palms lining one side of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, were planted by the Gardens director J. H. Maiden in 1914-15. Prieur and Mafart were charged with arson, conspiracy and the murder of photographer Fernando Pereira after Greenpeace's Rainbow Warrior was blown up in Auckland harbour, New Zealand, 10.7.85. Committed to 10 years in prison, they were released after less than two. The final French nuclear test took place 27.1.96.

Peter J Wells

The Cliff Top Above Fingal Bay

The air smells sweet with pollen
Even within the thicket.
We hear the buzz of bees and emerge to see
A shock of white flannel flowers

That cover the headland, a parody, I think
Of some English
Country garden, which is, I know
A back-to-front thought;

Closer to ground there are tiny blue
And yellow wild flowers,
Delicate against the loose
Sandy soil

We are above the sea
Looking down
On stone filled rocky inlets,
On ancient middens

A large parrot settles nearby but flies away
Before we snap him, the only
Bird to show itself, to the strangers
Passing-by;

Later I look through the photographs
And notice, among the flowers,
There are bare sticks thrusting skyward,
As if in memoriam

They add an eerie air to my memory
Of flannel flowers,
Of the sandstone headland, standing between
The bay and the open sea

Chelsea Taylah Woods

Fruitless

1.

Fruitless fruit
To which thou bear
O look at that sybaritic suit
And coffee combed hair

A single rose
Between a finger
But I shan't understand the prose
Or why I ought to linger

My magnolia flesh is no prickle
Touch me please
O thee such a fickle
Shall I never extol in ease

We will never be we
If thou swallows the stave
My tongue now thee!
O please be brave

2.

Thee swallowed the stave
Not concupiscence for my prose
Not endeavouring to be brave
All I bear now is a crisp crimson rose

Two words thou cattle!
Words to mask the chin and the straw
Not even a voice to rattle
What we were thinking before

Of course I desired thou nectar
My heart always quickened
Now inside is like crack, black tar
The sight of thee now only so sickened

O chances the chances
Present but hardly had
Because of avoiding dances
Good luck lovely, lonely lad

Louise Berry

Veitchia Joannis

(Joannis palm)

far from a northern tropical home
in a city of plenty
a foreign palm grants
shade
a sense of the exotic
a scientific study
an experiment in relocation

anxious to survive
it settles into its new abode
sends out young shoots
reproduces itself

each generation learns
anew
forgets old ways
ancient wisdom

knowledge of the innate
nourishment for the traveller
a survival gift
lost to but a few

future chefs
rediscover
exotic nourishment
feed
the elite



Alisha Brown

Two Seeds

Two seeds are cast into the wind
And spat into the fertile dirt
Where, by fate, they grow; their roots
Entwined within each other's earth.

The first, she blooms before the Spring
And spreads her splendid, golden leaves
Out wide against the blue; her beauty
So sublime in its debut.

But he is thrust into the shade
Beneath her blossom's ample reach,
Confined to live in shadow and to
Breathe the stale air underneath.

She loves the seed and, bending down,
She wraps her stem three times around
Itself to let the sun shine straight
And true upon his golden face.

He shakes, he stirs, he cracks and churns
And rocks until he finally bursts
With gorgeous yellow petals much more
Brilliant and bright than hers.

She smiles to see her love so bright
And bends to let him keep that light
Upon his face; although her stem
Is aching from the strain.

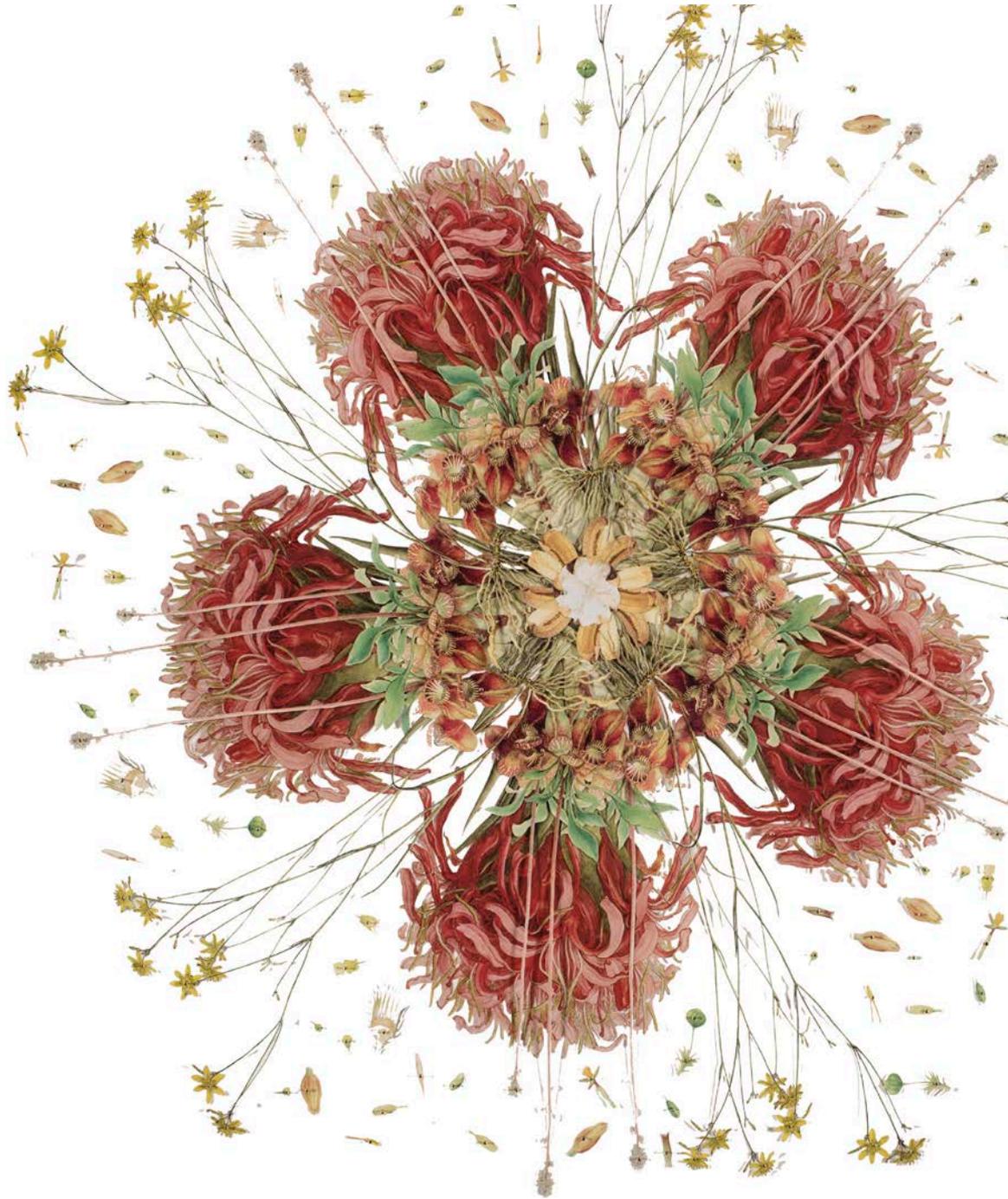
He grows and grows toward the sun
As she grows weak and tired and numb;
The bees are fighting for his pollen
But this season she has none.

He laughs and cries into the clouds,
Exclaims his happiness aloud
And she can only smile for him
While inching closer to the ground.

When summer's rain begins to fall
And he stands strong and proud and tall

She snaps; her body breaks in three
And falls beside his mighty stalk.

Golden tears still fall from him
And land upon her golden face
Which, smiling, gazes golden at
Her Sun she gave her life to save.



Claine Kiely

Wedded to Leaves

1.

Since September
no thoughts of Arizona
they tell her she is doing well
as she knits beige scarfs
like something out of her body
beside the computer screen of blue

“The hibiscus is clipped” they say
so she will sleep
more easily

They believe in
the kind of comforts
she has always feared

2.

She never slept
she lived to breathe
the hay
it staved of memories of suitors
—replaced the smell of onions
they had about them—
even when it mouldered in the rain

3.

Slowly the forest parts
the way men do
but the trees have
no will to hurt
or to
form jealous plans of execution

4.

In the distance
the trunks
husband grey
she rides past them now



till they shimmer
then she leaves

5.

Beneath these trees
ashes
and buds
like girls that tease

If she thinks to leave this place
these thoughts are
oppressive
like an endless dinner in Manhattan
viewed on a television screen
or a life lived out
in nameless bars
in any city



Kate O'Neil

Scribbly Gum

Tall custodians of scribbled mysteries,
What can you tell us, silent trees?
What tunnelling scribes find sanctuary
within this covert library?

Mere larvae, small but diligent,
whose little lives are wholly spent
to leave these ciphers in your care
till later times reveal them there.

What is the urgent need that drives
this tracery of transient lives?
What are the messages layered here
in darkness? Why, year after year

do you allow these prophets in?
Is there an itch beneath your skin?
Are you, tall gums, merely content
to give their need your nourishment?

Or do your lives and theirs conspire
to keep these riddles from our eye
till when these poets take their leave,
you wear their heartsongs on your sleeve?

Note: The scribbly gum is a eucalyptus tree with a very smooth, pale trunk. The distinctive brownish 'scribbles' are made by the larvae of the tiny scribbly moth.

Kate O'Neil

Flame Trees

Come November
the flame trees
begin to wear their fire.
Over there a winking ember
peeps cautiously
from a green crown,
hinting at Christmas
and stirring nervous thoughts
of fire in green places,

while nearby, an extrovert,
naked through winter,
makes a spectacle of herself
in the full flare
of a brand new red dress.

How do I look?
she asks seductively,

and even the old Jacarandas
in their cool quenching blue
offer nothing but
compliments.



Kate O'Neil

The Royal Tree

(Chrysophyllum Imperiale, planted 1868, Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney)

Affie planted me.
He's 'Prince Alfred' to you,
but Affie and I,
we go back more than 100 years,
and have special bonds.
Let me tell you about it.

You've noticed my nick-name—
"The Royal Tree"?
Well, I am majestic—
just look at my leaves—
and I'm twenty metres tall
so you can call me "Your Highness",

but Affie, he was true Royalty;
second son of Victoria and Albert,
and the first Royal to visit this country.
Both of us were strangers here,
he from the old, the civilised world,
me from the wild, the rainforests of Brazil.

Both royal, both strangers,
we've both faced dangers and survived.
Not long before he planted me
Affie was shot. He was guest of honour
at a Clontarf picnic when a crazy Irishman
tried to assassinate him.

Not far from here is a famous hospital,
Royal Prince Alfred, RPA.
Yes, you know it.
Sydney nurses helped Affie recover
and this hospital was given his name
to honour him, and them.
The threat I face is happening now—
extinction in my homeland.
When Affie planted me here in 1868
I was a common tree around Rio de Janeiro,
Emperor Don Pedro's favourite.
It was he who sent me as a gift.

But as Rio grew my family fell.
Close to extinct where we once grew wild,
only Botanic Gardens can save us now.
And here in Sydney, I'm playing my part,
growing seeds for Rio, for the world,
for times to come.

Note: "Affie" was the nick-name used in the family. Clontarf is a Sydney harbourside suburb. You can read about the assassination attempt at: http://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/assassination_attempt_on_prince_alfred_1868.

Kate O'Neil

Swamp Oak

(Casuarina Glauca)

What's in a name?
More than a meaning.
Listen to winds sigh,
lilting and lyrical,
through 'Cas-uar-ina'.
kesuari, cassowary;
words of a feather.
Sleep on the softest
of blankets below.
Think of a child who might
someday be named
'Cas-uar-ina'.

Now wake with a jolt
to a hardness of sound
mostly found
in the raucous squawk
of cockatoo talk.
glauca... glawka, glorka.
No name for a child.

Discrepant sounds,
but truth all the same;
the meaning of me
told in my name.

Opposites meet
when needles are soft—
and when I rise from
my roots in the swamp,
my grey-blue dreams
are fed by sun and air.

Kerri-Jane Burke

Strawberry in Schist

Little stoic plant clinging
Surviving sweetly



Marie McMillan

Amber's Strip

My clothes
They fall in the gutter,
My garments of amber and gold.
I always disrobe in public,
Dropping my sap-sodden stole,
Baring my ligneous arms,
My ruff of crimson and russet,
My skirt of swirling orange
Slowly sliding
Teasing pied-ly
Insouciantly falling
As I
Sway y y y
In the languor of my strip,
Eyed by panting Aeolus.
His heavy breathing whip-strips me
Bare,
Shears me of my liquidity,
Remnants,
Tints and tinctures
Of last season's haute couture
And leaves me
Breathless,
Shivering,
In my arboreal
Nudity.

Isobel Knight

To the Fig Beside the Water

I have broken off my roots.
Years (19) are not
Much
In the life of someone like you
Yet you are young
In a land like this
New companions bloom around you, dying gently into the wind: your seasons do not end as bells toll
My blooming my dying
Surely echoes only
That tiny sound of each spring flower as the weather turns

You have seen your mother called an emptiness
Your custodians bound and beaten
Booted feet
Concrete
Boats and births and building and
Birds every morning
Bats every night

Do you dream of islands?
Of rituals?
Of a kindred oneness?
Do you dream of these the way I dream of mountains?

Let me put my hands upon your roots
Let us sit in this dusk
Let us mourn what we have seen, known, lost.

Perhaps we could grow together, you and I
My beating form my constant shift and your
Gentle reach toward the sun.



Peter Collins

Botanic Perfection

The lone specimen of *Whateverus thingi*,
was pampered, well mulched, fertilised, weeded,
Protected from frost, and sprayed against insect life,
Defungused, pruned; and nurtured as needed.

It grew in the midst of purpose built gardens,
Harbour side views, and close to the city.
This paradigm of, its geno and pheno types,
Timeless and strong, beyond picture pretty.

Had visitors gawping at its well groomed glory,
Towering above, manicured lawns so fine.
(Genus name, species name, FAMILY in capitals;
Neatly beside, upon bronze coloured sign.)

Back in the ancient, *Whateverus* forest,
Alternate drenching rain with punishing drought;
And wildfires, parasites, termites and other
plant eating life forms all chewing it out.

Each tree was covered, in lichen, moss, mistletoe;
The smell of its flowers, wafted on the breeze;
Bringing butterflies, wasps, and loud crowds of songbirds,
Possums and lizards; and flies, ants and bees.

And first peoples harvesting bush food, medicine,
firewood; adding to one mad live riot.
Very lucky indeed, was the one gathered seed,
Taken to grow in well tended quiet.

Where it grew and matured, in stately perfection.
Straight trunk, healthy foliage, unscarred smooth bark.
The *Whateverus* exemplar, admired by all.
King of the *thingi*, master of its park.

Simon Donohoe

Monstera Deliciosa

Beneath the tendrils green and broad bright leaves
I press the hollow snail shell unto
my open lips. My nervous tongue tastes dirt
and echoes. I do this and don't know why.

Beneath the broad, green leaves through holes I peek.
My mother hangs wet clothes upon the wire
in the sun, pulling pegs from pockets while
my fingers gouge the grit beneath the leaves
of monster deliciosa—

I wear a mask;
I speak in babble, wiggling my tongue
through narrow apertures just wide enough.

My mother turns in mock concern and squints.
Her eyes go wide in pretend fright—a game
we play to spin the afternoons away.

Kathleen Bleakly

Veld Lily

Veld Lily
your roots
in the same continent
as mine
Africa
yours South
mine North

Veld Lily
Sand Onion
growing in arid soils
flowering
with spring rain

you take me back
dusky red deserts
palmeries
dates, figs
fields of broad beans and chick peas
your pink tubes
the colour of Marrakesh
stone buildings, rose gardens

your blooms
shapes of
red hot poker
succulent
shiny leaves
bold as Frida Kahlo's paintings
of watermelon, papaya, bananas
cacti, bird of paradise

Veld Lily
colours I'm wearing
musk through fire
leaf patterns
chosen for Frida
she too a wildflower
blooming
through disease
and accident



before we met
I viewed Frida's kaleidoscopic
jewels, dreams, gardens
jungles
remembered Barbary apes
in Morocco
scampering in cedar forests

Vervet monkeys
silvery grey
old worlds
Veld Lily, we are far
from when
Australia and Africa
were one
in Gondwanaland



Kim Solem

Cacao Tree

There's a cuckoo in the cacao tree
Singing a sweet song to me

“Coo-coo, coo-coo”

“I like cocoa too!”

Note: Living in the cold polar city of St. Paul Minnesota where foliage only blooms for a few months of the year, during the winter I'm a frequent visitor of St. Paul's Como Conservatory, where I can escape the frigid temperatures and enjoy the fragrance of flowers. One day, while at the Conservatory, I met a woman who told me the greatest display of flowers and fauna she had ever seen was at the Royal Botanical Gardens of Sydney Australia. Since, I've been a frequent visitor of RBG's website where I can learn about the many blooming wonders of the world. My poem, Cacao Tree, was inspired by Royal Botanical Gardens' video 'Sweet Addition' which is an educational presentation that introduces this astounding tree that can be seen there. Visiting Australia is near the top of my bucket list. If I ever realize my wish, the first thing on my agenda will be to visit the Royal Botanical Gardens of Sydney to look at this living marvel that has aroused countless chocolate cravings.

Lorne Johnson

Curtain Fig Tree

Creepy playground for local indigenous kids /
blessed cage for Lumholtz Tree Kangaroos /

disarranged Michelin Star restaurant tempting
Amethystine Pythons, Double-eyed Fig-parrots /

some sort of gift for devotees of the Alien films /
offering for Burning-Man-obsessed backpackers

who prefer looking at common indoor plants
while trippin' on dodgy ayahuasca /

God's reconfiguration of some undiscovered
whale's baleen plates and brain stuff /

what Salvador Dali still wishes he'd touched /
a manifestation of a recurring dream you had

involving Hungarian Pulis being walked by Rastafarians /
a cathedral of sorts that made James Cameron sob

while he dreamt up Avatar in a drab Hollywood backlot /
just another north Queensland tree...

evolved from a fallen seed that morphed
(over five-hundred years)

into zenith-bound roots that wanted nothing
more than a day, a life, a world and a universe,

vastly improved, by strangling.





Lucy Alexander

Monday's Song about Roses

Stop to breathe the scent
that must, sometime have whistled in
to some dark nostril
who's owner took it in
and came the following spring
to slice it from its mother's branch
and hip after hip to breed it
just for the scent—
carrying the bamboo bucket of water
from the river all summer
just for the whiff of it
in the garden of the emperor
or perhaps the moon's own forest
white or red or pale as the bloom
shed and sheds its petals
tears of ancestors who were not as sweet
and held their thorns much higher
the blossom blows its own head off
and falls at the feet of the grass
the wonder of the smell of it
lost among the sniggering crickets
and the human loss
don't forget, we will all rot like this.

Lyn Chatham

the liquidambar

the tree is drunk
with its tingle tangled stars
of crimson, gold and orange
swooning around a still trunk,
like Seurat's dots, a palette
of experiment, showy in front
of dark eucalypts, a mass
separating as you walk closer,
to an overhanging shroud,
maroon centred, rich grotto
of the boudoir



Margaret Rees-Gow

For the love of flowers

There is something wondrous and amazing
So mind-boggling, and so brilliantly fazing
That a tiny seed just falling to the soil
Could produce a tree so elegantly royal!
I am thinking now of the old Oak Trees
Waving very slowly their hand-sized leaves
Beckoning Jonquils and Daffodils to sit
Beneath shady branches—a perfect fit!
And nearby the Butterfly Amaryllis
Their big striped petals are there to thrill us!
The colours in their petals are extremely bright
And look even better with a touch of light!
Pansies and Petunias and Primrose too
Cosmos and Lobelias in both white and blue
Marigolds and Gerberas are favourites of mine
In fact I love flowers of every kind!
I love watching Grevillia flowers unfurl?
As one by one their little buds uncurl
One can't beat Wattle when it's in bloom
It looks great in August in any room!
Wet cotton wool was the experimental thing
To see what a seed and sun could bring?
And the joy of seeing the first tiny shoot
My goodness gracious, it was such a hoot!
I love the trailing and wandering Vines
Particularly Honeysuckle as around it entwines
It just needs to lean on a high lattice fence
And where it wanders, we know not whence!
Wisteria is a big favourite of mine
It's incredible how over arches it climbs
Producing what seem like purple pearls
Hanging so lazily as their flowers unfurl
I love Eucalyptus with their soft crepey bark
It's amazing how worms leave their mark!
So useful is the bark on their trunks
It's so easy to peel it off in great hunks!
What about Geraniums with petals so bright
They look so colourful in the full sunlight
They look especially good in hanging pots
Of course in Europe there are lots and lots!
It's so trendy to grow our herbs in long rows
Parsley and Coriander—no trouble to grow!

How delicious is “Potatoes, Sour Cream and Chives”
Not to forget Asparagus, and of course Endives!
Everyone can grow old favourites like Basil
It flavours everything we cook with no hassle!
And don’t forget one can make tea from Catnip
It’s medicinal, and calming with just one sniff!
But I pause now and wonder—
How long does it take a leaf to fall?
I’ve never wondered, ever before!
Moments go by as it sways in the breeze
Precious moments, quiet moments, long moments are these!
The love of flowers can be a great joy to all
Watching flowers grow, or leaves as they fall
Life seems less complicated if you love flowers
I could just garden for hours and hours!



Chris Armstrong

Early Nancy

Here comes Early Nancy
dancing round the rocks.
She's looking pretty fancy;
a nice white frock, sun on her face.

The forest has been pining
for her pretty company
all through the frost burnt winter
but, she's here for a good time

not a long time. She's here
for the last snow flakes,
some love in the grass and
a taste of mustard warm wind

because, pretty soon the bunnies
will swarm across these hills
hungry for summer
and Nancy's pretty frills.

*Note: Early Nancy is the common name for *Wurmbea dioica*, a native Australian herb that takes its common name from its tendency to appear as one of the first flowering species of spring.*

Fiona Murphy

Cool Root Run

In the guts of some gully
a clutch of pine rooted in rock
a secret site of steep
sandstone and eucalypt blue haze

A living link to family
conifer cast in stone
when mantle was still knitted in
sweeping Gondwana shape

Harvested from helicopters
skimming the crowning forest tops
swaddled for transport
through Sydney streets

Rooted in the ground fallow
from wishing roots of the
that long gone Wishing Tree
now a rare and threatened garden grove

Lengthy wet gestation
bright lime-green adolescent
to a muted maturity of deepen
green blue hue

Leaves lingering long
through century turn
and turn and turn. Still
King Billy stands firm

Flourishing under filtered light
taking upward flight
inch by inch lift,
some forty metres sky-climb this

From bulbous bark
like a rough bouquet of branches,
Some sidelong, side slant steams
Carrying cones to coppice

Winged seeds of Wollemi
carried far, to ice licked moors
so it grows
cool root run





Jaz Stutley

The One That (Nearly) Got Away

Planting a slip of Solandra
pinched from a schoolyard fence
I had no notion of its power.

In the first backyard
next to the chicken wire,
it scaled a gumtree trunk—

waving leaves, a greeting
from the top of the giant tree;
its yellow cupped flowers

perfuming the air
with passionfruit and banana,
dropping limp as brown leather gloves.

As a potted plant, it travelled
to its second home, installed
at the junction of two fences.

Evading the bougainvillea
the vine twined down the sideway
bending the palings, the trellis,

almost escaping by the front gate
till significant pruning reined in
this headstrong gallop for freedom.

John Brack knew his stuff:
confining the cut flowers in a glass.
The one that nearly got away...

Kit Kelen

Botanical Gardens Reflection

they have gathered here
stand as allée honour guard
and engineer the air to height
every moment knowing
how to rise and spread
they lean with the world
grub tunnels too
are lit, as often lost to sight
you won't see the seasons in them
but the blue is there
clouds are rain fallen
so many hatted when they stretch
the sun is in their shoes



Kit Kelen

Wollemia—A Little Ode

you have to be just
a little bit prickly

to get through
so much geological time

friends come
thicket in to beak about

if song's required let sky catch
wind tunes through the cones

everyone loves a survivor
look up into the crown to wonder

wings, all sizes,
make their ways

here's a track the rain
firms after

that was a snout
at the thing

I see where bandicoot's
gone to ground

Wollemia—mine! now everyone can have one
here's some backyard just for you

I want one of these to guard the house
in shadows and in ways around

the creatures
and life standing, swayed

myself am thing-among-them
I catch sunlight too

new branches from
the dormant buds





seeds are paper
winged to air

Wollemia—you're of
the nation Gondwana

nations and names
are nothing to you

come to a cone
where you branch

clump to coppice
you keep to your gully

a possum closer
or bird full of branches

brings light to ask
how is it blue?

and why is it
cloud travels?

black cockies call
flight feathered yellow

and you could be
thousands of years in the roots

old Nobbly-Bark
Coco-Pops some call you

a tree makes Christmas
or there's a star to follow us home

the pillow is surely
secret to dreams?

you are much loved and much admired
relict, not yet licked

your secret's
safe with me, Jurassic

I pray you may survive Australia
and prayers and these words too



Kit Kelen

in the leaf

in the leaf
we read
a map
of the forest

in the deep
of the forest
we come to
the garden

full of flowers
strewn with autumn
sun most welcome
in the afternoon

in the garden
the tree
guards the house
where we live

we live
in the garden
in the forest
on the map

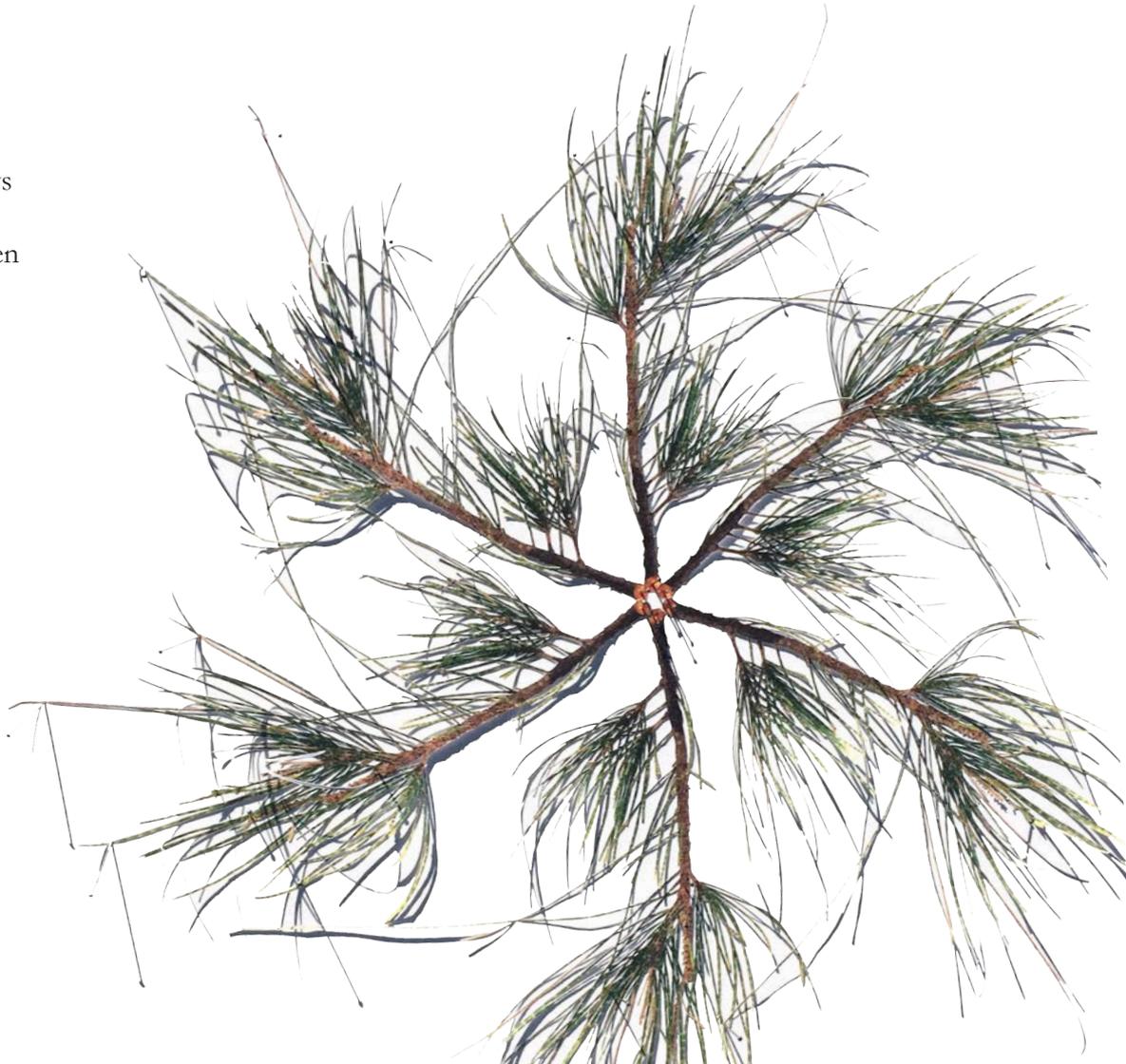
from the windows
of the house
we read the garden
and we tend it

the map is read
from the leaf
secret to the tree
it has just these

few days fallen
to tell
where we are
where we will be

will you join us
will you be one
among the all
that lets the leaf

now fall
?



Mery L Attard

The Dream

Dreamt a dream that felt so true
The winds of change went following through
Fields of gold with flowers in bloom
But something stirred within the view
Bold and strong, fierce and sweet
Was the calling that had a beat
As the footsteps go close to see
It was the shadow of destiny
Where everyone's fate does lie
Underneath a vivid velvet sky
We laid you down to get some rest
I heard them say
I lived I love but on that day,
I passed away
Was a beautiful site to see the people were so happy and free
Oh, but this was all just a dream
though one day it will happen to you and to me
So, live your life to the best that you can make it happy, safe and grand
our time is short like petals of a flower
which are beautiful when alive but do get devoured
by time, age and the course of a lifespan
that is why we do not have long on this land
For we are all just a mere dream to someone's great elaborate plan



Gabrielle Higgins

Spring

pushes at my clingy soiled-ness:
I am not the tight white buds,
strong in their thin layered folds.

Beneath
the whispered shouts
of the pale pink blossoms,
the very-here rock daisies
remind me, but of what

I can't be sure,
as I seek reassurance
by the mouthful in
the crowding ordinary,
to fill the remnant chasm

that remains.
Sometimes though, sunlight
dances through the leaves,
soothing the infant in me,
as I watch the evident wind.



Gabrielle Higgins

Meanwhile the trees

hold earth and sky
and radiate still

with whispered
cheers of resilience

respond oxygen to us
busy people
headstrong with ourselves

meanwhile the trees
interrupt pathways

their roots uprooting
all inconsequential

reminding us
of anchors available
all the while reaching still

Halee Isil Cosar

Chain of Fate

Though scholars preach
It hangs from your neck
Don't accept fate

Instead
Stretch that neck

Like liana
Look

How she drapes her vine as
She keeps close company
With rainforest canopy

Her limbs
One with the limbs
Of trees she climbs

Her roots
Anchored
In moist dark wombs

Fuel for
Her long labour
Into sunlight

Halee Isil Cosar

Climate Change

I envy you

You are not a native
Either

But you are free
Loved
(Dearly)

Your purple is admired
Mine admonished
You are accepted
I'm questioned
(Constantly)

My hijab
Should flow freely
In the breeze of the domain
(There was a time it did)
The way your flowers
embroider bitumen

There was a time
You and I ate lunch
As equals

Two accidental migrants

One, now, thinking of going back

Ian James Hales

Living Space

I am the breathing heart
Of our city landscape
Enter my gates and
You are a child in my womb
For me to nurture and hold
Within me
As you leisurely
Meander along my many paths
Like elegant gloved hands
And long poised fingers
Beckoning you
To delight in wonder
My Sydney Red gum
That watched the landscape
Change forever
Before crisp white sails
That are now fixed
In their eternal vigil
From Bennelong
Breathe deep from my lungs
The whisper quiet cool
Of centuries long before
Your birth
Of generations past
Let the stillness of me
Lazily drift through
The cells of your being
Slowing your mind that
Is filled with the rush
That is beyond my
Protective arms of
Solitude and splendour
You are with me now
All of me
As we each breathe
Within one another
Till yours stills with mine
And for a time
You are free

Janice Owens

Gazanias

I could have chosen a tree a shrub
that blooms with delicate flowers and sweet fragrance
instead I have chosen the common gazania
shunned by the local council
designated a weed to be destroyed
noxious to native flora

The gazania low growing
with dark green silver backed leaves
is a lover of spring and early summer
invisible during the frosts of winter
they emerge with the first hints of September sunshine
clustered cheekily along Riverland roads

There have been purges by the council
spraying of poisons to deter their flamboyant growth
but surrender retreat is not the way of gazanias
they continue to flourish
to brighten the countryside with their blooms
of yellow red orange

I secretly encourage these brazen intruders
I love their impudence their endurance
against by-laws and authority
their persistence even though downtrodden
is praiseworthy
they deserve their hour in the sun.



Janice Owens

Roses of Remembrance

Each spring the rose festival
awakens our small rural town
to the flamboyance and beauty of these blooms
to a pride in our gardens.

Each spring I too awaken my senses
unlock my carefully stored memories
to allow the fragrance of deep red roses
to penetrate the cold stillness of the past.

I have been told that my birth was celebrated
with a bunch of garden roses full blown
exotic survivors of drought and depression
quietly stolen from neighbouring gardens by my father.

Without work with a closeness to nature
he began my affinity to the earth bound
introduced me to the small creatures of contempt
the folding colours of velvet petals.

My mother pale skinned dark haired delicate
with ordered indoor preferences
indulged my childhood pursuits accepted my floral offerings
with amusement hoping I would discard this crude interest.

*

Later an elderly friend allowed me
to help in her cottage garden abundant with
roses climbing riotously in pink profusion with
perfumes to stir the imagination transport the jaded mind.

She taught me to care for the earth
to bury my small hands in its brown friendliness
to wonder at growth the power of sun and water
to recognise death and renewal.

I recall her funeral the dark coffin alive with roses
the colour of her garden strewn on the damp mound
petals caught in the autumn breeze taking flight
leaving me alone with my sadness.

I returned again to her garden
hoping for a miracle of relief from my grief
to hear her gentle voice admonish me
take strength from the earth and live your life.

Our wedding was a time for gold and cream roses
to shine, not the tight buds of modern taste
but large buxom blooms brazenly centre stage
creating timeless images.

*

My husband quickly learned that roses
were welcomed on any day celebratory or not
red roses a love note gold for anniversaries
a rainbow of colours for the birth of each child.

It was not long before our daughters were
requesting bunches of pink roses for their birthdays
gardenia orchids iris and sunflowers had short periods
of favouritism but roses prevailed.

Mother's Day was the time for
pale lavender roses that spoke to me of moonlight
of family bonds intangible reassuring
a span of unconditional love.

In retirement our rose garden became a refuge
where we could rejoice in the practicalities of
pruning weeding nurturing the plants and our spirits
where loneliness boredom sadness had no place.

During my husband's last illness roses were present
in every room of the house by his bed his wheelchair
he delighted in their perfections their idiosyncrasies
longing to paint them knowing otherwise.

*

The family placed red and white roses around his body
our tears washing over his lifeless form
mingled with the fragrant rose petals
scattered by his grandchildren.

Now I see the beauty of roses
smell their sweet perfume touch the soft petals
absorb their vibrant colours and free
my memories the precious residue of my life.

Jenny Pollak

Improv I

This is where the heron comes (White Faced)
and drawing her feet in the sand
in the faint-heart
of dusk
Our bodies' prints
a duet in two parts
This is where she strums
the minutes
and intervening
hours between
our measured treads
Our impressionable feet
laid down like free
jazz
on the beach
in the sand
our octaves crossed
like two lines
stopped in the shade
of the casuarina's
Coltrane
hands.

Kate McLean

Springtime Splendour

It must have taken metres of ruffled velvet
Harmoniously proportioned by a master hand
With perfectly balanced layers of yellow gold
To produce the most beautiful of flowers—
The Gold Bunny rose
Surrounded by a mass of protective leaves
To further enhance the full bloom
Peeping through the greenery can be seen
Dozens of tiny yellow buds
And tomorrow, these delicate forms
Will emerge with the same eagerness
As the alerting petal ears
With which the Gold Bunny hears



Kate Dunn

Black Thumb

Pink petals on a grave of green
The geraniums have not yet met Moy!
A week in his tender care and pink has turned to brown; green has turned to brown
And the once firm stems which reached jubilantly to the sky now litter the ground

Vale geraniums, but fear not
He will not stay forever
And you are strong
Lie dormant, recruit your strength
Then bask in the sunshine of his retreating shadow



Paul Nicholson

Begonia

On forest floor asymmetry grows.
Seeking perfection in imperfect form.
Where separate male and female, are joined together
by slender breezes.
On drip tip rivulets seeds flow to create
gregarious abundance.
In this garden man and wife,
of military persuasion but gentle heart,
transform seized gift into communal pleasure.
Between benches joined by a serpent's path
Lies a landscape created from love.



Kaye Hopping

The Oldest Soul

She remembers the years
Quiet and young in that eternal forest
Wet ocean breezes, sweet with salt curled through branches arched up like they're holding up the clouds
Old skies, echoed old songs of campfires kept nearby
She'd given up limbs to hear the low rumble of melody,
Allowed herself to be stripped for grubs,
Given shade to the hunters in the harshest summer days
She reached up young arms to ancient knowledge
Heavy with time

She felt first beats of it
Strange voices, rough with months at cruel seas
She felt the first flicker of curiosity
At the glint of metal, sharpened steel, barrel of a gun gripped tight.
Stamping footsteps where before there had only been the careful quiet of the hunt
She heard the first death
Beat, click, bang, scream, silence (momentarily)
The sound of barefeet hardened with years and generations
Learning to flee

She saw that metal turn cruel
Teeth, ripping skin apart, bark and hollow soul down at once
They felled a forest
And watched as from the bare land
They piled high those who once towered above
Wood, once alive and sheltering
Now dead though sheltering still

She watched as they worked Industrious, unkind
Paved fertile land
Drained swamps
Leveled hills, around her they moved
Like the ants, swarming a stranded creature
They bricked around her
Till there was nothing left of that once eternal

She reaches still for the old skies
Listening for campfire songs and rumbles of melody
She shades as best she can the garden
That somehow saved her, kept her witness
To the sea of lives that pass her by, unknowing
As the city changes, crowds her, forgets
Skyscrapers arch overhead like they're holding up the clouds
She reaches up tired arms to ancient knowledge
Heavier still with time.

Rosa O’Kane

Deep Listening

In pitch-dark peat, like
a newborn to mother’s milk
you lean tender roots.

Melody unseen
violas trumpets and bells
strain to hear the tune.

Earless eavesdropper
In underground orchestra
extraordinaire!



Note: Deep Listening is inspired by the article: Towards Understanding Plant Bioacoustics, M. Gagliano et al, Trends in Plant Science, June 2012, Vol 17, No 6, M. Gagliano et al.

Nepheronia Jumalon Ogburn

FLORA REFLECTIONS #1 **Wildflower Talk: Beauty in the Weeds**



In the highways and byways you regularly traverse
I have quietly adapted to the harsh side of your universe
Think well before you cast me off and categorise me with spite
As worthless weed, for life is not always a case of black or white.

In awe, you watch the rainbow adorn the skies
Its colours are not defined by boundary lines
In between the shades of blues, yellows and reds
Life is made exciting and exquisite as hues converge

Treat me tenderly for in the garden of life
There are many like me who are in strife
Crushed, cursed or completely cut off to die
How would you feel if you are treated alike?

Remember, the world was created so we can live in harmony
Nature is kind if you treat all with respect like a good symphony
For every creature and vegetation, tame or wild, has its use
All sublime, we only realise when ruin results from abuse

In the expanse of your garden with its varied colours or splendid green
Let me keep my chosen spot in the once barren space hardly ever seen
Except by tiny tots whose eyes are unclouded by bias and worry
Bring that inner child you buried long ago in quest for earthly glory

If by chance you include me in your routine gentle garden deeds
I may bring you a surprise with my unique beauty in the weeds.
Conversely, your precious flowering trophies and well-kept breed
With neglect can fall to pieces and become your dreaded weed.

Nepheronia Jumalon Ogburn

FLORA REFLECTIONS #2 – Eucalyptus haemastoma: Scribbled Charm



I am the broad leaved Eucalypt tree that greets you in the morning
From the window, you see me standing tall while the wind is blowing
To many, I may just be an ordinary plant not worth a second look
But behind my scratchy skin is a story already recorded in a book.

Ogmograptis moths lay eggs between layers of my smooth white or greyish bark
Their larvae burrow in, creating long, zigzag tunnels of indelible mark in the dark
Now, I am nicknamed a scribbly gum for the trails left as my old cover is shed
Little does anyone know what pain I have experienced or how my heart bled.

The early life of scribbling moths hang under cover of my smooth façade
While the popular koalas browsing at my large glossy foliage feel so glad
My seasonal white flowers produce nectar that entices some fauna to stay
And my small rounded capsule fruits ensure a new generation underway.

In life, one should not rely on what the limited eyes can perceive
For glory often hides beneath the ugliness and atrocities we receive
Like scars from painful or sad experiences that create strength and personality
My red scribbles are now a puzzle of art to draw those who seek inner beauty.

Nepheronia Jumalon Ogburn

FLORA REFLECTIONS #3 – Pterostylis nutans: Nodding Greenhood



I wake up with a sense of alarm thinking about the steep road to our Fauna class
But we have compulsory field work to do, so off I drove into the mountain pass
Still reeling from what the medic gave, the winding road seemed a bit too long
I must keep moving and think strong until our parking area beside the billabong

Walking into the woods brought back the wonderland of our childhood escapades
When my brother and I sneaked away from imposed siestas to explore hilly glades
In this strange land, I fear encounters with venomous creatures of spiders or snakes
But worries disappear in the splendid expanse of our unique Australian wilderness

In contrast to Caladenias looking up to thank Heaven for their radiant beauty
I find you, Pterostylis nutans, nodding your greenhood in rare orchid humility
Dorsal sepal and lateral petals combine to give you translucent hooded bloom
Protecting fused male and female organs inside with your third petal labellum

Lateral sepals protrude to embrace your galea, giving a comic extra-terrestrial appeal
So your petite form and inch size beaky hood no errant weeds or grass could conceal
Your scent entices a male gnat in search of a mate and your tongue flips inwards to a trap
A clever seduction towards pollination before you hide underground on edible tuber prop

Ability to store moisture, fungal symbiosis and deciduous nature provides you strength
In drought and fire, you bounce back triumphantly overcoming obstacles at any length
You continue your homage year after with bowed obedience to natural grandeur
An inspiration to keep going no matter how low or tough is the daily endeavour.

Nepheronia Jumalon Ogburn

FLORA REFLECTIONS #4 – The Rose: A Transformation



I first bloomed in your garden as a splendid yellow rose
Bringing awe and praise to anyone who comes close.
But after my pruned body endured the harsh winter
I transformed back into a wild rose flower.

In losing the beautiful layers of petals you so adore
I have exposed the essence hidden at my very core
Flourishing with only a tinge of my grafted cultivar
Now I am smaller but stronger and happier by far

Call me a freak or a failed experiment
I will survive the taunts of fate or bad element
I may no longer be the same rose with lavish display
But I am a content dainty white flower free to sway.

In life it matters not how one looks externally
For even the hardest tree changes annually.
But the scent arising from a beautiful soul
Lingers forever in the hearts of one and all.

Val Smith

Last Roses

Icy winterwinds
ravage my rosebush
strip every leaf,
seven tiny buds
remain

pink velvet folds
bloom in scarce sunlight
brave on bare stalks
fragile children
cling to life.

Saba Vasefi

Black Tulips

I've printed your picture on my mug
And every morning at the six, exactly six,
Your smile sweetens the bitter tea.

My fingers curve, unearth the furrow of your laugh,
The fruit of your forehead. In the row of your hair
I gather hope. I am absorbed
That the tea grows cold, and again
I am late.

Never mind the time, this imaginary line
That tears my life into a thousand bruised leaves
That still stand up, like black tulips.

Ndaba Sibanda

Intoxicating Songs and Sights

I just like to stray into the forest each time I visit the countryside
How I like to immerse myself into its thickness and feel the
awesomeness of Mother Nature surge into my veins

The proximity to a life undiluted intoxicates my spirits
I heed the birds' advice as they sing their happy
harmonies in their charming and chirping ways

Their serenading expertly makes love to my eardrums
I can't tell you how the creepy reptiles wow me
to no end as they wiggle and jiggle in their
amazing fashion to their hazy habitats

I marvel at the beauty of vegetation
and condemn deforestation
in the strongest possible
terms



Shona Ford

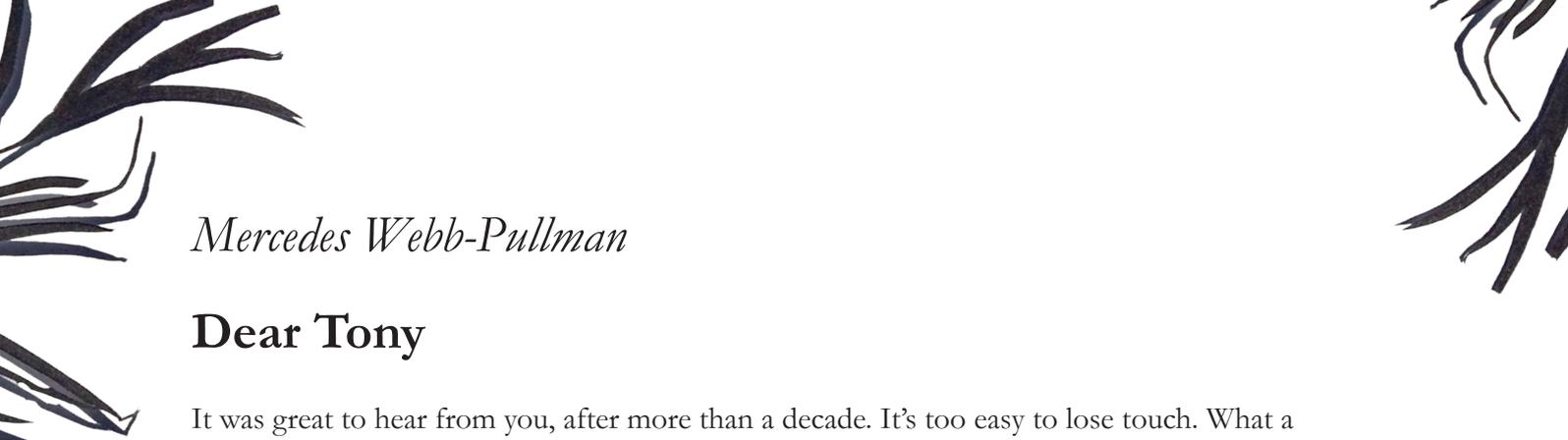
Grandmother Jacaranda

Grandmother's roots are gnarled,
Reaching into the distance,
Clutching desperately to life.
She listens each day to the sounds
Of piping laughter,
Of shrieking cries that pierce
The tranquility of day.
Too many times they have tried
To climb her ancient limbs,
But under the onslaught she stands,
Straight and proud,
While she suffers the indignity
Of grubby feet and hands.

It is when they touch her hair
That Grandmother takes exception.
It is her pride and joy.
Her springtime vanity.
A lavender so vivid,
They cannot resist.
Naturally.

They drag themselves upwards,
Reaching for elusive strands,
Only to plummet,
Aged limbs unable to support their weight.
Lesson learned.
Grandmother's hair shivers,
Sea breeze fondling the strands
Between ghostly fingers.
Some shake loose to land around her,
A swirling skirt to match her hair,
Mocking the fleeting pain of youth.
She heaves a contented sigh.
The devastated young ones
Scurry back to their waiting mother.
Thank God, like any grandmother,
She can give them back!

Oh, the pleasures of age.



Mercedes Webb-Pullman

Dear Tony

It was great to hear from you, after more than a decade. It's too easy to lose touch. What a coincidence, to find me through a bonsai chat site!

Each tree matters. Did you read about a white pine bonsai from 1625 that a bonsai master from Hiroshima had given to the United States in 1976, as part of a bicentennial gift from Japan? I think trees like this should be honoured with a name. After all we all know who 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Man' were. Trees probably do have names, but we don't speak the same language.

They're like our lungs. Quietly in the background they pump away, each one an automatic Pool Maid, constantly scrubbing the air clean; without them we'll all die.

We've always lived with them, worked together with them, used them, even sometimes acknowledged and worshipped them. Pivot, axis, and sphere—from Druids to the Cabala we've used trees as symbols of knowledge and alchemy, those hydraulic water stacks that all day rhythmically pump sustenance from the soil, up through non-return valves, to exhale into the air a million silent sighs.

Solar powered, they circulate water taken up from where roots intertwine; all life begins there in that dark strata that sustains us and holds our destruction. Some read universal patterns, others understand there is nothing else; our need is not returned, the tree exists only to feed itself.

The nursery was only 2 miles from Ground Zero in Hiroshima in 1945, yet that miniature pine survived, was later gifted by Master Masaru Yamaki to celebrate America's first 200 years. Some who commented on his actions at the time thought it was a very brave and magnanimous gesture, to give such a priceless treasure to those who had so recently been his enemy. Caring for trees must be good for you.

And we slaughter them. I've seen an old growth eucalypt forest after it was clear-felled for wood chips. Cheaper and easier to take down every tree, apparently, and leave behind what's not wanted. It made me think 'Holocaust'; death in orderly heaps, grisly remains of stringy bark, grey box, red box, manna gums, the habitat for so many other life forms destroyed.

The whole skyline was changed. The horizon had fallen, as if the world was closer than I thought. This was the right track, but all the trees were gone. There were only snagged-up piles of branches like bones, left ready to burn. Tire tracks of logging trucks led to a ridge above the Badja; all the trees were gone, apart from some discards too hard to move, left as trash.

The artist in Japan, having carefully ground his ink, will take paper made from these trees and paint what he sees; bare mountains—all the trees will be gone.

Master Yamaki's family home and tree nursery were blown apart by Little Boy, but his family survived the blast. The tree was protected by a courtyard wall.

That made me think of the wall outside a bank in downtown Hiroshima, close to the explosion's center, where the outline of an incinerated person was flash-fused into the steps.



For almost four hundred years Master Yamaki's tree has been carefully tended: watered daily, inspected for insects, rotated for sun twice a week, repotted when necessary, taken inside each winter, brought back with spring.

Trees must have a different awareness of time. I've stood amongst kauris more than a thousand years old, in forests in New Zealand, and redwoods of the same age in Californian forests, and learned the meaning of the word 'reverent'.

I'm sure they don't feel that way about us. We must appear as May flies to them, come and gone in one of their days, inconsequential. Their time is more like mountains, slow and ponderous. They are easy prey for us.

Olive trees still bearing fruit in Palestine were planted in their groves in Roman times. A pear tree planted in Plymouth Rock by Pilgrim John Endicott was a hundred years old when George Washington was born. Now, almost four hundred years old, it still bears fruit.

Even the brittle gums outside my back door in Numeralla exist in their own zone. Some hot summer afternoons the gum tree leaves glitter as breezes stir, pass with heat ripples through the air. Diamond lights flash and sparkle from the oil protecting the leaves.

It takes inconceivable time, and pressure, to make diamonds from cataclysmic earth-movements. I prefer the delight that arrives with a summer breeze.

I know trees can cry. People find their tears useful, and collect them. In an Edmonds Sure to Rise baking powder tin on a wall stud by the woodshed door, Dad used to keep some kauri gum, warm smooth lumps of amber. He told me they were ancient tears cried by the trees as they died.

Some sticky drops had trapped and preserved spiders, ants, flies. They crouched, seemingly about to move. I'd hold them to the light and dream about tears that lasted forever, and what would make a spider cry, and whether their tears could contain other, tinier, spiders.

Both sides of my family, though in different countries, chopped down what trees were already there, to plant grass for dairy herds. On one side of the Tasman they cut through landscapes of red gum, jarrah, and ash, to build their homes and dairies, while on the other, they slaughtered kauri and kahikitea, totara and rimu.

Rain forest trees still surrounded my grandmother as she milked her cows but they didn't mean much to her except green. She liked them best cut down, cut up and used.

She arrived at her funeral in a dead rimu.

America is honoring Master Yamaki's bonsai tree's history this week, as Thursday marks the 70th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing. That white pine has long outlived its life expectancy!

Take care of your trees, Tony.

With love.

Maureen Clifford

Tree Change

For many years he's stood out here. He watched the tall ships sailing,
he smelt the smoke from campfires and heard the Gadigal wailing,
he watched white sails rise on the point, he saw a bridge span water
and as the colony did grow he shaded son and daughter.
He stood beside the harbour blue and reached towards the sun,
his limbs reached ever upwards and extended to the gums;
his lengthening shadows cross the pathways where folks now do run.
He's seen so many changes in his lifetime.

This black bean—forty metres tall, branches in bloom, low spreading
his red and yellow pea shaped blooms upon the ground were shedding
a carpet bright and colourful small birds sought nectar there
as folks took rest beneath his shade. Mrs. Macquarie's Chair
basked in the glorious sunshine, its sandstone warm to touch.
Elizabeth? Well she's long gone. She loved it here so much.
For hours she'd watch the tall ships from the India's, the Dutch...
watching for ships from England—'home'. Her pastime.

The Bunya feasts are gone now but the bunya trees remain,
the Gadigal were scattered and things don't remain the same.
In times now passed they gathered here to fish and eat badangi,
the food was plentiful back then—wulaba and wirambi.
The bunya nuts were rich in oils and roasted on the flames
of campfires—shared with visitors and kin with different names
who came to trade and socialize, resolve and not defame
clan issues, sharing dance and talk in peacetime.

From Yurong one can gaze across the harbour waters blue
to Kiarabily—somewhat changed but still a lovely view.
These days the harbour waters are churned by ferries crossing
and on inclement days their passengers sure get a tossing.
The harbour bridge is on the left, her girders of grey steel
join distant shores together and at her feet they kneel
as she carries the lifeblood of this city. A fur seal
is spotted at the Opera House at lunchtime.

The Royal Botanic Gardens are the jewel in the crown
of Sydney. Her tiara is the bridge—the sea her gown.
Her minions gather round her and all kneel at her feet,
Potts Point, Rushcutters, Double Bay, The Rocks—they all compete.
But from humble beginnings when trees were first planted there
by human hands along the road to Elizabeth's chair

Eucalyptus Robusta was the first with blossom fair.
Her lemon scented leaves fragranced the daytime.

Yes time has come and time has gone and time goes on forever,
the wheels of life continue on despite mans worst endeavour.
The seasons come, the seasons go, the world is slowly changing.
For the better? Who can say? Mankind is rearranging
all the world and seems to give scant thought at times, you will agree,
to other species on this earth, the animals, the tree.
We do not learn, we are blinded with eyes that cannot see,
but one tree stands who once saw ships come sailing;
imposing—with a presence still prevailing.

Maximilian Heinegg

Peace Lilies

1.

Courtship. Ignorant
flowers abound, small wild ones plucked
on the return from a run, along the street's
island, the lake road, or a neighbor's
tree in blossom.

2.

Living in sin, with the first job came debt,
supermarket roses, the white wine
deluge that frightened guests.
Living on that ark, we grew
joyous, large.

3.

You wanted no love poems, no songs
composed of cowboy chords,
no veiled symbols & no cut flowers—

instead, we bought an aloe
for our apartment, a hardy plant
we could live with, but needn't water,
spiky, tolerant, one that, if torn,
would balm.

Not because of our effort, but because
of our choice, the plants flourished.
Long after we had split them
into separate pots,
they towered beside us.

4.

There was an epic rubber plant in the Fenway
apartment & did I dream, small oranges
that hung like Japanese lanterns &
perfumed the living room
memory, a mess
of baby-brain & beer.

5.

With older children, we chose peace lilies.
Like us, always sweeping
the air, mildly toxic,
& keep a bract over their flowers.

Left in shade, they come to resemble
familiar house plants,
but with the parting of blinds,
climb out of their pots,
flowering past domesticity.



Renee Abbott

Camellia

Cushions build an open lounge for gatherers of honey fruits
A sanctuary settled with the furnishings of binding roots
The winding lutes of wind song play in alternating flutterings
Reprising petal thickets speak of ages through their mutterings
Sequences of sequined swirls, suspended by a xyloid mast
Form ornaments of pomegranate pompoms in a coloured blast
Pink electrons circulate their nuclei of butter stems
Rose butterflies with paper-folded wings assemble, hem to hem
Saris in raspberry silk adorn the seats in permanence
Command performers fill the Music Bowl beyond its firmament
Watermelon couches densely line the auditorium
Smooth woven Afghan warmth equips a decadent emporium
Thickly-thatched in fairy floss of musk-stick pink, a convex roof
Collects the nectar of a storm while reigning, gracefully aloof
A carousel revolving with concentric flags' Tibetan red
In sumptuous materials which quilt for bees a daylight bed
A hidden stamen spire to decorate a domed conservatory
Surveys in elevations of an aerial observatory
Yards of Gothic lace are bunched in bounties, bound by sepal hooks
Gathered posies of Baroque pastiche are fixed in hidden nooks
An Empress who impresses with her pink marshmallow manicure
In tiled skirts of satin-padded plates to endlessly allure

Renee Abbott

Iris

Under the lilac quilt of dawn
I coat myself in its invitation
Foraging for words to describe your blue-haired bluebell beauty
As your hairline capillaries reach for atoms of nourishment
In the worms' nitrous labyrinth
A trident of grass for your candelabra of snapping stalks
A sip of Shepherd's Warning for your model cheeks
A drop of strawberry dew for your ripened scent
A lick of feathered toffee for your pollen pompoms
A star-printed Pianola score to play your wind dance
Creeping love forms its daisy chain
Through taffeta regalia, violet as the dusk
Drooping tongues tumble in maps of tiger veins
Fur-patted rivulets are fused in colours of exotica
Royal velvet capes are draped in looping trains of decadence
With whimsical translucency
Below a bluegrass beard
Your name is Iris
Spoken by curtains of wind curtailed by branches
Dressed by the night sky's couturier
In wind-puffed drapes of Saturn-ruffled tulle
Reflected in my Earth-coloured iris

Renee Abbott

Magnolia

Merlot-lacquered nacre decorates the chalice of the rain
Beckoning segmented pods, beneficent in sanguine stain
Beacons of the dusk, alight in frosted fans of Art Nouveau
Pearlescent lanterns of the moon are flushed behind a lotus glow
Rose Bakelite cocoons enfold, in mussel-shell capacity
An atrium, Kabuki white, `mid turnip skin opacity
A Flower Fairy flourishing in flaring veils, enshawled within
The tissue wind and cotton-vapoured breeze Orb-Weavers primly spin
Flapping Napa skirts of swan wing grace are posed in pirouette
A varnished porcelain phoenix, animating from a silhouette
A dancing dress of petalled panels, folding aces' florid decks
Then etched with the geometry of human skin, their mouldings flex
Cheeks of crimson blush perform theatrically in opal light
Plum parasols are prancing into boulevards of branching height
Oh, to drink the nourishment distilled in vessels of the Spring
Dispensed through sprouting fountain portals' cherry-brandy openings
A philtre of blackcurrant cosmopolitan in silk-screen sweeps
Is brushed upon the primed marquises' blank canvases to show and keep
If only I could fill the silver goblet with more Summer wine
And drench the pouting petals in effusive sprays of ageless time
To atomise addictively with cocktail-sweet ambrosia
Love's drenching gown—a banquet of perfume, makes visions rosier
A clutch of starched chalk parcels clusters inward like a penguin dance
Yet, polished as the nautilus in sculpted claws of royal stance
Pinch-pleated curtains blouse in gathered gills of Hollywood panache
Cascading shades enclose a new day's treasures in their oyster cache
Splayed almond fins in synchrony all paddle through white-water winds
Tenacious oars of layered ribbon ribbing, bound with tempered skins
Impasto's coat of cochineal half-fills the frills of stems' chapeaux
As models of the roaring twenties bonnets waver to and fro
A beaker of Art Deco grasp united by an even rhyme
Trains Grecian sister figurines to cultivate their pursing climb
Ivory keys are played in scores dictated by the nimbus pearls
In sequences of scattered tune, a new sonata crosses worlds
Smell the salted grains of window dust relayed by floral brooms
Collected from the breath of waves, transcending as they bathe and groom
Whisked islands of gypsophila are diamonds in a chandelier
In pizzicato sprigs, a whispered constellation blooms in tiers
Clothed in cream cascades of Aphroditean nobility
Skating over shimmer paths with Russian ice mobility
Shuttlecocks anticipating launch from their tenacious port
Are holsters of the Pekin quills which, by their genes, are aptly taught

Ceramic clicks of castanets find synchrony in tapping rims
Pomanders' scented synergies infuse rose coaches to their brims
Maidens of the mist sublimely congregate in garland rows
Transported on a channel wisp in carriages of fastened bows
I wear your outfit close to me in swooping sheets of haute couture
With selvages of sugar braid to stir decanters' dream liqueur
The textured rind of cartridge generates an avalanche of shade
Like conical martini parasols to filter sun-drops, frayed
Cast in lunar porcelain, the carafe of celebration's brew
Outpours its misty tincture from a tilted spout of residue
In eider aisles of bridal white are chasubles of purity
To twist their twines into a living carpet of salubrity
A Papal mitre multiplies in linen crowns' revered array
With trinities of holy hands, disciples bud in prayers' display
An avenue of bleached Chantilly frill, to reach infinity
Through aisles and miles of stretching leis, unwinding their divinity
A splendour spray of cabbage moths in floury flights, afloat on green
A clam of amethyst velour bears Venus as a garden Queen



Renee Abbott

Daffodil

Erumpent trumpets rise and bloom in symphonies of collared song
Polished butter cuffs are buffed by Summer dustings' gilt sarong
Postured necks of sleek proportion crane triumphantly to light
Through electronic yellow charge, brass bowls magnetically invite
`round glossy tubes of sweet lemon meringue, encased by short-crust fans
Crepe paper spathes' brown ribbons of organza form bucolic bands
Enamoured by reflections of Narcissus in the mirror pond
Aesthetic love is justified by crowns of Californian blonde
A bell which serves for all six-legged queries frequently is rung
As sticky legs itinerate the cupric arc's vibrating hum
The Taj Mahal for netted wings of pilgrimage bears open doors
A hive for the collection of ingredients is oft-explored
Moulded beeswax cylinders entice in saponaceous sheen
And sniffers of sweet sugared air are served on wands of bottle green
Extract a strand of pinecone wind and thread it through cicada words
Then pick a bulb of dew-glazed youth and plant it so the score is heard
An amber light spray plays its fountain shower through Egyptian gold
Notes catapult effusively from drums of treasure's cargo hold
Humming rays' tequila cocktail blends amid a beaker's curve
Stirred with turbid rods' embedded verve, the potent dew is served
A chain of reminiscent repetition, you regenerate
Resplendently displaying genes of agelessness, inveterate
A cache of Kashmir coinage forms the cashmere sleeves of pharaoh wealth
And ties of tycoon bullion flail from brocade waists of victory's belt
Stamen stems sedately sit in sunrise vases' scalloped edge
Fluted frills of Florentine fan lacily around their ledge
Wading in the paradise enchanting a liqueur glass
A tropical umbrella opens fruitful shade, obliquely cast
Coasters of banana skin are occupied by pumpkin pots
And guests traverse a moat of camembert to reach the chimney lofts
Custard piping glistens in a photon shower's spectacle
Spearing through an emerald shoal of populating tentacles
Like little jars of marmalade assembled with their dainty spoons
Served upon a saucer's doily star, arranged in filed festoon
A necklace charmed with honeycomb accessories and marquise scarves
A span of Spanish pitchers to dispense delight's lysergic salves
Egg-yolk yellow riches replicate themselves amid the field
In pliable rotundas to parade perfection's floral yield
Galloping Mistral gears propel a twirling sideshow novelty
Curled rudders of the token prize—hypnotic in their odyssey
Festivities of Ferris wheels rotate with neon amplitude
Scintillating lumens' sizzle navigates high altitudes

Hollowing the citrine wax with candlelight's descending flame
To effloresce in fireworks' hexagonal extension frame
Rendered tangerine, an upright fort erects its helipad
Antennae seek the columnar antenna to precisely land
A snapping paparazzi sea of skyward-pointed telescopes
Extending eighteen-karat lenses from emergent periscopes
A pillar of Ionic chiselled crests in scrolling symmetry
Declaring; sharing whirled volutes with stately magnanimity
Tutu ruches' concertina folds are framed in Arabesque
Right-angled poise suspends the dance, auriferously statuesque
Ruffled like Shakespearean accoutrements in bracing rings
Rolled sheets of crackling cadmium papyrus sway to cymbal tings
Lined up on the marbled earth are frosted phials of limoncello
Served in cores of pineapple, and saffron-robed like Buddhist fellows
Narcissus, justified within the species of Poeticus
A hexagon of rhyming hue upholds its reigning edifice
Spiced palace walls ensnare Mediterranean aromas' inks
Beneath a kumquat's coronet in curry braise and chilli tints
In mediaeval marzipan, tiara filigrees adorn
A knighted turret, edged with crenellations in their stoic form
Iconic castles clad with sandstone essences and baked by day
Clothed in solar tonic marinade, the organ vessels play
Images of Hansel joining Gretel in enchanted vales
All wander through a wonderland of gingerbread and cupcake trails
A lighthouse peeps in antimony yellow from a starfish bank
Observing while conserving honey's pottery as varnished tanks
For, Daffodil, you are a joyous metaphor for every dawn
Each melon sweep; each molten sugar sundown; every bright star born
If only the receptacles were tins of paint; with sepals' brush
I then could paint the city streets in daffodils' fluorescent gush
The waltz of dual trefoils flaunts Vienna's choreography
As costumed entertainers populate their duned topography
Tossing Roman heads and tails in Trevi splashes, paved with stone
Absorbing beads' fermenting verdigris, the shoots are richly sown
Impassioned bugles voice their boisterous presence on a Vaudeville stage
Proclaiming ceremonious accord in coloured escapades
Jasmine sprinkles rhythm over surfaces of chiming air
Resounding with metallic shivers' tambourine of jingling wear
Acutely pointed pennants strung together in the day's awards
Are mounted on prestigious trophies handed down with beauty's laud



Renee Abbott

Projecting Dad through a Hippaestrum

A lavender projector animates the cinema of dawn
The winding roll of Dad's flickering frames; the dotted codes which warn
A changing reel is imminent; the movie takes a newer path
So, delicately he unspools the clockwork casing in the dark
Swarming, wasp-like paths of heat meander through light buttered air
Perfumes of violet; jasmine; peach, are sweetened in distilled winds' flares
With just the music of their names – conducting Springtime's lullaby
Lithe watercolour, brushed in ozone blue across a silk screen sky
Nuggets of the sun sneak through each rivered twig in screaming lines
With star-shaped spears of photon efflorescence in a choral shine
Powdered light is sifted over rambling olive canopies
Filtered by winged wisps of talcum cirrus fibres' panoply
Dense and chalky airborne flour of woodsmoke – matting on my nose
Sweet like shaven oven dust of flaking baking sugar loaves
Street-lights on chevron-branched partitions peer triangularly through
Between the folds, erupting in a cider spring of déjà vu
Blooming like a city light through flourishes of Friday rain
Embossed in strumming burgundy and printed with mnemonic stain
Pinstripe garments; suited sleeves are tailored into tapered leaves
Supported with distinction by their pompous canes' unbending reeds
Honey sugars populate bees' straws in lollipop delight
Entrancing like a whirligig 'neath blurring colours of their flight
An innocent, involuntary toffee apple splice invites
A decorated mask's Venetian carnival of slatted lights
Tall, rushing winds crash with the dynamite of a Hawaiian wave
Brushing; teasing strands of stretching water, as the rocks are shaved
Surfing sonic magnitude with just my ears as balance tools
As swerving tonic amplitude comes curving through all vestibules
Petals of the noon descend in daisy chain continuum
Through light spears' asterisked corollary – horizon's vinculum
In parallels of Regency, plush wings' upholstered symmetry
Converges through a velvet wine bow-tie, shaped in infinity
I listen to the stigma's words vibrating through the speaker mesh
Saline phrases whisper like a nautilus; then evanesce
A perianth of waves transmits your tidal voice, and you are known
Baroquely strobing through a style amid the sprawling gramophone
A basket holding jewels of rain; a sprinkler's prism; chessboard lawns
The drowsing oil of coconut; the neon nights and comet dawns
The regal red of tartan pipes parades amid puffed petal pride
In running stitches woven through the lime-green awnings, side to side
Days of malted sunshine build like violins in magnum swell
Peering through the edges' wedge of space to cast a luminous spell



Moon-plated apertures dilate in open tiles of imbrication
A camera lens receiving and restoring optic information
Peering down the barrel lens of frescoed lime and pollen wands
I see your mind's translucent frames of memory unreel their fronds
A cone's concentric claws conceal a crystal cave of peridot
As pigments' Incan incandescence thrive in brambly berry glow
Confetti winds are gathered by the reaching of receptive ears
Silvern silts and wafer leaves – all eddying in tumbling spheres
Champagne shower panoplies' sonata of white noise erupts
As dusty clouds of static float in moments caught in blissful tufts
A festival of bird song glimmers through a starlit hemisphere
Revolving with the music in mandalas of the stratosphere
Abstracted from a roulette wheel, these numbers grow in certainty
Aligning in their Fibonacci architecture, perfectly
Lakota headdress, fitted with the finery of carmine quills
War-bonnet of the naked orb; bestowed with iron oxide grilles
Chambers of red-ochre strings play warm concertos with time's bow
Peruvian engravings etch a fluent groove in tidal rows
An atrium of gala scale with ceiling wings of concert halls
An amphitheatre broadening divine acoustics through skewed walls
Filaments revolve around the open dial with sweeping hands
As ticks of time are clarified overtly by the sifted sands
Through spinning seconds, currents generate an overtone of you
Winding through the gallery of spiral galaxies in view
Sun shines with different colour through a cognac-marinated sky
Absorbing quietening moods of dusk, awaiting dawn's reply
The nougat palm is glorified in tendrils of extending calm
And glamour hands play Hollywood though tropical majestic arms
Shaven in hypnotic folds of Shalimar's glass fleur-de-lys
With crystalline refraction, trapping patterns in transparencies
St Elmo's Fire mauvely luminesces over stamen tips
In halos of intrigue, as flights of matching garb take eager sips
Concurrent tracks on reel-to-reel are summoning in contour curves
Indelibly imprinted; pressed like vinyl grooves' conjoining verve
Stamped upon the theatre-lit proscenium are chilli strands
Flamenco colours plucked in bright arpeggios of spicy lands
Pasted with the pastel of pistachio and peppermint
Sweet syrup tarts are lashed with plum ganache in sherry redolence
Parisian fashion sveltely ribbed in extroverted corsetry
Cavorts in can-can cameos produced by solar sorcery
Hanging baskets, lush with moss, in greenhouses of golden glass
Conducted by batons' symphonic streaks of the Glenn Miller class
Soaked in Oklahoma port and spoked with twills of Irish Cream
Muscat sauces drizzle over sources of the fragrant reams
Humid Caribbean haze condenses into Apple rouge
Enlivened by the intertwining limelight of a twilight cruise



The open dish deciphers cosmic data through its looping port
So skyward satellites can send their greetings to a sound resort
The perianthic bell completing living tissue's gramophone
Is speaking with your spirit through the arches of its glamoured home
A polyphonic vortex to project the voice I hear inside
Enhances my awareness of the garden where you now reside
The hands of time itinerate the fob-fixed face with ambience
Suspended by a timeless chain of eighteen-karat opulence
Monday, Monday – rain falls like a cymbal's skid in static mist
Frenetic streets are fused on mental acetate in memories' tryst
The footage of the changing reel unwound in tune with minute-hands
Yet, every frame returns on petal screens upon our eyes' command

Renee Abbott

Touch of Class

You bundled me inside your hand-span's skin of polished suede
With square-cut bevelled fingernails, like smoky diamonds, smoothly paved
Peering with reflective hues while singing Perry Como tunes
With unabated heroism, carrying me `cross waves and dunes

Oh, where are you now?
Want to know how
To reach for you, so what I'll do
Is catch the teasing garden breeze
Because you're now a leaf

While gnashing incandescent teeth to dazzle any mirror plane
Your dryly sharpened wit's sardonic grimaces shone plump disdain
Elegant hands maintained astute control of highways, rolling home
And circus-strength precision held a steering wheel and ice-cream cone
Noticing a colour clash while focusing the opposite way
Your multi-faceted facetious quips worked like an impromptu play

Oh, where are you now?
Want to know how
Your scent is there, and you're elsewhere
But I feel you blowing light and free
Because you're now a leaf

Through forests of expression, meaning gleamed with perspicacity
In earthen saturation, green was nurtured with sagacity
The colour of your life, fertile in clothing; botany; civility
The tragedy—only the closest plants knew your ability

Oh, where are you now?
Want to know how
To reach for you, so what I'll do
Is brush my hand upon our tree
Because you're now a leaf

My Daddy's a leaf on the breeze

Helen Bradwell

Resilient

I give you geraniums—pink and red
and common as grief. Daubed sprawling in old
terracotta—matisse cezanne van gogh—or
against the fence in Maycomb, gaudy in

chipped enamel slop jars, clutching at hope.
I grew them in England, pruning back hard
each autumn; was pleased to find their reckless
heads lapping up the Australian sun.

The winter she died my father-in-law took cuttings,
the small shoots sprouting in days from flimsy stems.
I helped deadhead them the way she'd shown me
when she taught me how to love a garden. They go on



Ruby Tandon

Viola

Strikingly beautiful viola flowers
Growing in that distant garden reminds me of my love
It is the witness of my triumphs and tribulations in love
In the midst of these flowers our love bloomed
In its heart shaped leaves my tears gloomed
I fall by the wayside in love in its blooming shade
I hoped my destiny be like of that nymph Lo
Who was beloved by God Zeus
Whose tears were changed into sweet-smelling violets
Which only she was permitted to eat
When my heart broke into fragments
I wish I could have accumulated those fragments into a frame
And blanketed it with violets as symbol of innocence
I have heard violets are used to ease broken hearts
I wish I could have cry out loud my sinlessness
I wish I could have proved my impeccability
But as time passes by our distance increased
He pass by me
What left with me was handful of violets
Full of colour and divine vibes
They guide me to live a serene life
Life which is full of harmony
Life which is placid
Viola became my guiding light
Like it has become for mother Mary
Its flourishing signifies advancement
New beginnings, creativity
Good luck and purity
May blossoming of new viola flowers embarks new journey
New hopes new horizons new standings
New places new ventures new emotions for me.

Rob Walker

Wheels on Fire

(Stenocarpus sinuatus)

i. m. Margaret Preston

Not Dylan's and not rolling down the road;
A tree of lesser fame.
Banana mini-hands in tropic views
In clusters which explode
To flower-spokes of fire in sunset hues
Which radiate in fireworks of flame!

A passionflower, exotic *hanabi*
(The Japanese say *fire-flowers*—
More poetic—*fireworks* has no soul)
This showy vanity
Saffron/lemon mandala? Parasol?
No. These sparkling inflorescences are ours.

The shriveled flowers are psychedelic spiders
With nectar-seeking parrots rife.
They could be starfish who have lost their way
Or sweets for birds and sugar gliders.

In gaudy tepal radiant display
A dharma spokes-man for the Wheel of Life.



Rusel Last

Garden Trading

Do you have a garden that calls to you
each day to play barefoot across grass and herb?
To delve your hands into rich black earth and feel fertility
between your fingers. To pick and taste produce
from your own sweat-sanctified efforts.

Do parents send you home after each visit
with baskets of vegetables prayed over daily in
the exercise and the celebration of their own elite labour?
Ah, the smile on lips with the first crunch of
the first bean or leaf or fruit of the season.

Do friends invite you around to help pick
the bountiful harvest of zucchini, tomato or beet
and you cook and preserve and share for weeks the moments
of community the garden has joined you in?
The blessings, warming heart and soul.

You reading this, do you garden?
Do you practice the alchemy of earth and plant
insect and atmosphere that gives each of us our daily breath
every morsel we devour, every sip we savour?
Gardening is the very act of life.

Cultivate the barren, the wasteland,
grow the virtuous self amid the refuse of greed
and narrowed vision that chokes our world toward greyness?
where all is packaged and taken away. Grow
the green, and save our only world.

Rusel Last

Garden's Caress

The earth oozes between my toes
moist wetness of the great mother's fertility
shared with me in our intimate moments of green congress.
My caresses that mulched her most sensual
tissues yield to me the staff of life.

I look across the rounded hills of her
breasts and thighs, seeing the secluded forests
and hidden valleys where gushing waterfall and sacred cave
reveal the innermost reality of mother nature
and all the ways of life's daily struggle.

The perfumed garden caresses me,
senses stimulated by scent and sight and taste
of fragrant colours spicing the symphony of the synesthetic
ecology as I dance and sing my way through
choosing death for this and life for that.

I breathe deep the handful of released oils
kissing my hands after they caressed the herb,
fondled the fruit, flirted with flowers, pollen heavy, dripping
nectar for lips to kiss and tongue to savour in
the intimate moments of natural pleasure.

The joy of the garden calls me to come
play naked in the breeze, rain and dappled light,
to join essences, entwine bodies, and merge with the garden
till my being is hers and hers is mine and there
is no difference between I and other.

Rusel Last

Wind's Tears

Soft sigh of wind through grey-green needles;
whispers, whispers, not quite heard.
Softly told tales of who, when and where;
Dreaming, dreaming, the people's dreaming.

There in the hills, the Mother of Winds;
rock overhang, child hand prints.
Yellow sandy stone, worn and open;
Breathing, breathing, the Earth's breathing.

Soft sigh of breath through old grey whiskers;
Song Line singing, not quite heard.
Softly told tales of who, when and where;
Dreaming, dreaming, the people's dreaming.

There in the hills new houses rising;
Rock overhang, teens paint names.
Loudly yelled tales of who, when and where;
Crying, crying, the people crying.

Grey-green needles, drip with the wind's tears.

Rusel Last

Wind Stories

Soft sigh of wind through grey-green needles
stories sung of wives and loss
now just whispered cries through hair-like leaves.

Others hear soft lullabies, a safe
place to rest away from snakes
mats of needle leaves give bush comfort.

Noon day slumber with breeze's caress
drifting mind, imageful dreams
nature's altered states, treely given.

Old fellah stories, new settler greed
ancient ways all gone, destroyed
millions of voices murmur at once.

New fellah poems, old people's needs
distraction, loss of country
extinctions, whispered sorry business.

If none slumbered on dry brown needles
if no ear heard the wind's voice
would the stories exist still?



Renate Millonig

Wagga Wagga First Impressions

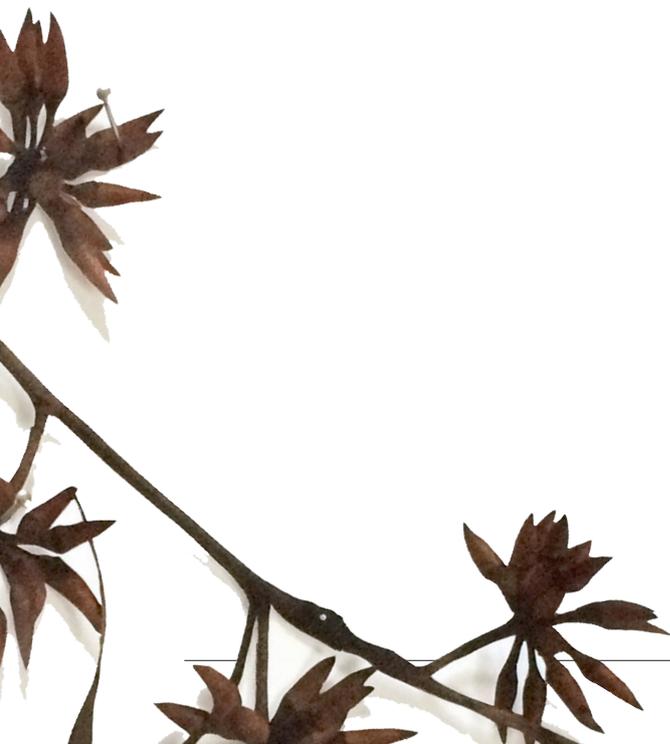
Murrumbidgee gums
cockatoo cacophony
morning coffee mouth

salmon gums raw flank
forking boughs crutch-like foldings
dry after the rain

paperbark pages
dangling flaps slack in the sun
unimpeded skies

gold everlastings
exact paper-crisp petals
fractal of the dawn

squabbling over seed
the lorikeets arrival
ghost gums blanched by sun





Kinga Elizabeth Bisits

Lenten Bloom

I once watched purple
shroud the plaster skin of saints
to mourn Christ crucified:
mother of sorrow
blow away the roman cloak
exhale over the expressway
breathe a breath violent
and violet lilac and lavender
into our Irish threaded soil
then let bark break out
iridescent blue flowers
that like harlots in mardi gras
samba through the suburbs
with tibouchina joy.



U3A Riverland Art Group

Garden Transformations

Traffic roar rush of people
gates open to a walk through time
in cool shaded quiet.

The steel gray skies are replaced
by wisps of blue-backed clouds
the dark earth shrugs awake.

Wind rain sun stir
harbinger iris fulfilling their promise
of roused garden profusion.

Fronds uncurling
fans of green tight buds delicate stems
turn to salute the sun.

Spring colours abound
gentle perfumes ride the breeze
garden harmony.

Scented hum of lavender
wattle birds squabble over nature's sweets
black birds till the pungent earth.

Cyclamen bold pink
daffodils clothed in sunlit gold
life in colour.

Gossamer wings dart
in free spirited ballet
a momentary presence.

Drifts of poppies
glow in their regimented beds
eternal remembrance.

An orchid's purity
shines in the morning light
a beacon of hope.

Roses standing proud
blushing pink to deepening red
signifying love.

Orchestrated songs
rise from shallow lotus ponds
a chorus of frogs.

Rustic seat cool breeze
quiet place of peace contemplation
all are welcome here.

The heat of summer
waned to autumn cool
trees metamorphose.

Children scatter leaves
to blow red and gold to far corners
like errant memories.

The last blooms shed
their lusterless petals drop
seeds for renewal.

Hardy evergreens
ready themselves for rain wind frost
guardians of this refuge.

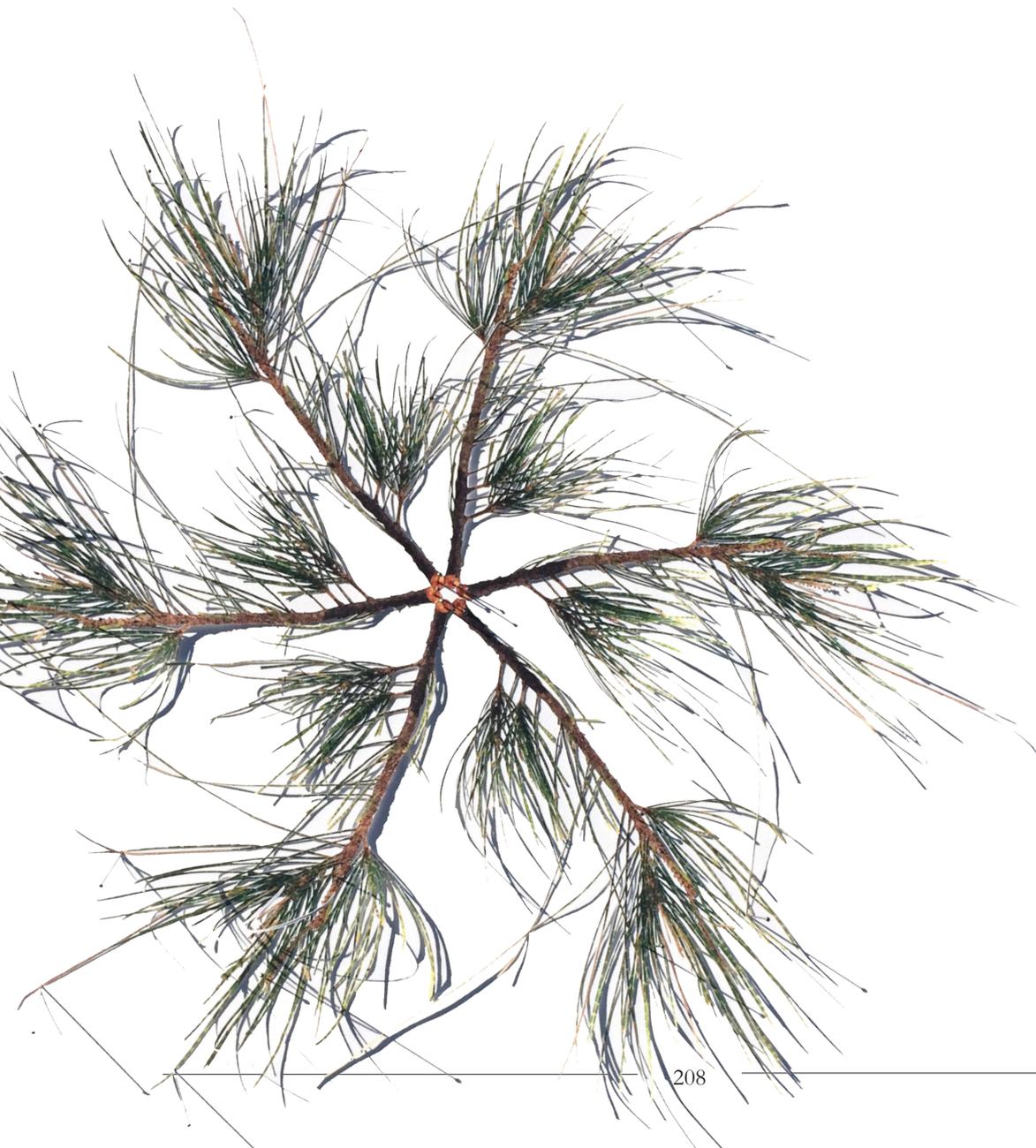
Winters icy touch now
lures the garden into sleep
to await springs arousal.

Backs to the closing gates
visitors leave the garden
refreshed transformed.

Tim Heffernan

hydration

sometimes the rain specifies me
asks to see
seeks out my desert place
and turns me into rainforest



Anna Jacobson

Thing I Find While Tidying My Room

i.

I stand at the entrance to my room.
The light has stopped working.
In the gloom I see a vine sprawling
across the floor, bulbous fruit rotting.
Somewhere in the house is a forest bear.
It can smell the fruit mingled with fear.
A branch grows out the window.
I climb down the tree—hear the bear
snuffling. It roars at my disappearance
as I head into town.

In the morning I check my bag for mouldy
mandarin skins or liquefied apples.
I find nothing except for my asthma inhaler
with an expiry date from a year ago.
I decide it is time to tidy my room.

ii.

Something I throw out:
my roller blades, wheels crumbling
in my hands like blue chalk.
Memories of Dad on our first roller blade excursion,
sending me and my brother down the highest hill
in Kangaroo Point. I made my landing in a flowerbed—
my brother fell onto a smashed bottle on the concrete path.

Something I put in the giveaway pile for little cousins:
a grow-your-own-alien—just add water.

iii.

The floor begins to reappear, my cupboard
can breathe again. My room seems bigger.
I no longer have to sleep at the other end of the bed
to avoid the dust.

Mark Tredinnick

Lotus Pond

For Sarah

If you want heaven, start in mud.

Begin transfiguration

Where you're stuck. Take your pilgrimage standing

Up to your ankles in sludge. And if the ground binds

and if your boots stick, and if you step

Out of them when you set off; if the odour

On a summer's day, when the water ebbs, is noisome

where you begin, so much more pure

Your thoughts will be when they flower,

so much sweeter the garden's scent when

You breathe it in, so much more like birdsong

Your voice when you begin at last to speak. Start underwater

if you want the sky. Start in the abject

Underworld, if you want the lighted Earth; start among

The throng of ears that cannot hear. Sink in detritus, seed in

the strife that your life, and every life,

Falls into now and then: Serenity

springs from squalor; love is only love if it

Can bear the badlands out. These wastes—good for nothing more substantial—

Bloom light and outshine day. The lotus pond,

a repurposed wetland well south of its days,

Is a perfect picture, empty, of the imperfection of your soul,

Helplessly in love with the vulgate particulars

of the secondhand world; in flower,

The pond is your Buddha self

at her ease; the Christ of St Thomas come down

From the cross. Freedom starts, but refuses to stay, in squalor;

Literature takes its first steps in slur and slurry.

Put down roots where no one

Else can, in the compost of loss, in the suspect terrain

Of the only life you may ever get to grow in.

Nothing is wrong for long

And hope cannot stay lost,

if beauty can walk from the wreck,

And the lotus can raise heaven

from the dreck and the dross.



Mark Tredinnck, Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Photograph: Christopher Phillips



Lotus Pond, Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Photograph: Christopher Phillips

Mark Tredinnick

Cedar (*Toona ciliata*)

They gave themselves away, flaming in rain-
Forests, rising stark through open canopies,
A goauche of green and grey. They wrangled
Them, these mahoganies, used furniture in
Waiting, architraves and finials and chairs;
They spotted them and downed them, these
Unwitting Colonial fittings hiding out
In geologic time; they rounded them up
From mountainsides, the future perfect
Immanent in their past continuous selves;
They drove them from gullies and flooded them
Downstream; they slipped them from these
Former worlds to new cities on the plains.
Too good to leave standing in a land
Of recalcitrant trees; too much like profit
And good timber to let be.

The forests that

Lost them lose them still; their grieving never
Ends; they miss the cedars' lyric trick of dying
Again, more beautifully, each new season
Than the last; they ring, the widowed forests,
As if waiting for their pasts.

And beneath

This one, spared the saw and islanded here,
Survivor of a genocide of limbs, I feel lonely
For the forests the tree never knew, for parts
Of me, and all of us, felled before we grew.

Mark Tredinnick

Bottle Tree Buddha

Bloated and subsided in her mirth,
This plump and tropic Buddha,
This unmessaged bottle from the north,
Has become a sunk and drunken
Wombat, recumbent in the grasses
of the south.

Mark Tredinnick

Tereticornis

Flooded redgum and Bastard box, Red ironbark and Slatey gum:
Through broken teeth in swollen gums, the tereticornis speaks—
She scratches with long fingers across the blue back of the sky—
A hundred common species of her name. A stranger still to the
Phrases that named her so many ungainly ways, tereticornis
Stands where she stood when a deciduous language—unready
For timber that wanted to splinter so many hopes of hearth and
Unhouse so many thoughts of home—made landfall, that tongue, and
Found her waiting: tereticornis in slender throngs along the ridge
Above the farm they found arrayed around the bay. There's a mob
Of them, a mnemonic chorus-line, the genies of the place, strung
The length of that ridge yet—some poised, corkscrewed and freeze-
Framed in the world's slowest ecstatic dance, and each a slender
Blue epitome of what beauty takes to prosper through seven-
Seasons yearly in a sclerophyll place on earth.



Mark Tredinnick

A Beatbox Choir

The bamboo stand is thick with solitude, a band
Of stranded scholars banished from their courts,

From all their lovers and their lands. The night is a hut
In the hills, and the bamboo rattles all its sashes,

Thicker than thieves and anxious to be off now
And elsewhere with burlap sacks full of burgled stars.

In the light wind, the grove moans like a groyne
In a king tide; it creaks like a barque in a swell.

By day on furled scrolls, come read the letters
The scholars have scrawled in their pining for girls

They can never hope to see gain. Hear how they
Curse love, longhand, for ending and for ruining,

It would seem, everything, in particular the solace
They had hoped to settle into in old age. Gargantuan

Grasses, flutes hollowed out by longing, they stand,
Damned to sing outmoded love songs long beyond

Their voices and their days. Give up all your grief,
Then, to the bamboo by the shore. Let these exiled

Elders take it and make of it a beatbox choir.
Let them make of it a palisade of prayer.

Mark Tredinnick

Ficus: A Strangler's Life (Strangler Fig)

Back then, the bay—a fired field,
An oaked and mangroved selvedge,
A threshold and a hearth, a sacred
Swamp, a river that spoke
With its mouth full of eels, a beach,
A feast, a forest of seasons, a farm
Put under cultivations by the wisdom
The women and the men learned here,
A garden that grew boys into men
And time into a library of light—
Back then, when it fell from the sky
And grew its people strong, long
Centuries before the West had
Dreamed of fields of wheat, the bay
Was already a garden, which had hardly
Heard of figs. But come here in two
Hundred years, and “fig” may be
All the bay will have to say.

 The people who landed
Here in this old and husbanded world,
And called it new, came from copses,
From hedgerows and woods and fall
And winter and spring, and wanting
Shade for summer, they found it under
Figs and brought them south to parasol
The shore.

 And like all of us to whom
A chance and a place are given, the figs
Wanted more. Everything would almost
Do the trick. They wanted from the start
To fell the fallen sky and rain
A forest down.

 And up along the creek
That watered this garden and waters it
Still, two figs of different temper, two
Figs of foreign tongue—one fig that
Loves the sandstone; one fig that loves
The rain—two figs have talked their way
Into a tale that's ages old and told on
The pages of a paperbark that may have
Stood here telling when the Enlightenment,
In all its foetid and parvenu pomp, dropped
Anchor in the bay.

Twenty-five years ago or so two figs
Fell out of heaven's mouth (or arse)
And moved into the upper stories
Of the telling tree and slowly made
A garden there, a plot in which, if they
Survive her, the landlady dies. Through
All these years and bats and suns and storms,
Two figs sat in a melaleuca attic and ate the sky
They came in with; they lived on memes
And code and IOUs and later sent down
Abseiling roots and when they touched
Earth, began to grow; two figs since then
Have eaten heir host out of house and dishevelled
Antique home. But see how, even in her ending,
She begins again! She puts out bloom and leaf,
And she'll go on trying to put on years, until
They stop her, and then she won't.

We call her the host, but what choice
Did she have? What choice, the first gardeners
Here? What choice, in the end, any of us,
But the end, and how we get there? History
Arrives with death in its pocket; sooner or
Later, it shows; and who we are is how we make
Our living worthy, while we wait, of what
We're dealt. In between, the years, the days.
The life we get may not always be our own.
And to give life, giving life! The height of
Love is the height of this hybrid canopy:
In which the end, though still far off, is written—
A beautiful death, a metamorphosis—in three
Tongues lost on each other all at once.

And the figs:
Who can blame them? Such wanton, patient
Longing for life, such lust and pluck, and what
A wild way to come to be.

Read the way a garden
Reads, looked at outside time and inside place,
There's nothing doing here but poetry,
That slow green fire, in which even death
Is dying to begin again.



The frail exhalations of four or five fires refusing even yet

To go out. The gardens make

a thousand distances

A shapely thicket of repose. A stubborn stillness holds there,
A recursive gladness in which all sadness also inheres,

Leafs out and fruits the future

as if it didn't give a damn.

And notwithstanding the savage rush of things, a simplicity holds
The hands of time a while here, remembers

And calls you child. Offers you

stories and under the stories' breath,

Leaves like archipelagos, flowers like feckless continents adrift,
And each day death forgets its dance steps and lives on another day.

How a garden hangs together—this one

an instance, like the rest of us, of us all—is how

One might cohere and carry on. A garden is never
Finished, and nor are you: Become, I think, a garden again,

And never, like a garden, cease; find

in every bed and nest, and step out along

Each pathway, and read in every leaf, more elliptical renderings, daily,
Of the oracle of your life: how to live it as you fathom it

By loving what is worthy of your love.

Find in every episode

Of weather, in every sudden gladness a garden gives and takes,
In every child that comes, in every fallen feather of each itinerant

Bird; and find in the circular migration

of the eels, in the invaginated flowering

Of the fig, in the stubborn insistence of things,
In beauty's refusal not to be—find a way to continue

To thrive, to flourish even, if you can,

regardless, to set seed, even when hope

Has lost its flight feathers, and strangeness
Has swallowed the way your life ran, and your days

Have run off sideways and become a week

of showers. Be a garden in a city,

And be all the love you've lost. From all the unpropitious
Pieces tending toward a self, cultivate a solitude, harvest half





Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Photograph: Christopher Phillips



Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Photograph: Christopher Phillips

‘Fallen Myrtle Trunk’

Zalehah Turner interviews Stuart Cooke, Winner of the New Shoots Poetry Prize

“In the production of images poetry differs from music, and veers closer towards painting. From painting, poetry also departs when it seeks to produce or defer meanings in tandem with sounds and images. Somewhere in the triangulation of music, painting and prose there is poetry.” Stuart Cooke

Zalehah Turner: Tell me about the themes in ‘Fallen Myrtle Trunk’: the power of storms; the life of trees; the life cycle in Tasmania and other forests; ‘aged into agelessness, less than age’, ‘too slowly for change’ and the vast expanse of time stretching back to Gondwana?

Stuart Cooke: The poem passes through different levels of observation/perception, starting with a broad consideration of time and space, including Gondwanan or evolutionary space-time, before moving to the more human level of the trunk itself, before ending with the microscopic—the epiphytes and termites, etc. The poem isn’t about ‘penetrating’ or getting to the ‘essence’ of the myrtle trunk; rather, as we move closer, its complexity increases.

ZT: There is also an absence of human presence in ‘Fallen Myrtle Trunk’. Is this intentional and if so, can you elaborate?

SC: I’m not sure that I’d agree with the assertion here. The poem is entirely about the perception of the trunk—that is, it is thoroughly bound up with human forms of understanding, relation and expression. The language isn’t the result of my solitary imagination, but rather it draws from botany and biology, not to mention the work of other poets—in other words, discourses developed over long periods of human-myrtle relation. Of course, it’s true that there aren’t any explicit human characters in the poem; this is because my objective was to make the trunk a character itself, to reveal drama and history in a living, non-human thing. Humans are part of this, but I didn’t want them to be in the centre of the frame.

ZT: What drew you to ‘Mountain Myrtle’? You grew up in Sydney and Hobart. Did you feel a personal connection to Marie E. J. Pitt’s poem expressing the power of the Tasmanian flora and landscape?

SC: Not really. Part of my composition process was to find poems by other poets about myrtles. Pitt’s poem demanded inclusion because it was closest both in terms of subject and location, and also because it did things that I was interested in—it imagined the mythopoetic power of the myrtle, and how it was bound up in the wild, “moaning” weather of Western Tasmania. Very few Anglo-Western poems grant so much power and agency to non-human things, and particularly plants.

ZT: Do you see the ‘Fallen Myrtle Trunk’ in a Tasmanian forest?

SC: Yes. Another crucial part of the composition process was to find a fallen myrtle trunk, observe it closely and patiently, and take detailed field notes. This particular trunk was on the edge of Lake Burbury in Western Tasmania.

ZT: There are many references to music and sound, both in the echoes from ‘Mountain Myrtle’, ‘songs to / of lonely places’, and in connecting lines such as, ‘cavern hymns’. Your latest book is entitled *Opera*, as is a poem you wrote in 2012. Tell me about the links to fugues and cavern hymns in cool, temperate forests and your poetry?

SC: The world becomes a world through wave-form. Waves are characterised by the accumulation of constancy—the repetition of troughs and peaks—and the repetition of contrasts—the shifts between troughs and peaks. Both music and poetry operate through the association of these harmonic clusters and melodic contrasts, and of course poetry plays at the intersection that language straddles between sound and signification. But in the production of images poetry differs from music, and veers closer towards painting. From painting poetry also departs when it seeks to produce or defer meanings in tandem with sounds and images. Somewhere in the triangulation of music, painting and prose there is poetry. Taken as a whole, that triangulation is the drive towards sonorous, vivid expression, which is channelled and/or produced by the body. As the body is the locus for art in human terms, I see myriad bodies, of all different kinds, expressing, composing, articulating. This is why it’s important not to overshadow the expression of the Myrtle with human subject positions: if my language was going to get anywhere near the tree’s, then I needed to leave it out there, to see what happened to the tree itself, instead of turning to a human character or locus for an easy translation or way out of the scene.

ZT: Tell me about the echoes that run through this poem from ‘Mountain Myrtle’ and ‘Out of Sorts and Looking at Elms’, the way they interconnect in ‘Fallen Myrtle Trunk’ and the connection between all three poems?

SC: Pitt’s ‘Mountain Myrtle’ is a very sonorous poem: it’s about the Myrtle’s slowly ageing “songs” within the wild, cacophonous orchestra of the Western Tasmanian forests. One of the things that’s so striking is how, despite the onrushing of everything, the “creeping” moss, the “leaping” storm—everything is in the gerund—the Myrtle remains steadfast, almost supernatural, and certainly magical. This tension between the immanence of death and decay—of chaos—and the apparent tranquillity and stasis of the present, of a thing in the present—of order, if you like—was interesting to me as well. ‘Out of Sorts and Looking at Elms’ is a very different poem, and of course not about myrtles. But I was reading Simon’s book at the time and I thought it appropriate to include. It’s a much quieter poem, and a much more botanical one, more much about close observation, although West’s imagination is no less interesting:

A mouthing eddy where a bough once broke off.
One branch, there, could be pleading help
where it reaches out. Others arch hardened spines
as if they were locked in struggle with gravity.

Even though the tone of the poem is quite naturalistic, I love the interplay between what is apparent—what is visible—and what is possible—what these things that we can see might suggest about what is happening. The speculative spirit of this poem is very close to that of my own.

ZT: I haven’t read ‘Out of Sorts and Looking at Elms’. Could you tell me a little more about it?

SC: The poem is from Simon's 2011 collection, *The Yellow Gum's Conversion*. It's a great book, extremely sophisticated and very accomplished. I don't want to wax lyrical about how wonderfully clear and simple the language is—too often that implies a claim that the best poetry is somehow the clearest—because, while there are indeed moments of tremendous, even shocking, clarity, what's really going on in these poems is a very attentive mapping of human cognition, where things emerge in consciousness only to be submerged moments later, where the ceaseless interplay of mind and landscape can be resolved briefly enough for startling, though not always revelatory, insights.

ZT: Your poem evokes the power of thunderstorms, and the expanse of time beyond that of the human race but it is mournful. Bright colours appear, the life of creatures who live in fallen trees and rotting wood. Yet, 'one branch, there, pleads help'. Why a fallen trunk?

SC: I like to think that there's a kind of joy in the revelation that the poem proposes, but while writing it I was also keenly aware of the various threats that Tasmanian Myrtles face (and here again human presence looms large). In recent years, Myrtle wilt, a parasitic fungus, has become a serious problem due to poor logging practices (in the poem: the "wilt lulled by such knots"). And the increasing frequency and temperature of bush fires is perhaps the most serious problem of all: Myrtle forests cannot survive strong fire, and must re-establish from neighbouring areas. But these neighbouring areas are becoming increasingly scarce. Generally, Myrtle forests only form once a wet sclerophyll forest reaches maturity, taking several hundred years to do so. Of course, Aboriginal people knew that Myrtles can survive light fires, but these burning practices rarely occur in the contemporary Western Tasmanian 'wilderness'.

ZT: Why youm, youm're and yourm? Why did you use the second person but alter the word? Has it any connection to 'yourn'? Is the 'm' for myrtle? Why did 'you' not seem sufficient?

SC: Simply, 'youm' is a pluralised second-person address. In Australia we have 'youse', but formally English doesn't have this pronoun. I wanted to write with one here because the question of cognition and its individuation, while complex enough for humans, is even more complex for other species, particularly plants. The 'm' is there because it vibrates bodily; when we speak the word it moves through us and escapes us, just as a communal mind or agency might escape any one body or actor.

ZT: In 'Fallen Myrtle Trunk', two to three stanzas are grouped together to form four, falling shapes. What are your feelings on concrete poetry and why the slow, fluid fall for 'Fallen Myrtle Trunk'?

SC: I'm actually writing this in Brazil, where poets like Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari were globally influential pioneers of concrete poetry. But as much as I love concrete poetics, I also want to keep a certain distance between them and my poem. In my designing of 'Myrtle Trunk' I didn't want the typographical features to do anything other than enhance the line—i.e. the line for me has to remain paramount: the line is where we as readers are going, and thus it must satisfy us. Often I think the failure of some concrete poems is to do with an emptiness produced by their typography, which invites us to consider language, but then the language itself gives us nothing. Conversely, I want my poem to have two levels: the first is the visual or framed reception of the work as a whole, where I draw on concrete poetics in shaping the text to suggest something of its subject (the form is slowly shrinking across the pages, like the biodegrading trunk); but the second level is to do with the slower experience of reading each line in succession. The painterly reading—where we 'stand back' and look at the whole work—is extended by closer reading.

ZT: Tell me about the form and themes of the poems in your latest book *Opera*?

SC: *Opera* is the accumulation of close to a decade of thinking about the relationship between voice, land and line in Australian and Latin American poetics. The book imagines a kind of trans-Pacific synthesis of geographies and histories, and of animal, human and inorganic potency. It's also a book about love, and the all-consuming, though often ephemeral, nature of it. I felt frustrated by the state of Australian poetry when I started writing *Opera*, and I wanted something new. So I turned first to a lot of Aboriginal and Mapuche poetry, both song poetry and written, and second to a range of Latin Americans, particularly baroque and neo-baroque poets like Pablo de Rokha, Coral Bracho, Vicente Huidobro and Raúl Zurita, and Pablo Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra* (one of my favourite books). I felt in their work an irrepressible power and an emotional expressivity that I hadn't ever seen in English-language poets; the liquid grammar and long, pulsing lines came with a deep, quasi-subterranean commitment to the importance of enunciation. I was also travelling quite a lot, particularly in Chile, but also in the West Kimberley, and these landscapes became the basis of the poems. The result, I like to think, is a very densely layered and many-sided language, which is also very emotional, very 'heart-felt' (in terms of a driving, rhythmic power that motivated the composition). I'm so happy with the way it turned out—Five Islands Press did such a great job—and it was incredibly generous of John Wolseley to allow me to use a detail from one of his Patagonia-Tasmania works on the cover, which fits perfectly with the scope and intention of the poetry.

'Fallen Myrtle Trunk' will form part of my next collection, which will be a kind of bestiary or garden composed of poems about a variety of animals, insects, plants and other things.

ZT: How did you feel about winning the New Shoots Poetry Prize?

SC: I was delighted with the news, and feel extremely humbled and happy that the judges thought so kindly of my poem. Any project that encourages creative contemplation of, or engagement with, the non-human world is certainly a worthy one, so it's extra-special to be recognised in this way as a part of the New Shoots project.



‘Anneslea fragrans (the spitting plant)’

Zalehah Turner interviews Magdalena Ball, Highly Commended for the New Shoots Poetry Prize

“Walking through a place like the Sydney Botanic Gardens is very much a sensual experience, and I feel that part of what a poet does is to slow down and pay attention to those experiences—to really smell, touch, taste and feel in a very deep way.” Magdalena Ball

Zalehah Turner: What drew you to *Anneslea fragrans*, the spitting plant?

Magdalena Ball: As a writer, I tend to be drawn to anthropomorphism. I like the idea of trying to get inside the perspective of something non-human—an animal, a mineral or plant in a way that somehow comes back to the human condition. Trigger plants like *Anneslea fragrans* are easy to do this with, because plants are usually immobile (at least to human eyes) and making this beautiful, elegant flower, which also smells lovely, actually do something reactive and fast was evocative for me.

ZT: Can you tell me about your own experience of the ‘*Anneslea fragrans*’ in the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney?

MB: It has been quite a few years since I’ve been to the Botanic Garden, Sydney, but being rather verbal and a chronic teacher of my children, sometimes to their dismay, I tend to read every sign aloud. We had the children with us the last time and were doing a self-tour. There was a lot of excitement at the ‘Spitting Plant’, because it smelled and looked good and then did this seemingly un-plant-like thing of reacting when we very gently touched the flower, which was great fun. We spent a lot of time waiting and hoping for an insect to land (that didn’t happen). There’s a kind of mystery in that trigger—is it deliberate? Is it reflex? I sort of filed the plant away in my mind as something I wanted to explore, so when I found out about the competition, it was the natural choice.

ZT: In ‘*Anneslea fragrans*’ you open with “first there is touch”. The poem contains many references to the senses and even the interconnection between them: “most of what we taste is smell”. Why are all five senses so integral to your poem, ‘*Anneslea fragrans*’?

MB: The plant certainly lends itself to that—because it’s a tactile experience, but also because it does stimulate the senses so strongly—with the scent, the look and the feel of it...I also wanted to make that connection with the other senses that are on alert in the garden. Walking through a place like the Sydney Botanic Gardens is very much a sensual experience, and I feel that part of what a poet does is to slow down and pay attention to those experiences—to really smell, touch, taste and feel in a very deep way—not just on the surface of it, but to think about what it means to be smelling this smell, or having a tactile experience—what is the broader implication.

ZT: Are you interested in synaesthesia and if so, in what way does it inform your poem?

MB: I’m fascinated by synaesthesia. Even for people who operate in the centre of the spectrum, the senses themselves don’t function in isolation. Our sense of smell and taste are intimately connected (as I suggest in the poem) and there’s so much still to learn about, not only the connections between our senses and how we perceive, but the connection between our senses and illnesses or emotional

state. I'm not at all certain that the separation of the senses is anything other than a human and perceptual response—it may be an agreed illusion or at least, entirely subjective. In the poem, I'm trying to embed myself a little more elementally into the natural world—to take a different perspective than the human. Of course, I'm limited to my own all-too-human linguistic capabilities, but I want to move a little deeper into empathy and the mixing of senses worked well for this, for me because animals and insects often use smell, colour and sound in ways that are more acute than humans are capable of.

ZT: You write in the second person. Who is the 'you' in the poem?

MB: I like the way poetry allows for multiple points of view simultaneously. So there are a few different versions of "you" that are being referred to at the same time in the poem. One of those is synonymous with 'one'—the human, including me. On another level, the 'you' is the reader and I like the idea of bringing the reader directly into the poem and making them a very direct participant and referent. The third 'you' could potentially be a companion, as well—a kind of single co-conspirator.

ZT: Why did you write "there were no bees this year"? Australia has been so far spared from Colony Collapse Disorder but it may well be in our future. Are these lines in reference to a highly possible, near future? What are your thoughts on the world wide bee shortage and its effect on pollination and ecology?

MB: I believe there's some disagreement about whether Australian bees are in decline even if we've been spared Colony Collapse so far. The number of bee-keepers has definitely declined and the use of antibiotics in beekeeping and pesticides (neonicotinoids) has dramatically increased here as elsewhere. From an anecdotal point of view, I've totally noticed the decline of bees in my own backyard. It's palpable. Five years ago we had so many bees in Spring, I was worried my kids would get stung swimming and was considering calling in someone to relocate the hives (I didn't in the end and we learned to co-habit). Now there are only a very few bees. I think that the worldwide bee shortage is a major ecological issue. Bees are critical in the human food chain and their role as pollinators is crucial to food production. Albert Einstein said "If the bee disappears from the surface of the earth, man would have no more than four years to live. No more bees, no more pollination... no more men". Aside from the fact that the loss of any species is tragic, most particularly when it's man-made, the loss of bees will have a dramatic impact on our own species' ongoing ability to survive.

ZT: You have references throughout the poem to critically endangered species, including a list which ends with a mammal which is not. Humans. "What else is on the way out?" Do you feel that humans are ensuring their own extinction through harming the environment and war?

MB: Yes! I don't want to be a prophet of doom, and in fact, it's my nature to be positive. I don't think giving up is a helpful approach, but all indications are that we're headed for a sixth mass extinction that may well include the human race. Apparently, over the last century, species of vertebrates are dying out up to 114 times faster than they would have without human activity (that stat from Paul Ehrlich of Stanford University). I have no idea if this is reversible—Ehrlich suggests it is. I'm not an expert, but from where I'm sitting, I'm not seeing a trend towards increased conservation amongst worldwide governments.

ZT: “A day that might not last”. Why do you feel that?

MB: As above. But that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t make every effort we can to save whatever species we can, and above all, to take notice now of the beauty that surrounds us—to give priority to using less resources, to living in a more sustainable way and lobbying our governments (and vote accordingly) to take climate change seriously. I probably sound a little like an eco-warrior, and I’m not really, and don’t feel art should necessarily be polemical, but I certainly know how precious the natural world is and how little hope we seem to be leaving for our children and grandchildren. Art does seem to me to be an appropriate means of exploring these issues and if nothing else, connecting dots that might not otherwise be connected. We’re not really so different at the end of the day from other animals or the plant world—we have a common goal of survival and well-being.

ZT: What are your thoughts on Botanic Gardens, conservation programs, and their efforts to save endangered flora?

MB: Utterly important on every level. I’m grateful for programs like the ecological restoration work, and wildlife and plant ecology programs, and support them wholeheartedly. I’m well-aware that these research projects go far beyond the confines of the Botanic gardens site.

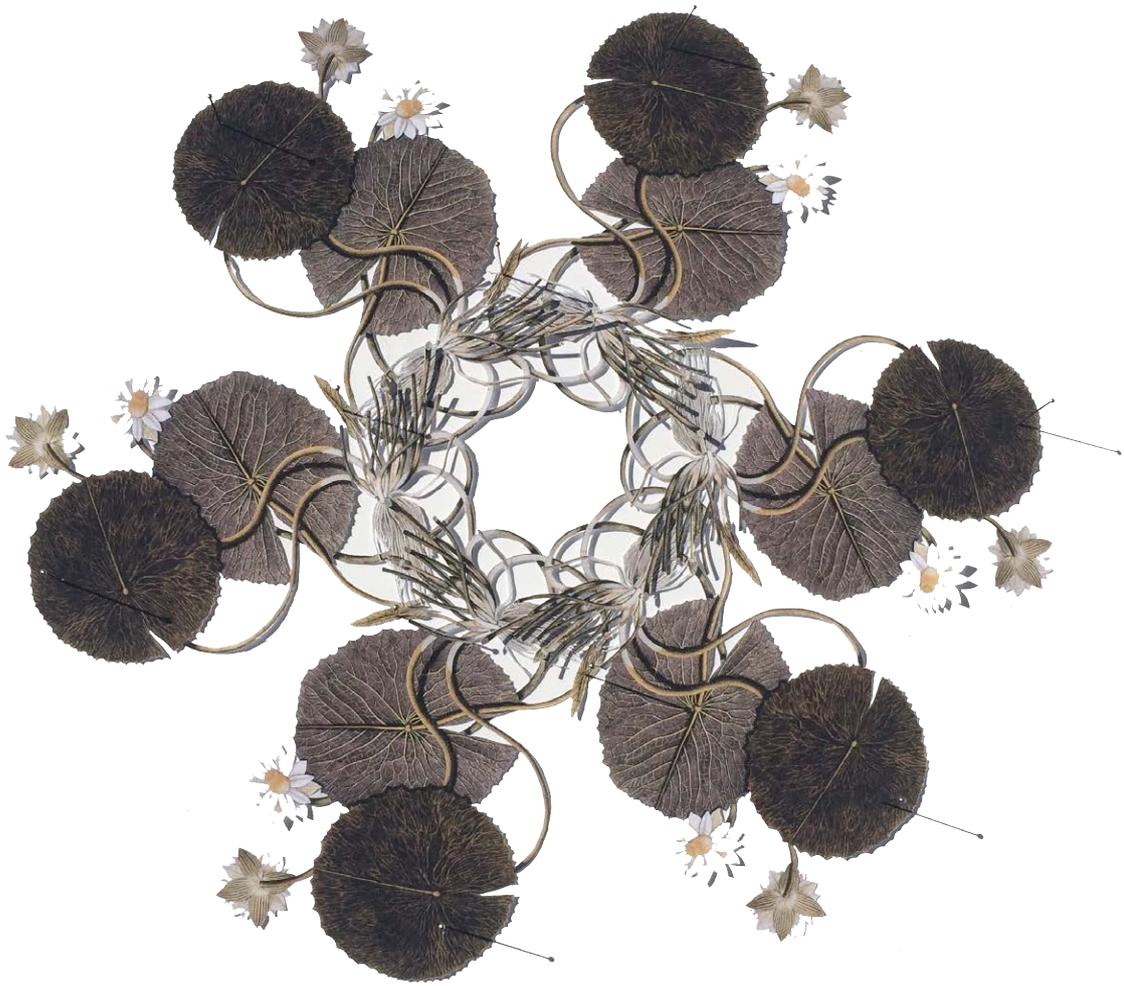
ZT: Is there anything else you’d like to add?

MB: I’m particularly appreciative of the opportunity to explore these themes poetically (and of competitions like New Shoots), because I think that opening a dialogue on conservation issues with the arts community is not only a natural affiliation, but one that can both link the reading population with the scientific population, and explore dystopian impacts in a way that hopefully reaches more people in new ways.

ZT: How does it make you feel to have been highly commended for the New Shoots Poetry Prize?

MB: Being highly commended for the New Shoots Poetry Prize 2016 was a particular honour for me, for a number of reasons. One is that the shortlist was seriously impressive, as were the winning and shortlisted poems. ‘Fallen Myrtle Trunk’ by Stuart Cooke just blew me away, as did Stokes’ ‘Leaving Wilona’ and Bennett’s ‘our primitive lives’, and I felt strong synergies between what we all were striving for as poets. Another reason this means a lot to me is the ecological nature of this project. I’m not sure I qualify as an ecopoet specifically, but much of my work has an ecological focus and being able to situate myself in this area means a lot to me. I’ve been following the New Shoots project from its start and have been deeply moved and excited by the work being done by Tamryn Bennett, Eileen Chong, Eric Avery and Mark Tredinnick, and though I didn’t get to see the actual guided poetry walk at the Sydney Writers’ Festival (wish I had), I have been following it closely online.

Finally, I have a great deal of respect for Red Room Poetry and the innovative work they’ve done over the years, from installing poetry on toilet room doors, working with prisoners, working with first nations cultures and lost languages, attempts to map disappearing places, and distributing poetry via carrier pigeon—to name a few of the projects that come to mind. Being associated with Red Room Poetry and with Rochford Street Review (another organisation I’ve come to respect greatly) is a kind of prize in itself.



‘Leaving Wilona’

Zalehah Turner interviews John Karl Stokes, Winner of the New Shoots Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney Poetry Prize

“In this work, we, writer, listener, watcher, singer in the brain and body, are led on a little journey through all these aspects of an ancient, derelict house and garden only to come to a shiver of memory we can’t explain.”

John Karl Stokes

Zalehah Turner: Take me through your poem, ‘Leaving Wilona’...

John Karl Stokes: Well, no work of mine is destined to end up starting at the beginning. Here we have no exception. The last can be first. I started with the idea of the speaker’s old home on the edge of Sydney harbour having “bitter-vine grown over with lies”. The “bitter” of course stands for both the bitter, real plant and its strangling habits and the hurt of revisiting. We then move to the father, growing flowers (he is a displaced farmer and horticulturist) near the Harbour Bridge (he worked on it) on borrowed ground opposite the Royal Botanic Garden. Humans enter the structure of the poem. Especially a Bavarian grandfather. Followed by that is the marine, sensuous smell and knock of harbour water. Next comes: “that you might find nothing under a memory” (speaker lifts a piece of roof iron). Which means a quick back-fill stanza is needed:—“the second mother” (don’t ask) and “fright and decay” rotting into regrowth. Then, things get interesting:—the speaker/narrator knew and knows years in advance, that he should not come back again in the future. But he will. He will have that strange, but well known, feeling of meeting himself and his ghost going their opposite ways.

Then we have the final dance-beat. The punch-line ending. The bit that makes a poem. As with much of my work, endings can take months or years to turn up. There is no exception here:—*“Brush past... alone...into the new ground”... ..“Say nothing”*. That “say nothing” (to your ghost) is really interesting. Public event readers of those two words, “Say nothing”, have had a variety of ways of saying them. I was inclined to a poignant, “nothing you can do”, mood. Another reader has spoken them as a strange interaction between two ghosts “outside of time”. Another—and I feel now, I would sometimes prefer it this way—gave them out in a loud, bloody fury shocking an audience out of its slumber. Finally, the poem was edited, boiled down, bred up again, titled, questioned and left to season before being let out into the garden.

ZT: What is the relationship between ‘Leaving Wilona’, the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney, and the life (and death) of plants?

JS: The speaker in the poem, his father and his grandfathers have direct relationships. There was the growing, nurturing and disposal of the plants and their dependants. The family gatherings. The air and sight therapy in that garden especially, before the years of fumes. There is a meeting of first boy or girlfriend. There is the history: the speaker in the poem was once the Assistant Keeper of the Book of Peppercorn Rentals for the Crown, and later one of its Crown Surveyors for the area. There was the matter of the silent cycle of growth and decay which gives the death and life of plants to the new generations; to the courting and marriages of new people while the secret creek dries, goes under, and is renewed.

ZT: You’ve spoken about the strong connection of place and memory in your poetry in an interview with Nigel Featherstone. In your words, place and memory interweave and ‘place’ is a “dark angel” Can you explain the connections to place, memory, nature, growth and decay in ‘Leaving Wilona’?

JS: Place, memory, nature, growth and decay form the opening path, to borrow somewhat pompously from the Buddhists. In this work we, writer, listener, watcher, singer in the brain and body, are led on a little journey through all these aspects of an ancient, derelict house and garden only to come to a shiver of memory we can't explain. There's the rub.

ZT: What is your personal experience of the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney?

JS: Many years of appreciating its beauty, its calming illusions, its secret places, its useful fruits, its temporary pausing of time, its modelling for me coming from the East Sydney Arts School, its funnelling of the world down to that distant, bitter-sweet romance of the leaving of flying boats to the "honeyed islands".

ZT: You spoke with Nigel Featherstone about the memory of a place being coloured by experiences, specifically, that of personal, traumatic experiences. Is 'Leaving Wilona' situated within such a context?

JS: Don't think a context like that necessarily applies here. Yes, jolts like that do happen, but the hurt in this poem is a long-term loneliness and loss, particularly of a mother, but not nearly bad enough by world standards. The horror in this poem is ill-defined. It is a wild but long drawing of the wire.

ZT: You mentioned that, 'Leaving Wilona' was connected to the longer poetic sequence, *Drowned Haven*. Tell me about *Drowned Haven*.

JS: *Drowned Haven* is subtitled 'Confessions of drinker of sea-light'. It is a highly emotional, poetic sequence lamenting the rushing past, and ultimately, accepting of a painful hope for small futures.

The drowning in this case refers to Port Jackson, a drowned estuary harbour and also, remembrance at once for our immigrants lost into the open seas. We lament on the death by hospital neglect of the last, local, Australian aboriginal man living on his ancestral land on the peninsular:—"Man who lived under the spiders". We have 'Going from the Valley'; 'Night surfers' and 'Midnight's talk'. We have 'A Girl is dancing in her green, green bonnet' and 'Mother. The birds are silent'. Then we come to 'The Place, The History, the devil's musician' dealing with plants choking on their own fertility behind the McMansions overlooking the gardened swards of the children at play and the windswept, waterside brides under the palm trees. Finally, we come to the specifics. A drowning which is to come by sea- and- storm-rise over the plants and creatures we share; a lonely, bewildered boy-child placed on the stone lions in the Gardens; a panicking wartime father shouting the Latin plant-names at him; a faint, sad hope that with the plants, and the bats coming in over the water gardens ("downward to darkness"), we will prevail. And nature with us. "The White foam sings" (Stokes).

ZT: Do you have anything else you would particularly like to add to give us some background into 'Leaving Wilona'?

JS: I would like to say that for much of my writing life, I have dealt with "truth" as a guard against cant. I passionately knew that truth was larger than fact, and people need to identify themselves in the writing, unless you are too famous for words. It has only come to me very recently, only at the last decade, that there is another need. That of "theatre", the emotional projection, the greater good. Watch your back. The Shadow Players are abroad.

‘our primitive lives’

Zalehah Turner interviews John Bennett, Highly Commended for the New Shoots Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney Poetry Prize

“We forget just how fundamental plants are, especially primitive ones, like mosses and fungi (more animal than plant) for our air, water, soil.” John Bennett

Zalehah Turner: In your notes you write, “This wall stands as a reminder that there is a story I want to trace.” Is ‘our primitive lives’ that story?

John Bennett: There are many other interconnecting stories: the garden as a Persian hunting park with walls keeping out the wild; botanic gardens arising from trade and empire and the rise of the consumer; the English landscape garden which, with poets and Italian painting (and Whig nationalist politics) helped shape the British idea of nature. The Eora had no walls. Eden must have had a wall or fence through which we were expelled. For 99% of human existence, hunter–gathering was the way of life, which has finished. In the last few years, the world population has tipped to urban not rural, and our agriculture has evolved quickly into industrial production. These changes are revolutionary and distance us from the natural processes collapsing through global warming, loss of biodiversity and habitat, the poisoning of the land, waterways and the seas. That’s a story.

ZT: You write, “my camera stitches connections”. Why did you chose the combination of the visual image and prose poetry for ‘our primitive lives’?

JB: They complement each other, as well as possibly distracting each other—and we are so easily distracted in our culture. A photograph can reveal beauty or a truth beneath our noses and interrogate a text—not just illustrate. Poetry stitches connections too, an ability at the heart of the art. Poetry can connect the intimate, cosmic, mundane, sublime, thought and feeling. Hopefully the combination can nurture a creative engagement.

ZT: What is it about mixed media and ‘Photovoltaic poetry’ that is so essential to your understanding and expression of the world?

JB: Our culture has become overwhelmingly visually based, despite music being a vital art. Yet the visual is so powerful. I cannot draw or paint and the environment here is so beautiful. To show the beauty of the natural world is important now that we are distanced from it. My current project is Eos: text, video and images of predawn when the visual can be sublime. Yet in the fifteen minutes before sunrise, colour fades and other senses come into play. Eos is an opportunity to become intimate with traditional elements—earth, water, air and light—and gain some understanding of our ancestors’ experience of a world before farming, roads or cities; before writing, machines, electrification or algorithms. At the same time we are creative, playful and curious. We were reliant on machines and now, rely on technology. My art uses word processing and digital photography—I ask in one poem:

...My lens slams light onto an oxidised
silicon semiconductor powered by charged lithium ions
processed by robots and third world labour. Is this appropriate
technology to attempt intimacy with the environment?

ZT: ‘Our primitive lives’ takes in history, landscape, ecology, photosynthesis and the beginnings of life. Can you tell me a little about their interconnections in the ‘present’ and specifically in ‘our primitive lives’?

JB: Aldo Leopold was one of the first to value historical, cultural and scientific aspects of a place or landscape as part of its aesthetic appreciation, of its presence I would say. We need such understanding to see clearly, or in the words of Arran Gare (1995, p.160), to ‘enable individuals to construct narratives which can relate their own lives to a new grand narrative, the global struggle for an environmentally sustainable civilisation.’ Poetry has a vital role to play. When I was a boy, I thought the wars were coming to an end and progress (a relatively recent idea) was inevitable. There’s a cornucopia of violent conflicts, unfair trade, continuing famines, violence against women, and the ongoing war with nature. A war the NSW Baird Government is continuing, passing a bill last week to weaken land clearing laws. Australia is mostly an urban world deracinated from the natural processes that donate fresh air, clean water and food. How many of us can name any of the eight desert mammals we have sent extinct since invasion?

ZT: Why do you turn your attention to the cliff face in Sydney Harbour and away from the Harbour Bridge in ‘our primitive lives’?

JB: I lived in Sydney for thirty-five years and know the Bridge and Opera House; they oil the massive engine of Instagram, flooding 8 million images every day. The wall is a more subtle aesthetic treasure, packed with the marks and deposits of humans and nature—it is a vertical version of Darwin’s ‘tangled bank’. Cézanne wrote in a letter to his son on 8 September 1906, “Here on the bank of the river the motifs multiply, the same subject seen from a different angle offers subject for study of the most powerful interest and so varied that I think I could occupy myself for months without changing place” (Galenson, 2002, p.52). The same could apply to this beautiful wall.

ZT: When writing about plants, you chose *Commelina*, moss and fungi, and added that, “the intimacy of slime lives with me”. When focusing on the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney you chose the cliff face. What particularly drew your attention to them, what is their connection and why do you feel so strongly about them?

JB: More than half of us are alien, cells that belong to other lives, and even our own cells are powered by mitochondria that were once primitive bacterial cells. We are symbiotic creatures intimately connected to our environment, but are stuck with damaging Platonic, Christian, Cartesian dichotomies: body/mind; reason/emotion; nature/culture. Reason is thought to be fundamental to our species and separating us from other animals, but consciousness is overrated. Much of our feelings, perceptions, attitudes, actions are achievements are hidden from us.

ZT: *Commelina* is known for its short life and referred to commonly as dayflowers. Why is this contrast between the short life span of a dayflower and immense stretch of time since the beginning of life so important to your poetry and ‘our primitive lives’?

JB: What will this wall look like in a thousand years? The time span of a politician’s thinking is four years, most of us have even less. Some struggle to survive from day to day, but the vast majority of us

in the ‘first world’ have the opportunity to look ahead to what we are leaving our children. We can also remind ourselves that we are about ten billion years old (our materials are star stuff).

We now have responsibilities, have to manage habitats and species or we would lose both. An estimated ten per cent of the 28,000 plants introduced into Australia to feed stock, decorate gardens, or accidental invaders, would take over.

ZT: You write, “I think it’s plants that can mend the earth”. Can you elaborate?

JB: We forget just how fundamental plants are, especially primitive ones like mosses and fungi (more animal than plant) for our air, water, soil. If only our natural environment was richer worldwide... Evidence is increasing from multiple scientific fields that exposure to the natural environment can improve human health and wellness. So it goes back to both natural aesthetics and the fundamentals of healthy ecosystems. It’s great that Red Room has the energy and ideas to drive poets to further creativity.

ZT: Congratulations on being highly commended for the New Shoots Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney Poetry Prize 2016. Is there anything you’d like to say about winning the award for ‘our primitive lives’?

JB: I’d like to thank judges for enjoying a poem revelling in discursivity—not that common these days... and congratulations to the Red Room for opening up new challenges for poets and new inventive spaces for poetry to breathe in.

Reference list

Galenson, D. 2002, *Painting outside the lines: patterns of creativity in modern art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, US.

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Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. Photograph: Kristy Wan

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