

An aerial photograph of a river delta, showing a complex network of channels and distributaries. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue color, creating a monochromatic effect. The text is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image.

**WRITING  
WATER:  
RAIN  
RIVER  
REEF**

TONY BIRCH  
EUNICE ANDRADA  
GEORGINA REID  
LUKE DAVIES

BROOKE SCOBIE  
CLAIRE ALBRECHT  
MAGDALENA BALL  
JANE GIBIAN  
ANNE CASEY  
J V BIRCH

ANNA JACOBSON  
DUY QUANG MAI  
RAYNEN BAJETTE O'KEEFE  
JENNY POLLAK  
ESTHER OTTAWAY  
PARIS LAY-YEE  
MARGARET OWEN RUCKERT  
SARA MORGILLO  
ANASTASIA RADIEVSKA  
PETER MITCHELL  
SEAN WEST  
ANN SHENFIELD  
ANNE ELVEY  
SHONA HAWKES

# POETS



Red Room Poetry is Australia's leading non-profit organisation for commissioning, publishing and promoting poetry in meaningful ways. Our poetic projects are created in collaboration with a spectrum of poets, communities and partners for positive impact in core areas of environment, amplification, First Nations, youth and marginalised voices. We aim to make poetry highly visible, vibrant, relevant and accessible to all.

[redroompoetry.org](http://redroompoetry.org)

Red Room Poetry acknowledges the Elders and Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters, sky and languages where we work, live and write. We are grateful to collaborate with First Nations people and aim to respect their continuing cultures as we move across Country.

Chosen from hundreds of submissions, these poems look beneath the surface to honour, deepen and question our essential relationships with water. As they flow through memory, loss, grief, and joy, these poems witness with remarkable clarity the ways that water holds us in our everyday ways of being. These words resonate in a time when most of us bear the weight of disconnection from bodies of water amidst pandemic restrictions around the world. In beholding the ceaseless presence of water in our lives, these poems close the distance between us and other human and non-human bodies of water.

In a time of environmental change, several poems ask us to imagine the future of water justice. Rushing in the undercurrents are urgent questions: What have we taken from water? What are we doing or giving back in return? May the questions that these poems ask float to the surface as we think of our relationships with water and the human and non-human communities that depend on it.

As we make and sustain our own connections with water, may we learn the history of these waters and the ways of Traditional Custodians who have cared for water since time immemorial. As a settler on unceded Gadigal land, and as an Ilonggo woman with her own inherited ways of relating to water, I face my own responsibilities to these waters and the peoples connected to them. Reader, as you move within the streams of these poems, I urge you to see the currents that connect water justice to justice for Indigenous peoples.

While those in power continue to ignore rapidly warming oceans and debate how to divide and distribute the diminishing water from the Murray-Darling River Basin, it is up to us to remember that water is life—and it must be protected. As we deepen our individual and collective relationships to this vital life source, let us honour and protect water every day.

~ Eunice Andrada  
Guest Editor

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# COMMISSIONED POEMS

## HOW WATER WORKS

TONY BIRCH

cup a hand  
 skin and bone  
 this water well  
 a beating heart  
 of molecules life  
 one two three  
 thousand years

twice daily rises  
 to gently fall again  
 flow stories asking  
 who are we  
 within this world  
 let water run  
 circle settle be

sun of arctic water  
 moving slowly south  
 sleeping ebbing rising  
 upwelling loops of life  
 seconds centimetres  
 patience slowly spirit  
 your beauty and humility

shape shift onward  
 through air and bodies  
 entwined with other waters  
 in plants in soil in country  
 from pregnant clouds  
 rain on my roof  
 to birth my love

# SANCTUARY IN THE HEAT ANOTHER TOWN CRACKING OPEN

~ Eunice Andrada  
 from 'sanctuary'

cup a har  
skin and  
this wat  
a beating  
of molec  
one tw  
thousanc

twice dai  
to gently  
flow stor  
who are  
within th  
let water  
circle set

sun of an  
moving s  
sleeping  
upwellin  
seconds c  
patience  
your bea

shape shi  
through  
entwinec  
in plants  
from pre  
rain on n  
to birth i

~Duy Quang Mai from  
'The Act of Water'

**THERE IS A SEASON  
TO BE AGAIN  
LOOK, ANOTHER  
HOUR, TO HOLD  
YOUR LIFE-RAFT**

*for the Murray-Darling Basin*

clusters of cod float  
on their sides, shaping a new absence

iridescence draining  
from ancient scales under the sun

another year of drought  
by the ministers who negotiated  
for a piece of you manufactured

who used scientific jargon  
to muddy the flow  
between the rivers in our bodies

as water is hacked and  
siphoned through  
pore and pipeline divided

you who remember  
how forgetful  
we must be to keep machines

below the ground and expect  
sanctuary in the heat  
another town cracking open

## THERE IS NOTHING HEAVIER THAN A RIVER

GEORGINA REID

It's the water that pins  
us down.

Our flighty atoms,  
our fizzy ideas,  
our invisible words  
held, grounded.

Without its weight  
we'd be a spectacle  
of glittering particles  
grey pink brown gold.

Miscellaneous human crumbs  
whizzing through air.  
A mess of light. An unending  
soup of unformed life.

Love like dust,  
everywhere at once.  
Sliding through fingers  
and splintering  
into minute mirrored shards  
in an untethered world.

Is it here we go,  
when water takes its leave,  
seeping unseen  
to the deepest place.

There is nothing heavier than a river.  
There is nothing lighter than a life.

## FROM INITIATION TO IDEATION

LUKE DAVIES

Bonfire as initiation. Nothing, not even  
meaning, was ever not metaphor. Try  
as I might I could not experience the slow  
degranulation of sandstone into sand  
and yet here the four of us went walking  
at Bondi by the water (this was not  
yet dusk) which seemed, this walk, "immediate";  
in the middle of the moment one tends never  
to allow for the millennia preceding the cool  
easy dip. Though I could have sworn I  
remembered from long ago these riots of waves  
booming on the tympanic membrane like atoms  
scattered by particle reactors preceding  
the birth of the Sydney Basin. I could have  
sworn to that, at least. Mirrah found  
a starfish. I remembered the yellow-bellied  
sea snake, two thousand miles off course, writhing  
its last on the sand in 1993. Or the exhausted  
albatross just trying to stand, just give me a moment,  
wings spread wide as the seagulls went batshit  
with rage, not *our* beach, nuh-uh, a mob  
descending, though in animal kingdoms, of which  
I count myself acolyte, that's known as  
presumption more than "gulls as selves".  
Everyone battling their own agency. None  
of this was relevant in Minamurra Avenue in 1973  
when I stepped into the creek: eel!  
That shudder echoing still. And the bull-ants'  
nest and those fractals of pain. And the magpie's  
relentless swoop. And so I had to work out  
the vehicle of de-atrophying just as "sandstone"  
works out the beach toward which it will  
ideate in nine hundred thousand years.  
Same goes for those smooth rocks, clacking in the creek.

# PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS

## COASTAL BROOKE SCOBIE

11

Salt crusted.  
Ever lingering  
Remnants of my ancestors.  
I allowed them to settle and fall away,  
In their own time.  
Sparkling in the rose dusted shadows,  
The evening tilted further under  
Into itself.  
While the ocean clung to me  
Because I belong to the sea.  
Salt water Mob.

She had tasted my eyelashes,  
Salted by the ceaseless brackish  
Behind my skin.  
Sodden and languid  
Haunted by suffocated song,  
And though the taste endured on her tongue,  
She couldn't understand  
That I belong to the sea.  
Distant salt water Country.

I drowned out the shore break  
Floating face up in a lake of gin.  
Dusted in sugar,  
I heard muffled words of nonsense  
A lantana language,  
Toxic and smothering  
My native tongue.  
That belongs to the sea.  
Calls to salt water Corroboree.

## CELL SAFETY CLAIRE ALBRECHT

when you rub your eyes  
 deep with long fingernails  
 you feel the push and pull  
 of the rubbing tides  
 these slippery, wet pools  
 inside your skull, you rub  
 and rub like you are trying  
 to burst an egg yolk

which is a single cell, you heard,  
 just a bobbing, lonely mass

your eye cells multiply  
 iris on iris on iris  
 probing in on each other  
 when you rub the reflections run  
 into the next frame  
 like unfocused binoculars  
 looking out to sea, twin boats  
 on the water, twin whales

a gaze that multiplies the world  
 and unveils the mirror

now there are hundreds of whales  
 waiting their turn to be real  
 each believing it more than the next  
 and, sparkling, each drop of spray  
 holds a whale eye perfectly framed  
 perfectly forced into forever  
 sometimes it helps you  
 to forget these small infinities

return to the yolk and  
 rub her walled cell's solitude

SHE CURLS A  
 PHRASE, KA KITE  
 ANO ON, THE  
 SANDBANK

~ Sean West from  
 'Unhooking the Lip'

when you  
deep with  
you feel t  
of the ru  
these slip  
inside yo  
and rub l  
to burst :

which is  
just a bol

your eye  
iris on iri  
probing i  
when you  
into the j  
like unfo  
looking c  
on the w

a gaze th  
and unwe

now ther  
waiting t  
each beli  
and, spar  
holds a w  
perfectly  
sometim  
to forget

return to  
rub her v

I ALLOWED THEM  
TO SETTLE AND  
FALL AWAY,  
IN THEIR OWN TIME.

~ Brooke Scobie  
from 'Coastal'

This is the last love song, I swear  
watching your slow demise  
on someone else's television.

Ice cubes popping  
make a watery song  
soothing and deadly  
on an invisible wound.

I can smell it from here  
the rising heat  
peat smoke phenols  
and fruity esters  
have done their work

every catchment flows into you  
every minute something new is lost  
your body dissolves into the space  
that contains you.

Your cup full  
while the inland river empties  
flow patterns in mud reveal salt  
translucent crystals, white against the cheek.

I've been believing against evidence  
eyes misted by my own groundwater  
after all the science  
lab-coated reason still gives way to  
sentiment.

No conversation outdrums  
the tin roof patter  
but the sea is still warm.

Not the kind of warmth  
that slides down the throat  
numb, forget, deny  
giant kelp dies  
at the edges of your dreams.

Where am I, who am I  
to break that spell  
just one more hominid  
sick with desire and fear.

There is no other time.

The clock no longer ticks

the water that wets your face  
is the only ocean left.

## SUBMERGED

JANE GIBIAN

Slips of fish like smears of transparence:  
the lagoon shallow and humming

where paperbark branches scrape  
in the wind near four men in the surf's

wildness, ringed by extrusions of rock:  
two brothers, one brother-in-law, a nephew;

or perhaps two uncles, their nephew  
and one father. Dolphins fish in a large pod,

the spiked ridge of submerged rock appearing  
momentarily in spume, a dinosaur's back

surrounded by fins. From here: a son, his father,  
two brothers-in-law disappear in swirls

of embroidered foam. By the lagoon,  
black cockatoos break open banksia heads

with prehistoric grey beaks, impervious  
to the squabbling of the nectar-eaters.

## PELLUCID DREAMING

### ANNE CASEY

I

To be as complete as the greater part of your self  
composed

To trust without knowing when to hang on  
how to let go

To have the ability to resist gravity  
in states out of quo

To be divisible by light  
one part visible to two invisible

II

More than two thirds of you  
already knows the way

You have mostly existed outside  
of time

Body unto body disembodied  
soaring out of dust into earth

From dirt to root to stem  
to leaf remaking light to feed

III

To carry, baptise, flourish to harbour  
new life

To realise  
we are all made of pieces of each other

Frozen out of time through space  
the greater part of us

Has gazed past all that is known  
beyond the heavens themselves

*Note: The human body is made up of more than two thirds water. Every water molecule in our bodies originated in space and has existed in many different places and forms (including human), some dating back to before the dinosaurs. Essential to life, in cultures the world over, water is held as sacred.*

## BARRIER REEF (FORMERLY GREAT)

J V BIRCH

The map is neatly new. The paper, parchment. An artist's impression. Picture book perfect. *Not to be used as a navigational aid.* I travel the length of Queensland in seconds. Swathes of thick green meet powder blue. A ribbon of colour ghosts its edge with bursts of pink and yellow, orange and purple. Coral before the climate effect. And there are big fish and small, jellied and finned. Black lines trailing them. As if that's what will follow. A snake slithers from a spidering sun. A turtle tracks the Tropic of Capricorn. Islands in between are barely visible. Hinchinbrook, Magnetic, Whitsunday. Beads along the coast's throat. Gateways to reef. What is the language here? How many Aboriginal ones are still spoken? Falling on closed ears. In a place that's screaming.

## WHEN DOLPHINS BRING GIFTS

ANNA JACOBSON

These creatures sense changes  
in currents ~ during the pandemic,  
dolphins bring gifts ~ sea-treasures  
to lure disappearing humans back ~  
sea sponges, barnacled bottles, coral.

For cod, dolphins wash ashore  
King Neptune's crown ~ for tuna,  
they spit out pirate-gold from underwater  
caves ~ for a taste of herring, they nose  
their way through shipwrecks for pearls  
in oysters and clams.

The dolphins are intelligent ~  
they know humans have bleached  
the reef ~ for a taste of mackerel  
they carry lumps of white.

## THE ACT OF WATER

### DUY QUANG MAI

& we thought american, european atlantic  
is the best option

*– in each litre of sea salt, there  
are foreign dreams  
to reap*

where mud-water hasn't  
climbed  
our thighs

but it pulled down,  
so low our last  
inhalation warped  
into marbles,  
rolled  
back to earth

*there is no such thing as ours,  
even names are borrowed  
from our mother teeth, whittled  
down to a tag whitened  
soft enough  
to beat*

is pacific pacific?  
I still see waves making their foreheads a silver history  
when they kiss the shoreline,  
there is a need to be  
when I live,

*are your seagulls writing signs,  
dear the one above?*

the sky starts closing  
like a dialogue

the same sky that holds its rain inside bruised belly –  
ripe eden, waiting to fall /

*monsoon why haven't you arrived  
to chuckle?*

*something heavier  
than the weight of heaven, can you  
why are your children  
naming their tsunamis an ark to arrive?  
why is each pound of skin  
a pound of above?*

*I remember  
you / drop each pulse  
the sky an orange cut*

there is so much mud  
& we've promised  
to use our whole bodies /  
push through  
palms have thinned into air  
for so long / so long I could  
grate words out of silence

in each hour there is a season  
to be again look,  
another hour to hold your life-raft  
like holding  
a thirst

so jump.

## SATELLITE VIEW DOWNWARDS

RAYNEN BAJETTE O'KEEFE

bread under ocean  
 scarfs under ocean  
 prams under ocean  
 spatula under ocean

granules under ocean  
 dried flowers under ocean  
 novellas under ocean  
 blockbuster under ocean  
 bramble cay melomys  
 under ocean

first kiss under ocean  
 apprenticeship under ocean  
 punk band under ocean

parents under ocean  
 goldfish under ocean  
 kitchen windsill garden under ocean  
 postbox under ocean

history under ocean  
 artefact under ocean  
 aircraft under ocean  
 combat under ocean

cryptocurrency under ocean  
 president under ocean  
 prime minister under ocean  
 settler imaginaries under ocean

heartbreak, at ocean  
 grief-stricken, at ocean  
 hoping tides, at ocean  
 pained rejoicing, at ocean

I sought feedback on this poem  
 only settlers responded  
 imagining, a beautiful, sidney ferry ride

## CALLING IT BY ANOTHER NAME – EASTER SUNDAY, 8AM

JENNY POLLAK

How cool the sea looks  
all those blue miles to itself

the sun on the estuary.

And the river is lost  
in a glitter it doesn't own.

Seven days of wood is coming downstream  
with a river-load of rain

All the spent fires of a continent  
of trees.

And the cormorant

who disappears

and returns

somewhere else  
and with a splash

vanishes

again

and each time closer or more

distant

leaves the surface  
charged

and otherwise

electrifyingly

difficult to define  
without describing

how the world is

expanded:

first by its rising  
then

by its absence.

## MEMOIR OF WATER

ESTHER OTTAWAY

From toddlerhood: a memory of careful bending  
and splashing my baby hand in the Huon's edge.  
My childhood learning held in a saltwater brain;  
my solitary mother walking her babies by the river.

Swimming with friends last summer, our bodies  
larger with age, remade into squealing children.  
Floating in night's bay as the fireworks  
scribbled joy on a black sky, black rippled waves.

The turbid water that followed my baby out.  
The tender water I washed my child in.  
In my home town, water's coldness, its finger-thrill.  
My paper-boat poem, rose petals for the dead.

How many times water has heard my sorrows.  
It never leaves me, willing to take me in.  
Give me its power to daily lift through cloud –  
its clean forgetfulness that engenders courage.

## LEFT BRAIN IN A BIND

MARGARET OWEN RUCKERT

*'A four-year-old in Australia has witnessed on media over 10 deaths  
by drowning.'*

Statistics don't lie around like sunbathers  
but in a healthy respect for the call of water  
you were, in all possibility, taught to float early.

A backwards float is someone lying  
on top of a liquid. Can this be true  
can water really hold you up like a one-eyed pirate?

You edge along a gangplank of anguish  
slip into the unknown.  
Your feet are treasure buried under.

The teacher encourages you to find your wings.  
You're advancing centuries, soon you'll be an aeroplane  
in fluid flight. Rest your head on the pillow of her arm.

She speaks again gently, you angle right back, she catches  
your head and waves lap inside.  
Your ears can't hear you will not go under.

Splutter, mouth-drown. Water's the enemy  
forcing an entry. All those you've seen drown  
rush past in a flood, not one of them is you.

Your feet lift off, you're a starfish  
floating – bottom down, face up – breathing  
lilting, drifting, bliss-thing.

So, this water can be trusted  
but what of tomorrow, will it kill like before?  
You wait for next lesson.

To float is to wrap left brain in a blindfold, suspend  
belief about sinking in water, that solid transparency  
where belief's an adult word out of your depth.

## WE ARE THE STARS AND THE SEA

### PARIS LAY-YEE

They tell us we're made of bones and skin.  
Of cells and blood and genes.

But what they mean to say is  
that there is  
*stardust*  
in our veins,  
and *water*  
coursing through our body.  
And so  
our cells,  
and our blood,  
and our genes  
swim through a galactical ocean.

And just like the vast deep chasm that is our seven seas,  
we rise like the waves, and we  
fall,  
crash,  
break,  
hard.  
Only to be swept up into the current once more.

So when we  
poison,  
taint,  
bleach  
our oceans,  
we're only holding the toxins to our very lips.

And yet while this vial is clutched in our hands,  
so is the anecdote.

To save our  
*aquatic universe.*

Like the waves that rise to meet the man on the moon,  
we need to  
come back home.

## ABOVE THE TWILIGHT ZONE

SARA MORGILLO

The surface rises  
slowly

Creeps up shoreline, as we beckon it closer behind our backs

Spreads oil floats bags and bottles

The blue is robbed

Raided of masses and less

sinks

down

to nourish

The twilight zone

Sharks are apex predators; they kill off weak eliminate disease

They do not need cutlery or plates

do not need their meals wrapped up in takeaway

Fish would taste like poison if there's anything

left to find

Even the midnight zone

is hurting

We have reached the ocean thousands of kilometres from its surface

There, we see the beach change

Dive over snapped white coral draped in fishing line

One degree Celsius higher than this time last year, my wetsuit stays dry

Redundant

Supermarket shelves stocked with 'flake' that outlives all of us (or at least, is supposed to)

disguised as nothing just a flake just flake just the apex predator

Cleaning the ocean we swam in all summer

Supermarket shelves stocked with salmon and tuna and sardines canned up  
in aluminium

Fish don't have emotions how can they feel pain there is nothing urgent  
about a few centimetres or degrees

There's nothing to do nothing to change

Make sure you eat all the cod on your plate

We need coral to breathe oxygen comes from the sea so kick it over

Hook it in

We walk by the beach in December

Rest on sand zero metres about sea level

Wonder how the twilight is doing under all this sun

Already, there is enough pressure

## THE STORY OF THE FLOOD

ANASTASIA RADIEVSKA

Sitting in the wet garden you smashed the land like a cup  
 – your legs were moving  
 over a patch of firmament – chant-drying

feed – feed – feed me  
 to the tenth layer of wormlife underneath.

Where we sat the watervines climbed stupors of despair  
 they are a cord – they are a rope  
 they travel up  
 the only way –

if they keep chanting  
 will the flood be fed?

I wasn't terrified of the flood – I smashed it  
 in the cup – even the highest vines are fleeing now  
 – we watch their entrails  
 cover the floor like sleep.

When we say 'we', a livid flame  
 breaks in between and chases landing  
 until our legs vine under life.

And if we were to stand?  
 The waters might run down to newer earth.

NOW THERE ARE  
 HUNDREDS OF  
 WHALES WAITING  
 THEIR TURN TO  
 BE REAL

~Claire Albrecht  
 from 'cell safety'

Sitting in

feed – fe  
toWhere w  
thif they ke  
wiI wasn't t  
inWhen w  
brAnd if w  
Th

~ Anna Jacobson  
from 'When Dolphins  
Bring Gifts'

# DURING THE PANDEMIC, DOLPHINS BRING GIFTS

## HOMECOMING PETER MITCHELL

Was it the rainy moon? A longing for reanimation?  
Or a reminder to us of the sound we had lost? Forgotten?

Two weeks before for a week, the vault above had warned us.  
During those days, an oyster sky for an hour here, there spoke

sprinkles as fine netting; for an afternoon on different days, a purple-  
bruised dome squalled torrents of silver needles; a dirty-washing

firmament patterned steady rain for two long days. Rivulets as  
earth-bound stories gushed down cliff-faces and hills. Pooled in many spots

along the streets, water molecules gathered for story times. The following week,  
the weather was clear. We mailed letters, purchased bread, hung washing on our  
lines.

In March 1974, Lismore ignored another inundation. Now street signs write  
your histories: different depths at points on the floodplain; bricks & mortar &

belongings became flotsam, exposed foundations art installations.  
Again in March, Cyclone Debbie and a low pressure system co-joined.

Conversations rumbled between them and you, Wilsons River.  
After 40 + years, your perfect memory was ripe. Your homecoming

took shape. In your ancient way, our built environment, farm  
land and Big Scrub remnants became intimates. For generations,

we've lifted belongings, moved stock & vehicles then returned them.  
Yet this flood cycle was different. The old stories were washed away.

Afterwards, we stood still; our hearts roiled, minds soiled.  
All your new stories were now mud, hidden & awaited reappearance.

Were you angry with us? Was it the construction of the levee?  
When will your voice speak our lessons?

## UNHOOKING THE LIP

### SEAN WEST

*for Courtney Sina Meredith*

She cups my name in her hands  
like an undersized fish, unhooks

his lip, slips him back into shoals  
beneath our feet that'll eddy him off

to someplace beyond reach. She invites  
me to close my eyes in this too-bright

room where there is no running  
water or waxing moon. I hear it weir

across rocks, vortex in my ears: her voice  
is a raised hand out of the rip, as if to signal

drowning yet guides me until we're neck-deep  
She asks who I think about when I picture

the ocean. I trace his voice, watch his face float  
to the surface. She curls a phrase, Ka kite ano

on the sandbank, presses a mask to my mouth  
We wade out to the wreck, peer through

cracked glass, shine a light into the belly  
of his demise. She brushes my hand over

a new fish, mouths something I can't catch  
Stroke its gills as I feel the tail thrill against

my wrist. When I open my eyes, she holds  
the hook. There is blood on the line.

*\*note: Ka kite ano is a Maori phrase for "until I see you again"\**

## MAGNIFICATIONS

### ANN SHENFIELD

Before she connected the headphones  
to the tree she said

*I've been told that ice cracking  
sounds like a child screaming*

I knew she meant this literally  
and as I listened to the tree

I heard a pulse, or that is  
the sound of a heart beating in drips

In that moment, everything concertinaed  
although maybe what I mean is the opposite

Besides somebody else was already  
slamming it all shut, saying

*The only thing we humans ever hear  
is the magnification of our own sound.*

a name for what speaks this day to  
water

as creek replies  
mirror

a woman is not the  
scene

this is private  
talk

though she witnesses a multitude of small  
sparkles

unshifting on  
flow

a possibility of cooperation in  
reflection

where currents are both repeated &  
new

the woman disappears into its age a  
visitor

who might be but is not quite  
estranged

without certainty she imagines the  
elders

who came by light water for tucker or  
song

those who keep it now in  
care

according to  
law

it is not hers this  
place

receiver of stolen goods the woman  
retreats

creek gives to land a liquid  
testimony

## WHAT SCHOOL NEVER TAUGHT ME

SHONA HAWKES

how long it takes to heal a barren riverbank  
 how to keep the faith that the water birds will return  
 how to train your eyes to see a flash of platypus

hoarding is a crime, not a conquest

a word for the longing of a floodplain when the waters no longer come  
 or for the memory of birds on pilgrimage to a forest grieving its trees

how to read the rips below a smooth surface

any word in the language this land speaks with its people  
 and what it takes to earn the right to learn it  
 the proper shape of the seasons

how to see terror in the silence

the land is a teacher you will never surpass  
 trust is a measure of time  
 accountability is a mathematics of action  
 empty words are a weapon

theft is a habit we learn from our parents  
 the most vicious untruths are told with brutal certainty

sorry can take whole lifetimes to say  
 and is only heard in the quiet of justice.

~ Luke Davies from  
 'From Initiation  
 To Ideation'

TO ALLOW FOR  
 THE MILLENNIA  
 PRECEDING THE  
 COOL EASY DIP.

POET BIOS

how long  
 how to k  
 how to t  
  
 hoarding  
  
 a word fo  
 or for the  
  
 how to r  
  
 any word  
 and what  
 the prop  
  
 how to s  
  
 the land  
 trust is a  
 accounta  
 empty w  
  
 theft is a  
 the most  
  
 sorry can  
 and is on

~ Tony Birch from  
 'How Water Works'

CUP A HAND  
 SKIN AND BONE  
 THIS WATER WELL  
 A BEATING HEART

## CLAIRE ALBRECHT

Claire Albrecht is a Newcastle based poet. She was the 2019 Emerging Writers Festival fellow at the State Library of Victoria and a Varuna 'Writing Fire, Writing Drought' fellow, and will be a resident at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation, New Mexico in 2021. Her debut chapbook *pinky swear* was published in 2018 and her poems have been published internationally.

## EUNICE ANDRADA

Eunice Andrada is a poet and educator. Her debut poetry collection *Flood Damages* (2018) won the Anne Elder Award and was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Poetry and the Dame Mary Gilmore Award. She has performed her poetry on diverse international stages, from the UN Climate Summit in Paris to the Sydney Opera House. Her ecopoetry has been recognised through the awarding of a residency and fellowship presented by Australian Poetry and Nature Art and Habitat Residency (NAHR). She lives and writes on unceded Gadigal Land.

## MAGDALENA BALL

Magdalena Ball is a novelist, poet, reviewer and interviewer, and Managing Editor of *Compulsive Reader* ([compulsivereader.com](http://compulsivereader.com)). She has been widely published in literary journals, anthologies, and online, and is the author of several published books of poetry and fiction, including, most recently *High Wire Step* (Flying Island Press, 2018), and *Unreliable Narratives* (Girls on Key Press, 2019).

## J V BIRCH

J V Birch lives in Adelaide. Her poems have been published in a number of anthologies, journals and magazines, including *Australian Love Poems*, *Grieve*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Not Very Quiet*, *Magma*, *Cordite* and *Mslexia*. She has three chapbooks with Ginninderra Press – *Smashed glass at midnight*, *What the water & moon gave me* and *A bellyful of roses* - and a full-length collection, *more than here*.

**TONY BIRCH**

Tony Birch is the author of three novels: the bestselling *The White Girl*, winner of the 2020 NSW Premier's Award for Indigenous Writing, and shortlisted for the 2020 Miles Franklin literary prize; *Ghost River*, winner of the 2016 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Indigenous Writing; and *Blood*, which was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award in 2012. He is also the author of *Shadowboxing* and three short story collections, *Father's Day*, *The Promise* and *Common People*. In 2017 he was awarded the Patrick White Literary Award for his contribution to Australian literature. In 2021 he will release two new books, a poetry book, *Whisper Songs* and a new short story collection, *Dark As Last Night*. Both books will be published by University of Queensland Press. Tony Birch is also an activist, historian and essayist.

**ANNE CASEY**

Originally from the west of Ireland and living in Australia for the past 26 years, Anne Casey is an award-winning poet/writer and author of two poetry collections— *where the lost things go and out of emptied cups*, with a third collection and a chapbook forthcoming in 2021. Anne has worked for 30 years as a journalist, magazine editor, media communications director and legal author. Anne's writing and poetry are widely published internationally and rank in *The Irish Times* newspaper's Most-Read.

**LUKE DAVIES**

Luke Davies is a poet, novelist and screenwriter. His novels include *Candy* and *God of Speed*. *Totem* won the Age Book of the Year Award. *Interferon Psalms* won the Prime Minister's Literary Award. His film and television credits include *Candy* (starring the late Heath Ledger), *Lion*, *Beautiful Boy* and *Catch-22*. Davies was nominated for an Oscar, and won the BAFTA, for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Lion*.

**ANNE ELVEY**

Anne Elvey acknowledges the Boonwurrung people on whose land she lives and works. Her most recent books are *On arrivals of breath* (2019) and *White on White* (2018). She is outgoing managing editor of *Plumwood Mountain* journal and holds honorary positions at Monash University and University of Divinity, Melbourne.

**JANE GIBIAN**

Jane Gibian's poetry has been anthologised most recently in *Contemporary Australian Poetry* (Puncher and Wattman) and *Contemporary Australian Feminist Poetry* (Hunter). She was awarded a Varuna Poetry Flagship Fellowship for 2020.

**SHONA HAWKES**

Shona Hawkes grew up in a country invented by brutal men, on the unceded lands of the Kulin nations. She has been published in *Cordite*, *Slippage Lit* and *SideWALK* and was a finalist in the 2018 Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize. She is also active in community radio and currently based in London.

**ANNA JACOBSON**

Anna Jacobson is a writer and artist from Brisbane. *Amnesia Findings* (UQP, 2019) is her first full-length poetry collection, which won the 2018 Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize. In 2020 Anna won the Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Writing (Open Creative Nonfiction) and was awarded a Queensland Writers Fellowship. In 2018 she won the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award. Her writing has been published in literary journals and anthologies including *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Griffith Review*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *Rabbit*, and more. Anna's poetry chapbook *The Last Postman* (Vagabond Press, 2018) is part of the deciBels 3 series.

**PARIS LAY-YEE**

Paris Lay-Yee is a 16-year-old student who enjoys poetry writing and enjoys competing in public speaking and debating competitions. Her inspiration for her original poem "We are the stars and the sea" came from a speech she'll be delivering at a national competition this year on ocean acidification. She hopes to one day publish a book of poetry herself.

**PETER MITCHELL**

Peter Mitchell is the author of the poetry chapbooks *Conspiracy of Skin* (Ginninderra Press, 2018) and *The Scarlet Moment* (Picaro Press, 2009). As a queer poet living in Lismore in Bundjalung Country, he writes poetry, memoir, short fiction and literary criticism. His writing has been or is forthcoming in international and national print and online journals, magazines and anthologies. His poetry is published in *The Blue Nib* (Ireland), *Rabbit*, *Verity La*, *Soft Blow* (Singapore) and *Styluslit*, among others. *Conspiracy of Skin* was awarded a Highly Commended in the 2019 Wesley Michel Wright Prize for Poetry. His memoir, *Fragments through the Epidemic* awaits a publisher. At present, he is working on his first full collection of poetry, *The Loam of Memory*.

**SARA MORGILLO**

Sara Morgillo grew up in a suburb near Fremantle/Walyalup, Western Australia. She has spent the past three years exploring nature, working different jobs, and becoming a professional scuba diver. Sara Morgillo has featured at Spoken Word Perth, Perth Poetry Club, and the WA Youth Slam launch. Her works have been published by Underground Writers and Mulla Mulla Press, and her debut chapbook 'Moth Bones' was published and launched by Hectic Measures Press in 2018.

**RAYNEN BAJETTE O'KEEFE**

Raynen Bajette O'Keefe is an artist, writer and community worker, living and working on unceded Gadigal lands (Sydney). They have a dance practice, and a background in film studies, and write from the body, somatics, family history, and place. They are interested in restorative work, which is a guiding practice for them, across mediums. They have worked across a number of mediums, and projects, through time.

**ESTHER OTTAWAY**

Esther Ottaway is an award-winning Australian poet who often writes about women's experiences. She was shortlisted in the world's largest poetry prize, the Montreal International, in 2020. Her poetry features in the noted anthology *Thirty Australian Poets* and in leading newspapers, literary journals and anthologies. Her book *Blood Universe: poems on pregnancy* was critically acclaimed and her new collection, *Intimate, Low-voiced, Delicate Things*, will be released in early 2021 by Puncher & Wattmann. Esther's work is online at [esther-ottaway-poet.jimdosite.com](http://esther-ottaway-poet.jimdosite.com).

**MARGARET OWEN RUCKERT**

Margaret Owen Ruckert is an award-winning poet of the 2019 SWW National Writing Competition – Poetry, having won in 2007. She is the author of eight collections, most recently *Sky on Sea* – a collection of tanka. *Musefood* won an IP Poetry Book of the Year. As facilitator of the Hurstville Discovery Writers in Sydney she presents regular writing workshops.

**JENNY POLLAK**

For most of her life Jenny Pollak has been a full-time artist, focusing her arts practice in photography, sculpture and video installation, a time which also included five years as a musician playing flute and congas with various African and Latin American bands around Sydney and NSW. In 2012 she began a poetry practice, and in 2013 she came 3rd in the inaugural ACU Poetry Prize. Jenny has won both the Yeats Poetry Prize and the Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize. Her poetry has been published in *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *the Australian Poetry Journal*, *the Stilts* journal, and in various anthologies, including Australian Award-Winning Writing 2017. In 2018, *Shadowplay*, a collaborative poem written as a Renga in 62 stanzas with the British Poet Philip Gross, was published by Flarestack Poets, UK.

**DUY QUANG MAI**

Duy Quang Mai is from Hanoi, Vietnam and is currently an international student in Sydney, Australia. His poems have been published or are forthcoming from *The American Poetry Review*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Overland* and others. He is the author of the chapbooks *Homeward* and *Journals to* (Story Factory, 2018-19).

**ANASTASIA RADIEVSKA**

Anastasia Radievska is a policy researcher and law student living on Gadigal land. She is interested in the interweaving of personal and collective histories in poetry, and the way these can open up new spaces of freedom.

**GEORGINA REID**

Georgina Reid lives and works in the trees on the banks of the Hawkesbury River, just north of Sydney. She's a writer and the founding editor of *The Planthunter* – an online magazine that, since launching in 2013, has grown an international reputation for its fierce commitment to documenting, exploring, and questioning the endlessly curious and varied ways humans relate to the natural world. In addition to editing *The Planthunter*, Georgina contributes to a range of design and culture publications and speaks regularly about her work. Georgina's first book, *The Planthunter: Truth, Beauty, Chaos and Plants* was released by Thames and Hudson in 2018.

**BROOKE SCOBIE**

Brooke Scobie is a queer Goorie woman, single mum, emerging writer, and community worker. She was born and bred on Bidjigal country in South West Sydney and now lives on Darkinjung land. In her writing, Brooke is most passionate about telling stories that centre identity, love and family using the imagery of Country.

**ANN SHENFIELD**

Ann Shenfield has worked as an animation filmmaker, illustrator and writer. Her animated films have received numerous prizes, including selection to the Official Competition at the Berlin Film Festival. Her poetry has also received various prizes, including the Judith Wright Poetry Award for her collection *You Can Get Only So Close on Google Earth*.

**SEAN WEST**

Sean West is a *Meanjin*-based poet and workshop facilitator. He's been shortlisted for the *Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize* in 2020 and 2019. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Antithesis Journal*, *Bareknuckle Poet*, and *Lite Lit One*. He is founding editor of *Blue Bottle Journal*.



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~ Georgina Reid from  
'There is Nothing Heavier Than a River'  
**LOVE LIKE DUST,  
EVERYWHERE AT  
ONCE.  
SLIDING THROUGH  
FINGERS  
AND SPLINTERING**



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